ARABS
AND
EMPIRES
BEFORE ISLAM

Edited by GREG FISHER

OXFORD

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Editor's Acknowledgments

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List of Abbreviations

AA	*Archäologischer Anzeiger*
AAE	*Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*
AB	*Analecta Bollandiana*
ACO	*Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*
ADAJ	*Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AncSoc	*Ancient Society*
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
AnTard	*Antiquité Tardive*
AnW	*Ancient World*
BaM	*Baghdader Mitteilungen*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BIA	*Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology, London University*
BMGS	*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
ByzF	*Byzantinische Forschungen*
BZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CAH 14	A. Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins, and M. Whitby (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Volume 14. *Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors,* AD *425–600.* Cambridge, 2000
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*
CFHB	*Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae*
CHI	W. B. Fisher et al. (eds), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 vols. Cambridge, 1968–90
CRAI	*Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres*
CS	*Cistercian Studies*
CSCO	*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*
DHGE	A. Baudrillart et al. (eds), *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques.* Paris, 1912–
Documenta	J.-B. Chabot (ed.), *Documenta ad origines Monophysitarum illustrandas.* CSCO Scr. Syr. 52. Paris, 1907–33
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
EAH	R. S. Bagnall et al. (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, 13 vols. Oxford, 2013

EAL	J. S. Meisami and P. Starkey (eds), *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 2 vols. London, 1998
EI²	H. A. R. Gibb et al. (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, 13 vols. Leiden, 1960–2009
EI³	K. Fleet et al. (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd edn. Leiden, 2007–
EIr	E. Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 16 vols. London, 1982–
EMC/CV	*Echos du monde classique/Classical Views*
EQ	J. D. McAuliffe (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, 6 vols. Leiden, 2001–6
FGH	F. Jacoby (ed.), *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, 7 vols. Leiden, 1940–58
GCS	*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*
GRBS	*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*
HSCPh	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JLA	*Journal of Late Antiquity*
JMA	*Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*
JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
JSAI	*Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
LA	*Liber Annuus*
MedAnt	*Mediterraneo antico*
MedArch	*Mediterranean Archaeology*
NC	*Numismatic Chronicle*
Nd	O. Seeck (ed.), *Notitia Dignitatum accedunt Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae et Laterculi Provinciarum*. Berlin, 1876. (*Nd. Or.* = the eastern Roman empire)
NPNF 2	*Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2. Available online at http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html
OC	*Oriens Christianus*
ODB	A. P. Kazhdan et al. (eds), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 vols. Oxford, 1991

OCD[4]	S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds), *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edn. Oxford, 2012
OHAI	D. T. Potts (ed), *Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*. Oxford, 2013
OHIH	T. Daryaee (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*. Oxford, 2012
OHLA	S. F. Johnson (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*. Oxford, 2012
OLP	*Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*
PAPhS	*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*
PL	*Patrologia Latina*
PLRE	A. H. M. Jones et al. (eds), *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 3 vols. Cambridge, 1971–92
PO	*Patrologia Orientalis*
POC	*Proche-Orient Chrétienne*
P&P	*Past and Present*
PSAS	*Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*
REJ	*Revue des Études Juives*
SC	*Sources Chrétiennes*
SCI	*Scripta Classica Israelica*
SemClas	*Semitica et Classica*
SHAJ	*Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*. Amman, 1982–
Syn. Or.	J.-B. Chabot (ed.), *Synodicon orientale*. Paris, 1902–
T&M	*Travaux et mémoires*
TTH	*Translated Texts for Historians*
T&U	A. von Harnack (ed.), *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*. Berlin, 1882–
VC	*Vigiliae Christianae*
WZKM	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

List of Contributors

George Bevan is Associate Professor in the Department of Classics at Queen's University, Kingston. He has worked with the Ḥumayma Excavation Project in Jordan, and has a forthcoming monograph with Peeters entitled *The New Judas. Nestorius in Ecclesiastical Politics*, 428–451 CE.

Aldo Corcella is Professor of Classical Philology at the Università della Basilicata. He is the author of *Erodoto e l'analogia* (Palermo, 1984) and co-author of *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I–IV* (Oxford, 2007, with D. Asheri and A. B. Lloyd).

Touraj Daryaee is the Howard C. Baskerville Professor in the History of Iran and the Persianate World at the University of California, Irvine. He is the author of *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire* (London, 2009), and the editor of the *Oxford Handbook of Iranian History* (Oxford, 2012).

Omar Edaibat is a doctoral candidate at McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies, Montreal, Canada. His dissertation focuses on legal pluralism in the Islamic legal tradition.

Peter Edwell is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Ancient History at Macquarie University, Sydney. He is the author of *Between Rome and Persia: The Middle Euphrates, Mesopotamia, and Palmyra under Roman Control* (London, 2008).

Zbigniew T. Fiema is the Docent in Classical Archaeology, University of Helsinki. He is co-director of the Northeastern Petra Project in Jordan, as well as the director of the al-ʿUlā al-Wajh Archaeological Survey Project in Saudi Arabia.

Greg Fisher is Associate Professor in the Department of History and the College of the Humanities, Carleton University, Ottawa. He has worked with the Ḥumayma Excavation Project in Jordan. He is the author of *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2011), and the co-editor of *Inside and Out: Interactions between Rome and the Peoples of the Arabian and Egyptian Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (Leuven, 2014, with J. Dijkstra).

Denis Genequand is currently in charge of Roman archaeology at Geneva's archaeological office, and holds a lectureship in Islamic archaeology at the University of Geneva. He was the director of the Syrian–Swiss projects in Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī (2002–11) and Palmyra (2008–11), and is the author of *Les établissements des élites omeyyades en Palmyrène et au Proche-Orient* (Beirut, 2012).

Matt Gibbs is Assistant Professor in the Department of Classics at the University of Winnipeg. He is co-editor of *Themes in Roman Society and Culture: An Introduction to Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 2014, with M. Nikolic and P. Ripat).

Geoffrey Greatrex is Professor of Classics at the University of Ottawa. He is the co-author of *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, A.D. 363–630* (London, 2002, with S. Lieu) and more recently of *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah of Mytilene* (Liverpool, 2011, with R. Phenix and C. Horn).

Basema Hamarneh is affiliated with the Department of Letters and Philosophy, Bergamo University. She has participated in, supervised, and directed several excavations and surveys in Jordan (including at Mababa, Mount Nebo, and Nitl) and is the author of *Topografia Cristiana ed insediamenti rurali nella Giordania Bizantina* (Rome, 2003).

Robert G. Hoyland is affiliated with Oxford University's Oriental Institute and New York University's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World. He is the author of *Arabia and the Arabs from the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London, 2001), and *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool, 2011). He is involved in the publication of Arabic and Aramaic inscriptions from Taymāʾ (Saudi Arabia), Mardin province (Turkey), and various sites in Syria and Jordan.

Ahmad Al-Jallad holds a double appointment as Assistant Professor of Arabic Linguistics at the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics and the Leiden Institute for Area Studies. He is the author of *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions* (Leiden, 2015).

Ariel S. Lewin is Professor of Roman History at the Università della Basilicata, Potenza. He is the author of *Popoli, terre, frontiere dell'impero romano: Il vicino Oriente nella tarda antichità* (Catania, 2008).

Michael C. A. Macdonald is a Fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford, and Research Associate at the Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford. He is Academic Director of the 'Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia' project and heads the British component of the Saudi–German–British 'Epigraphy and the Ancient Landscape in the Hinterland of Taymāʾ' survey. He is the author of numerous works on the Safaitic and other Ancient North Arabian inscriptions, and on the history of the ancient nomads of Syria and Arabia.

Harry Munt is Lecturer in Medieval History at the University of York. He is the author of *The Holy City of Medina: Sacred Space in Early Islamic Arabia* (Cambridge, 2014).

Laïla Nehmé is Directrice de recherche at the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS: UMR 8167) and is co-director of the Saudi-French Archaeological Project at Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, ancient Ḥegrā, in north-west Arabia. She is the author of numerous works on Arabian history, epigraphy, and archaeology, including the *Atlas archéologique et épigraphique de Pétra. Fascicule 1: De Bāb as-Sīq au Wādī al Farasah* (Paris, 2012, with the collaboration of J. T. Mililk and R. Saupin).

Christian Julien Robin is Directeur de recherche émérite at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS, Paris). He is director of the French archaeological missions in North Yemen, Qatabān (Yemen), and Najrān (Saudi Arabia), and Membre de l'Institut (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres). Among numerous publications, he is the co-editor of several recent volumes, including *L'Arabie à la veille de l'Islam: Bilan clinique* (Paris, 2009, with J. Schiettecatte), *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux ve et vi^e siècles* (Paris, 2010, with J. Beaucamp and F. Briquel-Chatonnet), *Dieux et déesses d'Arabie, images et représentations* (Paris, 2012, with I. Sachet), and *Les préludes de l'Islam* (Paris, 2013, with J. Schiettecatte).

Peter Schadler is Visiting Assistant Professor at the College of Charleston. His forthcoming book is entitled *Christian Heresiological Discourse and Islam: John of Damascus and the Last Heresy.*

Isabel Toral-Niehoff is affiliated with the Georg-August-Universität-Göttingen. She is the author of *Al-Ḥīra: Eine arabische Kulturmetropole im spätantiken Kontext* (Leiden, 2014).

Donata Violante is a doctoral student at the Dipartimento di Scienze Umane, Università degli Studi della Basilicata, Potenza. She is the author of *Paolo e la predicazione ai gentili: La definizione di un'identità nell'impero romano del I secolo d. C* (Florence, 2013).

Walter Ward is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the University of Alabama, Birmingham. He is the author of *The Mirage of the Saracen: Christians and Nomads in the Sinai Peninsula in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2014).

Conor Whately is Assistant Professor of Classics at the University of Winnipeg. He has published widely on the Roman army, including four chapters in A. Sarantis and N. Christie (eds), *War and Warfare in Late Antiquity: Current Perspectives* (Leiden, 2013).

Philip Wood is Associate Professor at the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations at the Aga Khan University, London. He is the author of *We Have No King But Christ: Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c. 400–585)* (Oxford, 2010), and *The Chronicle of Seert: Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq* (Oxford, 2013).

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TEXTS

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MAPS

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PLATES

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IN-TEXT IMAGES

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Transliteration Conventions

Several transliteration conventions are in use in this volume.[1] The IJMES system is used for the transliteration of Arabic personal names, place names, and the discussion of Arabic texts (Chs 1–8). As the IJMES system is less suitable for epigraphy, the direct transliteration system is used for the discussion of inscriptions in Chs 1 and 7. Greek and Roman names are rendered using the most familiar forms, e.g. Procopius, not Prokopios.

(As the conventions for South Arabian inscriptions are applicable only to the majority of texts in Chs 2 and 3, for the sake of convenience they are introduced in Ch. 2, alongside a discussion of the South Arabian alphabet.)

Arabic	IJMES System	Direct transliteration	Nabataean
		(1 roman letter for 1 Arabic)	(only 21 letters)
ا	ʾ	ʾ	ʾ
ب	b	b	b
ت	t	t	t
ث	th	ṯ	t
ج	j	ǧ	g
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ
خ	kh	ḫ or h̲	ḥ
د	d	d	d
ذ	dh	ḏ	d
ر	r	r	r
ز	z	z	z
س	s	s	š
ش	sh	š	š
ص	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ
ض	ḍ	ḍ	ṣ
ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ
ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ṭ
ع	ʿ	ʿ	ʿ
غ	gh	ġ	ʿ
ف	f	f	p
ق	q	q	q
ك	k	k	k
ل	l	l	l
م	m	m	m
ن	n	n	n
ه	h	h	h
و	w	w	w
ى	y	y	y
For Arabic, long vowels are indicated as ā, ī, ū			

Leaders of Arab Dynasties and the Kingdom of Ḥimyar

Presented here is a list of key figures from the various Arab dynasties covered in this volume. The list includes certain (or reasonably certain) family relationships, drawn from the pre-Islamic Graeco-Roman and epigraphic sources and the medieval Syriac chronicles. For reasons outlined in the Editor's Introduction ('Tribal and Family Names'), genealogical information from the Arab-Islamic tradition is not included. A star (*) indicates that a family or tribal link, or the connection between a certain text and an individual, is contested or unclear. Many of the links between certain individuals and tribes remain unresolved; the indication of those *usually* called 'Jafnids' or 'Naṣrids' is purely for illustration, and this list is intended as an *aide-mémoire* for the chapters that follow. Readers should also note that individuals from some tribes who appear in this book (e.g. Muḍar) are not always reported by pre-Islamic sources or the Syriac chronicles (at least, not unambiguously: see Chs 5 and 6).

Sources, identified by chapter and sequence (e.g. 3.9 = Ch. 3, text 9), or page numbers adjacent to the names of individuals, indicate relevant quotations and/or discussions. To facilitate comparison between the different source traditions, references to the individuals listed below from texts discussed in Ch. 8 (Arab-Islamic and Persian material) are in **bold**.

This list also includes the kings of Ḥimyar in late antiquity. In the interests of space, and due to their greater familiarity, Persian and Roman emperors are not included.

Persian-allied Arabs (individuals usually called Lakhmids/Naṣrids are underlined)

fl. late 3rd c.	ʿAmr(u) of Lakhm	p. 61
d. 328	Maraʾ al-Qays/Imruʾ al-Qays	pp. 75–6, 7.3
fl. late 4th c.	Podosaces	pp. 77–8
fl. 460s/70s	Amorkesos/Imruʾ al-Qays (switched sides → Rome)	1.27
fl. 5th c.	al-Mundhir	p. 85, **8.22**, **8.46**
fl. late 5th/ early 6th c.	al-Nuʿmān	*5.2, 5.5, 5.6, 6.11, ***8.53**
r. c.504–54	al-Mundhir, (Al(a) moundaros/as), son of Sikika/ Saqiqa/Zekike	5.7, 5.10, 5.11, 5.12, 5.14, 5.15, 5.18, 5.20, 5.21, 5.22, 5.25, 5.26, 6.24, 6.44, **8.23**, **8.38**, **8.45**
fl. c.554–?	ʿAmr/Ambrus, son of al-Mundhir	5.25, 5.26
fl. 570s	Qābus, brother of ʿAmr	5.28, 5.29
fl. 590s–c.602	al-Nuʿmān, son of al-Mundhir	5.35, 6.41, 6.42, 6.43, **8.25–7**, ***8.36**, **8.40**, **8.44**

Roman-allied Arabs (individuals usually called Ghassānids/Jafnids are <u>underlined</u>)

fl. 350/60s	Zokomos	6.2
fl. 370s	Mavia	1.26
4th/5th c.	Thaʿlaba, possible king of Ghassān	pp. 220, 332
*c.*420	Aspebetos/Peter	6.13, 6.14
*c.*420	Terebon (Elder, son of Aspebetos)	6.13
mid-fifth c.	Terebon (Younger, grandson of Terebon)	6.13, 6.24
fl. late 5th c.	<u>Jabala</u> (Gabala)	*5.2, **8.31b**
d. 528	<u>al-Tafar</u>	5.13
fl. 520s	Gnouphas	5.14
fl. 520s	Naaman (al-Nuʿmān)	5.14
early 6th c., r. *c.*528/9–568/9	<u>al-Ḥārith</u> (Arethas), son of <u>Jabala</u>	5.15, 5.21, 5.22, 5.23, 5.27, 6.19, 6.20, 6.21, 6.23, 7.6, **8.23**, **8.31c**, **8.38**
fl. early-mid 6th c.	<u>Abū Karib</u>, brother of <u>al-Ḥārith</u>	*5.16, 5.19, 6.24
fl. early 6th c.	*<u>Eretha</u>, son of <u>al-Ḥārith</u>	*6.30
fl. early 6th c.	Thaʿlaba, son of Audelas	6.30
?–d. 545	<u>unnamed son</u> of <u>al-Ḥārith</u>	5.22
?–d. 554	<u>J(G)abala</u>, son of <u>al-Ḥārith</u>	5.23
*c.*568	(presumed ally) Asaraël, son of Talemos	6.34, 7.7
?–?, r. 568/9–581/2, d.?	<u>al-Mundhir</u> (Al(a)moundaros/as), son of <u>al-Ḥārith</u>	5.28, 5.29, 5.30, 5.31, 5.32, 6.22, 6.25, 6.26, 6.27, 6.29, 6.31, 6.32
fl. late 6th c.	<u>al-Nuʿmān</u>, son of <u>al-Mundhir</u>	5.32, 5.33
fl. late 6th c.	<u>unnamed sons</u> of <u>al-Mundhir</u> (one perhaps al-Nuʿmān)	6.26, 6.32
fl. late 6th c.	<u>Jafna</u>, *son of <u>al-Mundhir</u>	5.34, *6.28

Ḥimyarite Arabs (so-called 'Ḥujrids')

fl. 5th c. (?)	Ḥujr	3.10, **8.5**, **8.6**
fl. late 5th/early 6th c.	al-Ḥārith/Arethas *possibly the same figure as:*	5.14, 5.18
fl. late 5th/early 6th c.	Arethas, 'son of Thalabene'	5.2, 5.4
fl. late 5th/early 6th c.	Ogaros (?Ḥujr), son of Arethas, 'son of Thalabene'	5.2
fl. late 5th/early 6th c.	Badicharimos, son of Arethas, 'son of Thalabene'	5.4
fl. early-mid (?) 6th c.	Qays/Kaisos, related to al-Ḥārith/Arethas (above)	5.17, 5.18
fl. early-mid (?) 6th c.	Mavias, son of Qays	5.18
fl. early-mid (?) 6th c.	ʿAmr, son of Qays	5.18
fl. early-mid (?) 6th c.	Yezid, son of Qays	5.18

Kings of Ḥimyar in late antiquity

*c.*286–*c.*311	Shammar Yuharʿish	3.9
*c.*311–14	Karibʾil Watār Yuhanʿim	
314–21	Yāsir^{um} Yuḥanʿim	

Dynasty of Dhamarʿalī Yuhabirr

321–4	Dhamarʿalī Yuhabirr	
324–75	Thaʾrān Yuhanʿim	3.8
375–400	Malkīkarib Yuhaʾmin	3.3, 3.6
*c.*400–*c.*445	Abīkarib Asʿad	3.3, 3.5, 3.6, 3.11
? 445–50	Ḥaśśān Yuhaʾmin	3.5, 3.11
*c.*450–*c.*468	Shuriḥbiʾil Yaʿfur	3.5

Dynasty of Shuriḥbiʾīl Yakkuf

*c.*468–*c.*480	Shuriḥbʾil Yakkuf	
*c.*480–*c.*485	Marthadʾilān Yunʿim	
? 485–500	Interregnum (?)	

Ḥimyar as a tributary of Aksūm, and ally of the Roman empire

*c.*500–15	Marthadʾilān Yanūf	3.13
*c.*515–19	Interregnum (?)	
*c.*519–22	Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur	3.14, 3.15

The revolt of Joseph (Yūsuf)

522–525/ 30	Yūsuf Asʾar Yathʾar, king of all the communes (Joseph, Masrūq, Dhū Nuwās)	3.16, 3.18–19, 6.45–8, **8.7–9**
? 530/31	Interregnum (?)	

Aksūmite Arabia

*c.*531–5	Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ (Esimiphaeus)	3.19, 3.20, 5.17

Dynasty of Abraha

*c.*535–65	Abraha	3.21, 3.23, 3.24, 3.25 (?), **8.10, 8.11–17**
*c.*565–8	Aksūm (son of Abraha)	3.21
*c.*568–70	Masrūq (son of Abraha)	pp. 150, 152
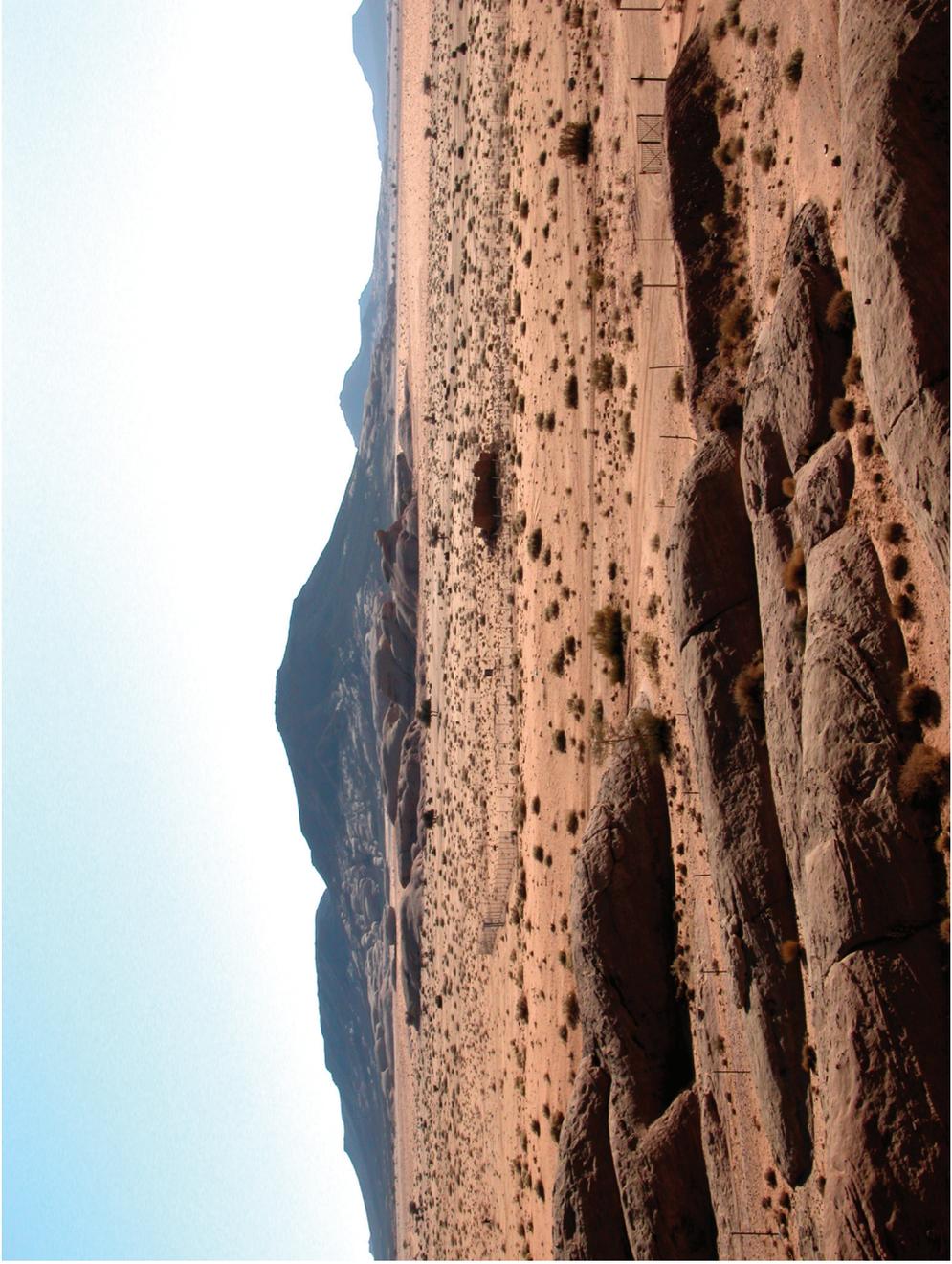
Plate 1. A view of the temple of al-Ruwāfa (see **1.18–22**) and the landscape around it. Photograph by Laïla Nehmé.

Plate 2. The inscribed stone featuring al-Ruwāfa Inscription III (see **1.20**). Photograph by Greg Fisher.

Plate 3. The fortification wall of the city of Barāqish, ancient Yathill, in the Jawf region of Yemen (see **2.1, 2.18–19**). Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

Plate 4. The Marib Dam, 120 km to the east of Ṣanʿāʾ, Yemen (see **2.12, 3.21, 3.26**). The northern sluice controlled the waters irrigating the north of the oasis. Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

Plate 5. The valley of Maʾsal al-Jumḥ (205 km west of Riyadh). Inscriptions **3.11** and **3.14** are engraved higher up (on a rock on the left bank of the valley) at the foot of the cliff from which the photograph is taken. Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.
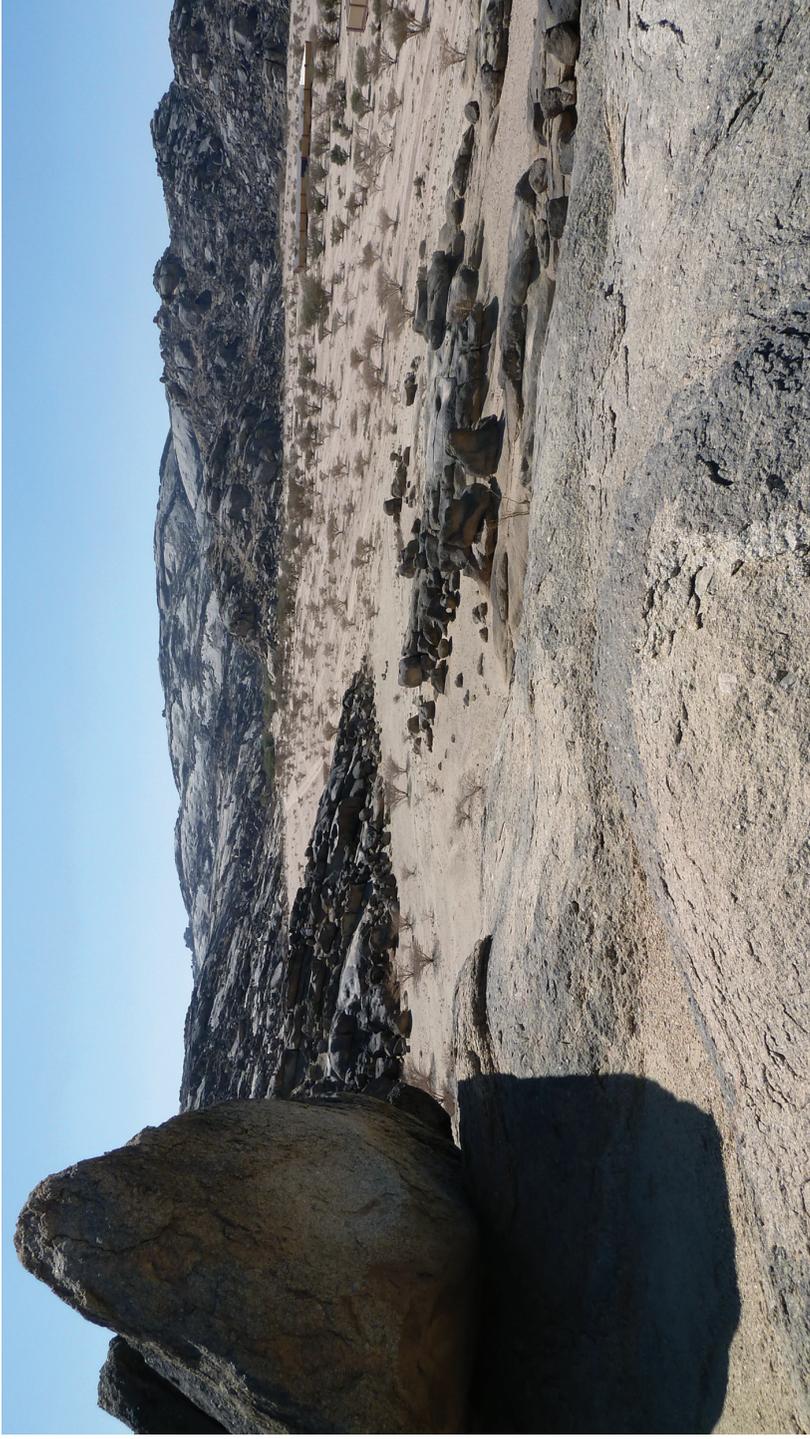
Plate 6. The entrance to the wādī Murayghān (230 km north of Najrān, in the south-west of Saudi Arabia). View from the rock on which the inscription of Abraha **3.24** is written. The wells are located a few hundred metres away, as well as another inscription of Abraha **3.23** written high up on a rock on the left bank of the wādī. Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

Plate 7. Detail of the mosaic floor from the Church of St Sergius, Nitl (**6.30**). The text reads: 'Oh Eretha son of Al-Aretha', from Piccirillo 2002b: 201. © Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem.

Plate 8. General view of the south church in Nitl, from Piccirillo 2002b: 214. © Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem.

Plate 9. Aerial view of Tall al-'Umayrī East (**4.8, 6.31**) indicating the church, in 2010. Photograph by Stafford Smith, APAAME_20101002_SES-0266. © Aerial Photographic Archive for Archaeology in the Middle East.

Plate 10. View of the late Roman tower at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (**4.6, 6.23**). Photograph by Greg Fisher.

Plate 11. Exterior view of al-Mundhir's building in al-Ruṣāfa/*Sergiopolis* (**4.7**, **6.29**) from the south. Photograph by Denis Genequand.

Plate 12. Inside view, towards the apse, of al-Mundhir's building in al-Ruṣāfa/*Sergiopolis* (4.7, 6.29). Photograph by Denis Genequand.
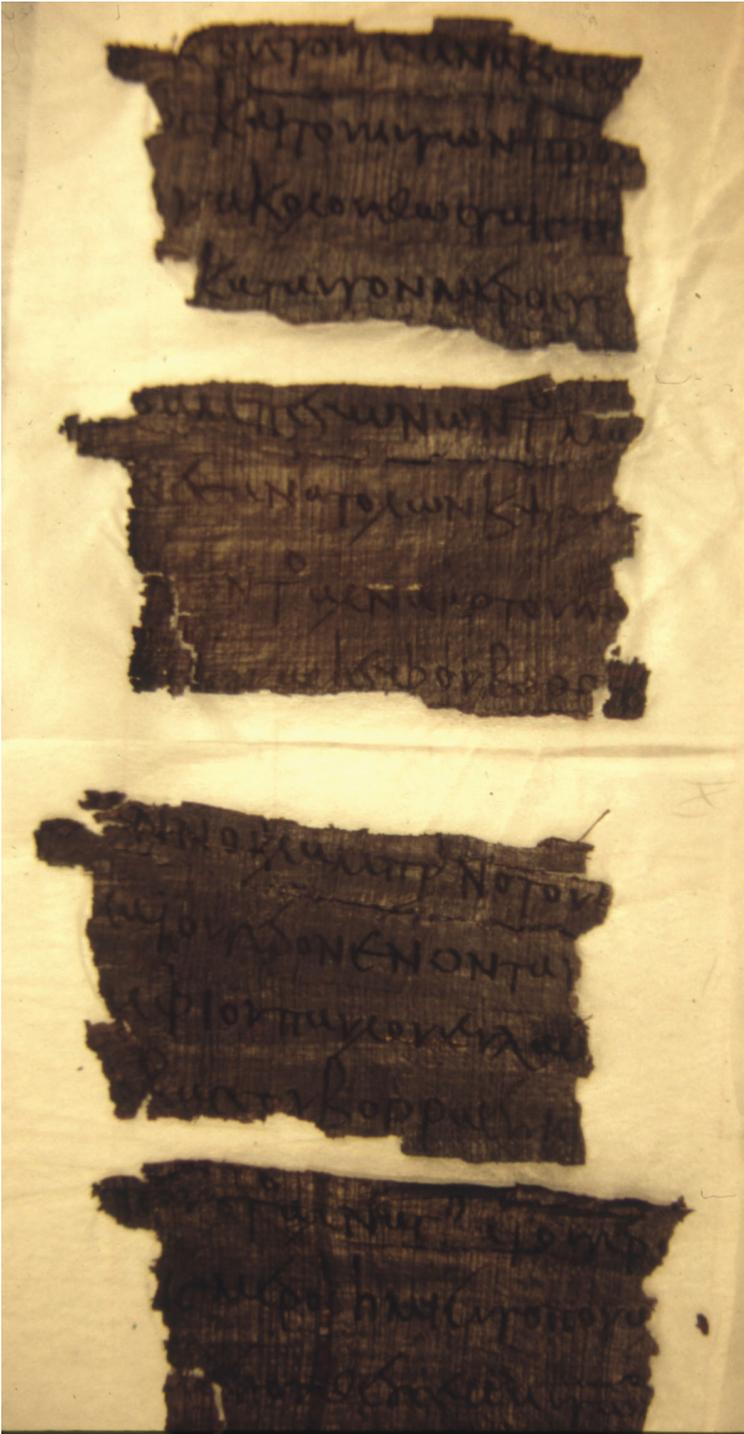
Plate 13. Fragments of the Petra Papyri (cf. **7.16**). Photograph by Jaakko Frösén.

Plate 14. The Old Arabic inscription from Jabal Says, Syria (**7.6**). Photograph by Michael C. A. Macdonald.
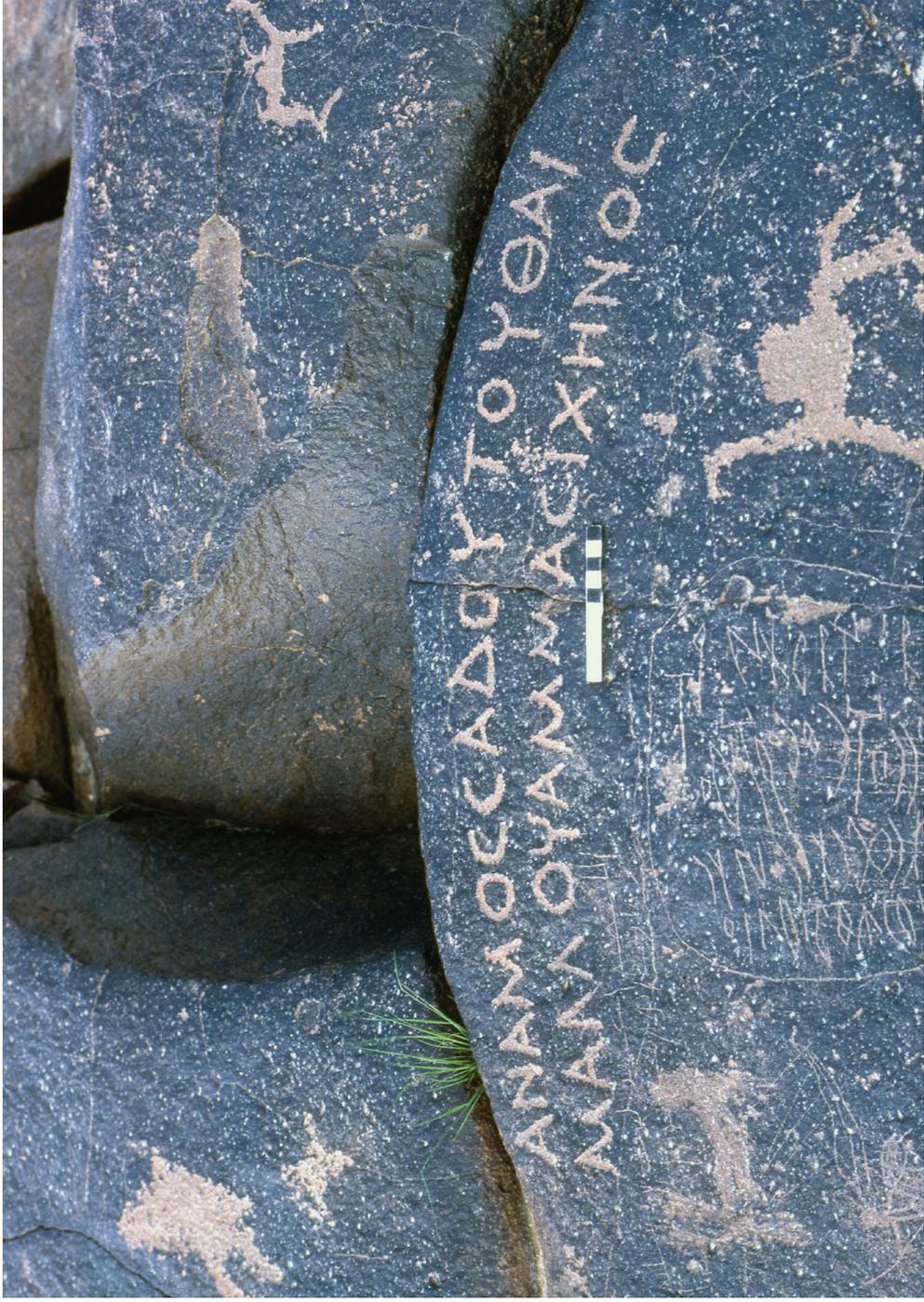
Plate 15. KRS 2420 (7.23) and the monolingual Greek inscription from Wādī Salmā, Jordan (7.21). Photograph by Geraldine King.

Plate 16. The Ḥarrān inscription, Syria (6.34, 7.7, 7.25). Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

Editor's Introduction

Greg Fisher

Interest in Arabia and the Arabs in the pre-Islamic period has grown rapidly in the last two decades.[1] In part, this reflects the vitality of the study of late antiquity, which has challenged 'traditional' geographical, temporal, and disciplinary research boundaries, and driven scholarly interest in areas which had previously received only limited attention.[2] The vibrant study of the emergence of Islam, new archaeological finds, or the reassessment of existing material, in Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, and theoretical advances in the study of 'barbarians'[3] have also contributed to a renewed examination of the place of Arabia, and the Arabs, as important components of the late antique East.

This book provides a portrait of current research in this dynamic field, conveyed through the quotation, analysis, and discussion of a broad cross-section of ancient sources. Written by Roman officers, Greek explorers, Persian emperors, hagiographers, chroniclers, Ḥimyarite kings, and occasionally Arabs themselves, these sources examine the relationship between Arabs, and empires, in the pre-Islamic period.

SOURCES FOR PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA AND THE ARABS

The nature of the sources means that the history of the Arabs in the pre-Islamic period is largely a history of 'Arabs and empires'. In common with

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[1] Amongst the vast literature, see for example: Parker 1986; Shahîd 1995–2010; Hoyland 2001; Millar 2005; Robin 2008a; Millar 2010b; Fisher 2011a; Toral-Niehoff 2014.

[2] Cameron (Av.) 2013 provides a recent and concise view of the state of the discipline, with an extensive bibliography. Fowden (G.) 2013 and Pohl et al. 2012 are representative of the wide-ranging approach current in the study of late antiquity.

[3] Much has been done to rehabilitate this term, which is used here for the sake of familiarity and convenience. See e.g. Dauge 1981; Pohl and Reimitz 1998; Pohl et al. 2001; Gruen 2011; Woolf 2011; Maas 2012.

some other peoples peripheral to ancient imperial interests, such as Germanic barbarians, Arabs were mostly written about by 'outsiders'—those who lived in the empires and states of the East.[4] These records, which include Greek, Latin, and Syriac texts, as well as inscriptions in a number of languages, can be understood as 'outside' sources.[5] Such witnesses, frequently hostile or condescending, reflect a tremendous variety in how ancient observers defined 'Arabia' and 'Arabs'. (Such sources also, of course, say a great deal about the sociopolitical and cultural environments in which they were produced, and such considerations are a consistent background theme in this book.)

By contrast, the 'inside' sources on Arabia and the Arabs, from which we might hope to obtain a corrective to these one-sided and sometimes remarkably superficial views, make up only a tiny percentage of our available evidence. They mostly comprise inscriptions and oral poetry, known from later collections. An Arab narrative literary tradition would develop only much later, and would be subject to the 'seismic changes in Middle East politics' in the Islamic period. This nascent literary corpus (Ch. 8) should be seen as an 'outsider' source for the pre-Islamic period.[6]

It remains a challenge to construct a balanced interpretation of the history of Arabia and the Arabs in the pre-Islamic period. There are, as a result, few synthetic accounts,[7] while examinations of the diverse and broad-based source tradition have been necessarily restricted to individual periods, geographical locations, themes, or disciplines.[8] This book aims to explore many of the gaps which the source problems have left us. It brings together a wide-ranging group of contributors, including historians of Rome, Greece, Persia, and Arabia, as well as epigraphy experts, Arabic philologists, and archaeologists, to provide an analysis and discussion of the extensive spectrum of the different sources for Arabia and the Arabs before Islam.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

The relationship between Arabs and empires was significantly affected by the most valuable commodity of the East: water. The Fertile Crescent, above and around the 200 mm isohyet (rainfall line) provided opportunities for significant levels of agriculture, animal husbandry, and urban and rural settlement (see Fig. 0.1). Below that line, into southern Syria and Iraq, and further south

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[4] Hoyland 2001: 8–10.
[5] Hoyland 2001, 2014, for the terminology; see generally, Dijkstra and Fisher 2014.
[6] Hoyland 2014: 280; cf. Macdonald 2009b, 2014.
[7] Robin 2012b; Hoyland 2001; Retsö 2003.
[8] E.g. Parker 1986 (archaeology); Trimingham 1979 (Christianity); Fisher 2011a (sixth century).

Fig. 0.1. Map of the Near East, indicating the 200 mm isohyet and the geographical area covered by this volume. Drawn by Aaron Styba.

into the Arabian Peninsula, lay deserts of substantial geographical variation. Studded with oases—Palmyra, for example, or Dadan (al-ʿUlā)—the deserts provided immense challenges to settlement.[9]

A substantial part of the surviving literary sources discuss conflict between desert populations and those who lived in the towns and villages of the Roman

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[9] For a concise overview of the geographical background, see Whittow 1996: 15–37; Butcher 2003: 11–15, 161–6; Isaac 2000: 9–14; Bowersock 1983: 5–11; Kennedy and Riley 1990: 24–8; Robin 2012b: 247–8; Dijkstra and Fisher 2014. See also Fowden (G.) 1993 and Fowden (E. K.) 1999.

and Persian empires.[10] Such conflict reflected the imbalance between the resource-rich lands of the Fertile Crescent—'the greatest oasis of them all'—and the resource poverty of the desert areas.[11] Yet conflict was tempered by trade, seasonal migration, negotiations for pasture and water, and other interactions between different elements of the population.[12] By late antiquity, the extension into the desert of Roman settlement and fortifications created opportunities for increased levels of contact between different segments of the population. Arab units appear in the Roman military (Ch. 1), for example, and the hagiographies of monks talk of the Christianization of desert populations (Ch. 6).

The geographical situation at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula mirrored, in part, the divergence between the deserts and the Fertile Crescent. The south-west was a 'land of towering mountains, beautiful coastal plains and plunging valleys . . . endowed with the double blessing of monsoon rains and aromatic plants'.[13] Some parts of modern Yemen (a region which includes some of the territory of ancient Sabaʾ and Ḥimyar; Chs 2 and 3) receive up to 800 mm of annual rainfall; even allowing for a divergence between modern and ancient levels of precipitation, it is clear that the relatively clement environment was a key factor in supporting urban and agricultural development in South Arabia (Ch. 2). Sophisticated irrigation works such as the Marib Dam (Plate 4) played an important role in the maintenance of these communities. Yet the balance could be broken by catastrophic events, such as drought or the breaking of the dam itself (Ch. 8). The rich and fertile areas of the south-west were also bordered by regions of stark contrast, steppes and deserts of only minimal rainfall, less than 150 mm annually, and to the east, even less.[14]

In antiquity, Graeco-Roman writers named the south-western part of the Peninsula *Arabia Felix*, 'Happy', or 'Lucky' Arabia, in part due to its fertility (Chs 1–3). In contrast, *Arabia Deserta*, a challenging dry landscape where access to water was key to survival, lay between the Fertile Crescent and *Arabia Felix* (this area includes, today, parts of the Rubʿ al-Khālī, Nāfūd, Dahnā, and Syrian deserts; see Fig. 1.2).[15] *Arabia Deserta* was a place of considerable resource poverty, difficult to cross, and of questionable value for conquest—but a place which, nevertheless, was of continual interest to outside observers, as many of the sources discussed in this volume demonstrate.

TERMINOLOGY

The most vexing terminological problem relevant to this book—the meaning and definition of the terms 'Arab' and 'Arabia'—is one of the main subjects of

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[10] See Lenski 2011; Parker 1987.   [11] Whittow 1996: 33.
[12] Cf. Banning 1986, 1987; Mayerson 1989.   [13] Hoyland 2001: 4–5.
[14] Yule 2007: 14–17; Hoyland 2001: 2–5.   [15] Hoyland 2001: 4; Sanlaville 2010.

Ch. 1, and there the terms 'Saracen' and its Syriac equivalent, 'Ṭayyāyē', are also discussed. Here, a number of terminological issues which reoccur throughout this volume are briefly noted.

Frontiers

The geographical divergence discussed above helped to delineate the 'frontiers' of the different empires. Regions such as *Arabia Deserta* presented formidable natural barriers, as did rivers, mountains, and other natural obstacles. While numerous ancient frontiers were created by geographical realities, it is now clear that the term 'frontier' is best understood not as a categorical division, but representing a permeable zone of dynamic political relationships and cultural contact.[16] It was in such areas that Arabs encountered monks and hermits, who had moved away from the urban settlements of Palestine in search of solitude (Ch. 6), and where Arab raiders skirmished with Roman patrols (Ch. 5). Frontiers were often fluid spaces—borderlands—whose populations, political and cultural character, and religious identity could be constantly subject to negotiation and change.[17]

Tribe, State, and Nomad

The relationship between 'Arabs' and 'empires' is sometimes framed as one between 'tribe' and 'state'. These controversial terms are usefully approached from a structural perspective, where tribes can be seen as decentralized and non-hierarchical entities, which 'assume great freedom of action on the part of members'.[18] States, in contrast, are 'hierarchical centres of power' that rely on institutions not usually found in tribes, such as a bureaucratic administration and an organized military. Tribes defend resources, while states seek to control them; competition, conflict, and cooperation help to define the relationship between tribe and state. Occasionally the tribe is itself the resource. The use of the phylarch system, and the enrolment of Arabs for military purposes, provide an example (Chs 1 and 5).[19]

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[16] See for e.g. Salzman 2014; Whittaker 1994; Isaac 2000: 372–418; Isaac 1988.

[17] Investigations of 'borderlands', deriving from Barth 1969 and US colonial historical theory, have done much to provide further subtlety to our understanding of different types of frontiers. Not necessarily geographical, frontiers might also be religious, cultural, political, and so on. See Lee and North forthcoming; Sizgorich 2008; Parker 2006; Boyarin 2004.

[18] Salzman 2014: 84.

[19] Salzman 2014: 84. The literature on this topic is vast: see Szuchman 2008; Salzman 2004, 1974; Khoury and Kostiner 1990; al-Rasheed 1987; Beck 1986; Tapper 1983.

Tribes, and very often Arab tribes, are frequently understood, misleadingly, all to be 'nomads'. The word nomad conjures images of a mobile people whose livelihood depends on the pastoral care of animals. For ancient authors, the label, and the lifestyle it evoked, was usually seen pejoratively (Ch. 1). Advances in anthropology have, however, demonstrated that 'settled' people share aspects of their society, culture, and economy with nomads, and that nomads pursue a diversity of lifestyles, including the raising of crops—an activity associated, for ancient observers, with 'civilized', settled peoples.[20] While often very different in terms of their characteristics, it is thus misleading to *always* see nomads and settlers, tribes and states, as diametric opposites. In this volume, the terms tribe, state, and nomad are retained as common and convenient labels, but should be understood within the framework of this brief discussion.

Tribal and Family Names

The tribes and tribal groups which appear most prominently in this volume are Ghassān, Salīḥ, Tanūkh, Kinda, Maʿadd, and Lakhm (adjectivally, 'Ghassānid, Salīḥid, etc.'). These names are known mostly from sources post-dating the emergence of Islam (Ch. 8), although there are occasional earlier references (Chs 1–3). In recent scholarship the terms 'Jafnid' and 'Naṣrid' have emerged as a shorthand to describe the *leaders* of Ghassān and Lakhm, respectively; thus the 'Ghassānid' and 'Lakhmid' leaders of older scholarship have now become 'Jafnid' and 'Naṣrid' leaders. Another label, 'Ḥujrid', is used to describe the Arabs under the influence of the kingdom of Ḥimyar.[21]

This development reflects the fact that the vast majority of *pre-Islamic* sources talk not of tribes, but of individuals. A discussion of tribes on the basis of pre-Islamic evidence cannot easily progress much beyond speculation since, in fact, ancient authors seemed remarkably uninterested in tribes, tribal structures, and indeed tribal society, economy, or political organization, causing significant problems for modern scholars, who have been forced to rely on comparative studies to hypothesize about ancient tribal societies.[22] Only very occasionally are tribes named in connection with individuals, as in the text of the diplomat Nonnosus, who names Kaisos (Qays) as leader of Kinda and Maʿadd. Yet Nonnosus does not go into detail about the link between Kaisos

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[20] For anthropological perspectives, see Szuchman 2008; Khazanov 1994, 2001; Salzman 1980; Salzman and Galaty 1990; Salzman and Fabietti 1996; for perspectives on antiquity: Macdonald 2009e; Shaw 1982; Donner 1989; Leder and Streck 2005; Macdonald 2009e. Robin 2012b: 261–6, offers a summary.

[21] Robin 2008a; Robin 2012b: 294. For an interesting dissenting view on Ghassānids, see Liebeschuetz forthcoming.

[22] E.g. Fisher 2014; Retsö 2003; Lindner 1982.

and these tribes, such as whether he had any familial relationship with their leading families, or whether he had been appointed over them by another party, such as Ḥimyar.[23]

Scholarly attention has thus focused on the individuals named and discussed by the sources: so even though there may be general acceptance that the Jafnid leaders came from the tribe of Ghassān, much more can be said about the individuals than the group. Yet if terms such as 'Jafnid' have offered the methodological benefit of directing our analysis towards attested individuals, they remain imperfect as labels.

A certain ʿAmr(u), known from the Paikuli inscription (Ch. 1), was later identified by Muslim sources as ʿAmr b. ʿAdī b. Naṣr, that is, the descendant of Naṣr, from whom all of the kings of the Lakhmid dynasty at al-Ḥīra in Iraq followed (Chs 5, 6, and 8). One source from the Arab-Islamic tradition describes a long list of kings at al-Ḥīra for 520 years, most of whom could be traced back to the original ancestor, Naṣr.[24] There is no evidence for such a chain, nor is anyone named Naṣr known, on the basis of pre-Islamic sources. Thus, although it is clear that some of the 'Naṣrid' individuals who appear in the pages of Procopius, Menander, or others were indeed related to each other, there is no evidence that the 'Naṣrid' al-Nuʿmān deposed in *c.*602 by Khusrau II (Chs 6 and 8) and ʿAmr of Lakhm, from Paikuli (Ch. 1) were from the same family.[25] The label 'Naṣrid', suggesting a single family dynasty, linked with the tribe of Lakhm (the Lakhmids), thus rests on shaky foundations.

For the Jafnids, the situation is somewhat clearer, since the Graeco-Roman and Syriac sources are mostly explicit about the family relationship between the very small number of individuals who enjoyed an alliance with the Romans in the sixth century (Chs 5 and 6). However, while a sixth-century Jafna appears in the sources (Ch. 5), the identity of the 'original' Jafna is not known—except to the Arab-Islamic tradition (Ch. 8). The means by which the Jafnid family became established as Roman allies before *c.*528/9 are likewise murky (Ch. 5).

The Ḥujrids, used by Ḥimyar to control part of *Arabia Deserta* (Ch. 3) and later objects of Roman diplomatic pressure (Ch. 5), can probably be traced back to an original Ḥujr, known from a graffito in the Arabian Peninsula, as well as from the Arab-Islamic tradition.[26]

It is perhaps instructive that the ancient literary sources prefer to identify Arabs in terms of political and religious relationships. For example, Menander the Guardsman (Ch. 5) talks of 'countless Saracen tribes, for the most part leaderless desert-dwellers, some of whom are subject to the Romans, others to

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[23] Photius, *Bib*. 3. See Ch. 5; cf. Amm. Marc. 24.2.4 and Malchus, fr. 1 (Ch. 1).
[24] Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, p. 361.
[25] Robin 2008a: 185; Hoyland 2014: 272; Fisher 2011b; Fisher and Wood forthcoming.
[26] Gajda 1996; Robin 2008a.

the Persians'.[27] John of Ephesus (Chs 5 and 6) says that 'the Arabs of the Persians were in great awe and fear of Harith, king of the Arabs of the Romans', referring to al-Ḥārith (Arethas), leader of the Jafnids between *c.*529 and 568/9.[28] The final Naṣrid leader, al-Nuʿmān, is identified by Evagrius as a 'polluted heathen',[29] while a Jafnid counterpart, al-Mundhir, son of al-Ḥārith, is described as the 'Christ-loving Mundhir'.[30] Notably, the inscriptions linked with or produced by the Jafnids themselves (Chs 4 and 6) also eschew any identification of lineage or tribe, favouring instead the linguistic and cultural forms of the Roman empire. The only exception to this is the inscription from Jabal Says mentioning the Jafnid leader al-Ḥārith, whose author identifies his tribal affiliation (Ch. 7).

These examples illustrate that, for whatever reason, tribal membership did not seem to be of great interest to ancient observers of the Arabs, and that, for Roman consumption at least, it may have been suppressed by the Jafnid 'inside' sources. Instead, and especially for 'outsider' sources, religious choice and political links with Rome and Persia were of greater importance. In this volume, we retain the widely used 'Jafnid', 'Naṣrid', and 'Ḥujrid' to refer to the *leaders* of the Roman, Persian, and Ḥimyarite Arabs, respectively. Except where the sources indicate, no 'unbroken lineage' is assumed on the part of any particular group. For the convenience of readers, a table of 'Roman Arabs', 'Persian Arabs', and 'Ḥimyarite Arabs' (along with a list of the kings of Ḥimyar) can be found at the beginning of this volume.

THE SCOPE OF THIS VOLUME

This work spans a time period from the eighth century BC to the seventh century AD. The majority of sources are provided in translation only—the exceptions are those where a presentation and discussion of the original language is a component of the commentary.

In order to ensure that this volume is useful, of a manageable size, and complements rather than duplicates the existing detailed studies of Retsö,[31] Hoyland,[32] Greatrex and Lieu,[33] Shahîd,[34] and others,[35] the quotation and discussion of sources focuses on material that is either not well known, is poorly represented, has been re-evaluated, or has never before been published or discussed in detail in English. While several prominent and familiar authors are discussed throughout—for example, Herodotus, Strabo, Cassius Dio, or

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[27] Menander, fr. 9.1 (trans. Blockley).   [28] Joh. Eph., *HE* 3.6.3/pp. 280–2 (trans. Wood).
[29] Evag., *HE* 6.22.   [30] *Documenta*, letter 41, subscription 121: see Ch. 6.
[31] Retsö 2003.   [32] Hoyland 2001.   [33] Greatrex and Lieu 2002.
[34] Shahîd 1995–2010.   [35] E.g. Dignas and Winter 2007.

Procopius—direct quotation of their texts is kept to a minimum in order to reserve space for other, less familiar material.

The first chapter, 'Arabs and Empires before the Sixth Century', examines a very broad range of literary and epigraphic sources from the conquest of the Babylonian kingdom, by Cyrus the Great, down to the adventures of the renegade Amorkesos at the close of the fifth century. Alongside a consideration of the encroachment of Roman and Persian power into the deserts, and the increasing complexity of their relationship with the Arabs, this chapter includes a new edition of the Ruwāfa inscriptions, as well as an examination of North Arabian epigraphic material.

Chapter 2, 'Before Ḥimyar: Epigraphic Evidence for the Kingdoms of South Arabia', and Chapter 3, 'Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and *Arabia Deserta* in Late Antiquity: The Epigraphic Evidence', discuss a diverse selection of inscriptions for the political, cultural, and religious environment in South Arabia down to the end of the sixth century AD. These sources describe the role played by Ḥimyar in the conflict between Rome and Persia, and provide an epigraphic perspective on famous events such as the massacre at Najrān in 523. The texts also shed light on the form of Judaism adopted by the kings of Ḥimyar in the fourth century, on the conflict between Ḥimyar and Aksūm, and on the rule of the last great king of Ḥimyar, Abraha. A number of these texts appear here in English translation for the first time.

Chapter 4, 'The Archaeological Evidence for the Jafnids and the Naṣrids', shifts the discussion away from the more generalized overview of the relationship between Arabs and empires to focus on the material record for the Jafnid and Naṣrid dynasties; the Jafnids, in particular, gained a reputation in the Arab-Islamic tradition as prolific builders (Ch. 8), but this is not supported by the material evidence.

Chapter 5, 'Arabs in the Conflict between Rome and Persia, 491–630', focuses on the role played by both Jafnids and Naṣrids in one of the key phases of Rome's competition with Persia, played out not only in Mesopotamia, but also in South Arabia. A number of the texts discussed here complement the epigraphic material in Ch. 3, as well as the Arabic and Persian texts in Ch. 8.

Chapter 6, 'Arabs and Christianity', examines the relationship between Arabs and Christianity in late antiquity, covering the patronage of the cult of St Sergius by the Jafnids (including an examination of a newly discovered mosaic inscription from Jordan), the links between the Jafnid family and the so-called Miaphysite Christians, and the arms-length association between the Naṣrids and the Christian faith. This chapter covers a range of literary, epigraphic, and material sources, including a consideration of the mosaic pavements from two churches linked with the Jafnids, and sections from the *Ecclesiastical History* of John of Ephesus, the *Chronicle of Seert*, and the *Khuzistan Chronicle*.

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

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

CROSS REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT REQUIREMENTS

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

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

1

Arabs and Empires before the Sixth Century

Michael C. A. Macdonald, with contributions from Aldo Corcella,
Touraj Daryaee, Greg Fisher, Matt Gibbs, Ariel Lewin,
Donata Violante, and Conor Whately

INTRODUCTION

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

   The chapter is divided into two sections. The first includes a discussion of
inscriptions from North Arabia[1] and the Achaemenid Persian empire, a new
edition of the Ruwāfa inscriptions from Saudi Arabia, and a brief selection of
Graeco-Roman authors from the Classical, Hellenistic, Seleucid, Republican,
and early Roman Imperial periods. This part of the chapter also briefly
assesses the very sparse evidence for the relationship between Arabs and the
Parthians, and the early years of the Sasanians.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[4] See the list and discussion in Macdonald et al. 1996: 444–9. The most interesting of these is a Palmyrene dedication (*CIS* ii, no. 3973) which is dated to AD 132, i.e. twenty-six years after the Romans had annexed the Nabataean kingdom and made it *Provincia Arabia.* Here the author gives his name and genealogy and then describes himself as *nbṭy' rwḥy'* i.e. 'the Nabataean, the Rūḥite [i.e. of the tribe of Rūḥū]'.

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

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

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

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

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[5] See the very careful assessment by Yon 2002: 87–97. However, this should be read in conjunction with the criticisms of the assumptions that the etymology of personal and divine names can be used to define ethnicity which are set out in Macdonald 2003a: 306–8.

[6] On this see Macdonald 2003a, 2009a, V; 2009b; see also Macdonald and Nebes n.d.
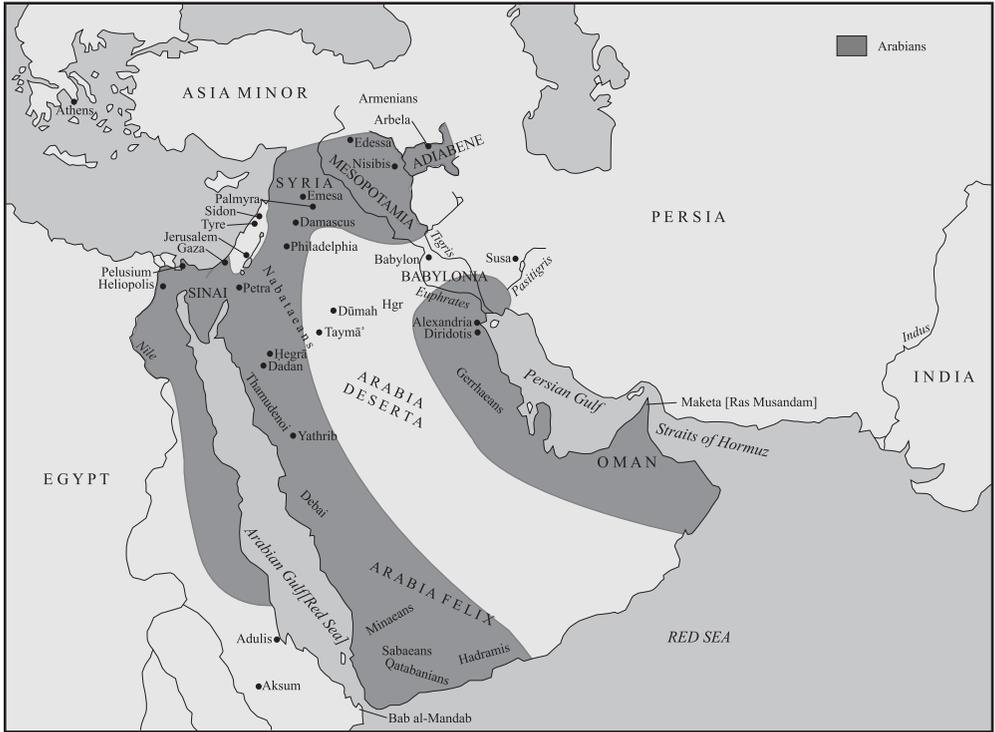
Fig. 1.1. The distribution of peoples described as 'Arabs' by the time of Pompey's conquest of Syria in 63 BC. Map drawn by Aaron Styba.

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

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

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

Ancient North Arabian Inscriptions

The Ancient North Arabian inscriptions[8] fall into seven groups of texts carved by the inhabitants of two of the oases of northern Arabia, and by groups of nomads who lived throughout the western two-thirds of the Arabian Peninsula, from southern Syria to Yemen. They are difficult to date, but the earliest texts we can identify are already fully formed in the mid-first millennium BC and they do not seem to continue beyond the fourth century AD. Linguistically they are quite diverse, but are grouped together as 'Ancient North Arabian' because the various alphabets they are carved in all belong to the South Semitic alphabet family of which the *musnad*, or Ancient South Arabian alphabet, is the most famous example. This family was one of the two branches of the original alphabet (the other being the Phoenico-Aramaic family from which descend all but one of the traditional alphabets today) and it was used exclusively in pre-Islamic Arabia, southern Syria, and Ethiopia. Its only descendant today is the vocalized alphabet used by several Ethiopian languages.[9] None of the alphabets of the South Semitic family, except Dadanitic, show any vowels or diphthongs,[10] and there were no ligatures between the letters. The Dadanitic script, like Ancient South Arabian, was written from right to left with the words separated by vertical lines. Word dividers of various sorts are also often used in Taymanitic, but in this script texts can be written in any direction. Most of the graffiti of the nomads run continuously in any direction with no separation of the words.

The languages and scripts of the oases: Taymanitic and Dadanitic

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

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

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

[9] See Macdonald 2008a.

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

Fig. 1.2. The trade routes in ancient Arabia and the Levant between the mid-first millennium BC and the early centuries AD. Map drawn by Aaron Styba.

trans-Arabian caravan route. This ran from South Arabia (modern Yemen and Dhofar), which was where the best frankincense and myrrh grew as well as the point at which spices from south Asia and the Far East were landed, to the almost insatiable markets for these products in Persia, Mesopotamia, the Levant, and the Mediterranean (see Fig. 1.2). The script used by Taymā''s inhabitants is mentioned as early as c.800 BC far away in the city of Carchemish, in what is now southern Turkey.[11] The oasis, along with five others, was

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[11] See Macdonald 2010b: 5, 10–11.

conquered by Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon, who moved his court to
Taymāʾ and stayed there for ten years of his seventeen-year reign (556–539 BC).
It is possible that he introduced the use of Aramaic to the oasis as the prestige
language and script, a situation which was no doubt cemented by the Achae-
menid governors who followed him. Probably as a result of this, the use of
Taymanitic seems to have died out.

Examples of Taymanitic inscriptions

[**1.1**] Eskoubi 1999: no. 169 (Fig. 1.3)[12]
1. ʾn / mrdn / {ẖ}lm / nbnd / mlk / bbl
2. ʾtwt / mʿ / rbs¹rs¹ / kyt
3. … nm / b-f¹³lʾ / tlw / bdt / lʿq

I am Mrdn, servant of Nabonidus king of Babylon. I came with the Chief Officer
Kyt … in a waterless wilderness beyond the desert of Lʿq.

This inscription must date to between 552 and 543 BC, the period when
Nabonidus was in Arabia. It was carved at a large rocky outcrop called
Mashamrakhah, in the desert south-west of Taymāʾ, by one of those who
came with Nabonidus from Babylon. Since he was clearly familiar with
Taymanitic script, it seems possible that he was an interpreter.
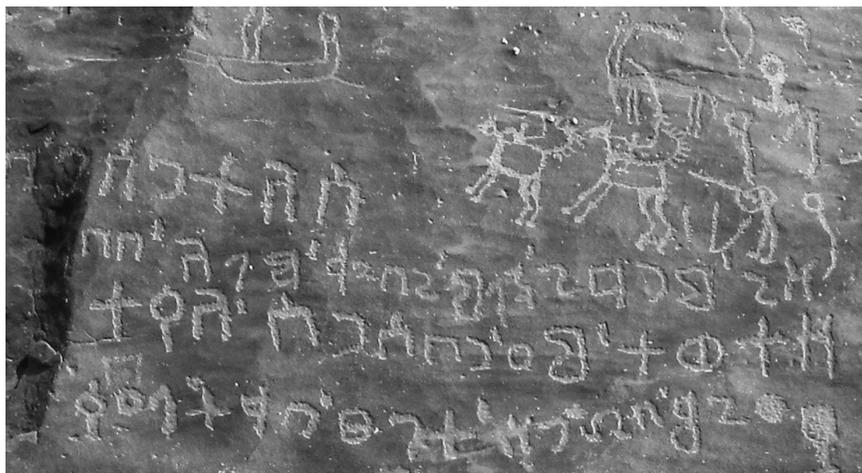
Fig. 1.3. A Taymanitic graffito mentioning Nabonidus king of Babylon. Photograph
by Michael Macdonald.

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[12] The text was reread and reinterpreted in Hayajneh 2001: 82–6. The reading and translation
presented here is based on that but differs in some details.
[13] Note that a word divider was erroneously placed before the *f* but was then erased.

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

[**1.2**] JSTham 513 (Fig. 1.4)
lm rḥml / b bs¹rt / ḫl / b-ddn
By Rḥml son of Bs¹rt. He camped at Dadan.

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

[**1.3**] HE 31 (Fig. 1.5)
1. *bʾrl b klb*
2. *mn s¹mʿ l-ṣlm ltwy*
Bʾrl son of Klb. Whoever listens to Ṣlm, may he bow down.

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

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[14] See Beaulieu 1989: 167–9.
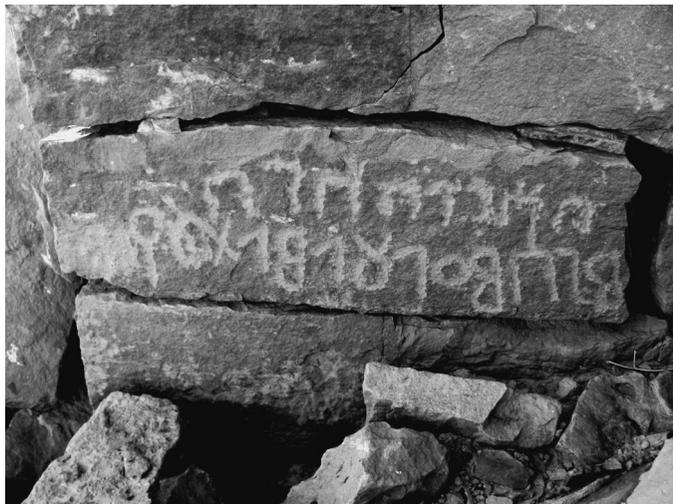
Fig. 1.5. A Taymanitic graffito with a religious statement from a watchtower near Taymāʾ. Photograph by Michael Macdonald.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Examples of Dadanitic inscriptions

[**1.4**] JSLih 138
khf / kbrʾl / bn mtʿʾl / mlk ddn / w ṯrw / nʿm / b-h / nʿrgd
The tomb of Kbrʾl son of Mtʿʾl, king of Dadan. And Nʿrgd became rich in herds because of him.

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

[**1.5**] JSLih 49 (Fig. 1.6)
  1. *ʿbdwd*
  2. *ʾfkl /w*
  3. *d / w bn-h*
  4. *s¹lm / w z*
  5. *dwd / hw*
  6. *dqw / h-ġ*
  7. *lm / s¹lm / h-*
  8. *[m]ṯlt / l*
  9. *ḏġbt*
  10. *f rḍy …*

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

ʿbd-Wd, priest of Wd and his two sons, Sʰ1lm and Zd-Wd, have offered the young
[slave-]boy Sʰ1lm as the substitute to Ḏ-Ġbt. So may he favour [them] . . .

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

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

[**1.6**] Sima 1999: no. ʿUḏayb 18 (Fig. 1.7)

1. ʿms¹ʿd / bn k
2. brh / ʾẓl / h-ẓl
3. l / l- ḏġbt / b
4. ʿd / m l-h / f rḍ
5. y-h / w s¹ʿd-h / w ʾḫ
6. rt-h / w bn-h / {ḥ}rm

ʿm-s¹ʿd son of Kbrh performed the *ẓll* ceremony for Ḏ-Ġbt on behalf of what belongs to him [i.e. ʿm-s¹ʿd]. So may He [i.e. Ḏ-Ġbt] favour him and help him and his descendants, and [particularly] his son Ḥrm.

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

Inscriptions Carved by Nomads

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

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

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[19] See Macdonald 2005: 74–96.

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

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

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

Examples of Safaitic Inscriptions

[**1.7**] A previously unpublished graffito from north-eastern Jordan[21] (Fig. 1.8)
l zd bn rgl w rʿy h-ʾbl h-ʿrḍ s¹nt myt bn qṣr w s¹mʿ ʾn myt flfṣ f s¹ḫr w h-bkrt w h gddf lʿn ḏ yʿwr m yhnʾ w ġnmt l-ḏ dʿy h-tll

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

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

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[20] See **1.9**.
[21] Although it has not been fully published before, part of it has been discussed in Macdonald 1995: 286–8.

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

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

[**1.8**] A previously unpublished graffito from north-eastern Jordan.[23] (Fig. 1.9)
l ʿqrb bn ʾbgr b-ms¹rt ʾl ʿmrt frs¹ s¹nt ngy ġwṯ bn rḍwt

By ʿqrb son of ʾbgr, a horseman in the military unit of the ʾl ʿmrt, in the year Ġwṯ son of Rḍwt was appointed [commander].

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[22] See Macdonald et al. 1996: 483–4.
[23] Although it has not been fully published, it has been discussed a number of times by this author. See Macdonald 2009a, II: 374; IV: 189; VIII: 11; and Macdonald 2014: 157.

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

The way this author identifies himself is at present unique, even though the elements he uses are familiar from other texts. While the camel provides the nomad's capital, his principal food source (through its milk), and both the reason for and the means of pursuing his nomadic way of life, the horse was (and still is) a pampered pet and the means of achieving honour in battle and the hunt. This can be seen in numerous rock drawings where an individual horseman is seen in a 'heroic' pose, spearing lions, ibex, and other large game, or charging into battle, just as Assyrian kings were shown in their reliefs. Normally, the authors of the Safaitic inscriptions will express their group identity by reference to their ʾl, a word which covers all social groups from immediate family to tribal confederations, and even states like the Romans (ʾl rm). We know that the Romans raised army units from among the nomads on the edges of their provinces of Syria and Arabia, though we have very little detailed information about them. However, from various inscriptions, it seems that they raised these units (for which the Safaitic word is *ms¹rt*) from particular tribes (here, the well-known tribe of ʿmrt) and put them under the command of nomad leaders. The appointment of such leaders was often used by others as a fixed point by which to date their inscriptions, as here. The way this text is phrased would suggest that the author could express his group identity not only as a member of the ʾl ʿmrt but specifically as a member of the

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

> [**1.9**] *CIS* v 4448[26]
>
> *l mḥwr bn ġṭfn bn ʾdnt w ṣyr b-ġnmt-h s¹nt ḥrb h-mḏy ʾl rm b-bṣr{y}* . . . [27]
>
> By Mḥwr son of Ġṭfn son of ʾdnt and he remained with his small flock of sheep at a place of permanent water the year the Persians and the Romans waged war at Boṣrā . . .

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is a Latin inscription from Qalʿat al-Zarqa in northern Jordan possibly from AD 259 which mentions the transfer of troops from the province of Palestine to that of Arabia, the capital of which was Boṣrā (Bostra), and this may be related to the Sasanian raids into Syria from 252 onwards and the preparations for the full-scale invasion in 260.[30] However, we have no indication that on this occasion the Persians came as far south as Boṣrā and it seems more likely that the Latin inscription is simply describing precautionary measures which were being taken.

Inscriptions in Varieties of the Aramaic Script

Nabataean Inscriptions

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

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

Examples of Nabataean Inscriptions

[**1.10**] LPNab 41 and *PUAES* IIIA no. 238[1] (Figs 1.10a, 1.10b)

1. *dnh npšw fhrw*
2. *br šly rbw gdymt*
3. *mlk tnḥ*

1. Ἡ στήλη αὔτη Φε-
2. ρου Σολλεου,
3. τροφεὺς Γαδι-
4. μαθου Βασιλεὺς
5. Θα[two large holes in the stone]νουηνῶν

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[**1.11**] JSNab 39 (Figs 1.11a, 1.11b)
1. *dnh msgdʾ dy ʿbd*
2. *škwḥw br twrʾ l-ʾʿrʾ*
3. *dy b-bṣrʾ ʾlh rbʾl b-yrḥ*
4. *nysn šnt ḥdh l-mnkw mlkʾ*

This is the baetyl which Škwḥw son of Twrʾ made for ʾʿrʾ, who is in Boṣrā, the god of Rbʾl. In the month of Nīsān of year one of Mnkw the king.

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

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[32] For a summary of this traditional view see Hackl, Janni, and Schneider 2003: 197–8.
[33] See Rothstein 1899: 38–40 and Robin 2008a: 181–8, both of whom, however, accept the identification, along with most scholars. For an attempt to reconcile these inconsistencies see *EI²* s.v. 'Tanūkh' (I. Shahîd), 191.
[34] See the references in Rothstein 1899: 38–9.
[35] The Nabataeans commonly represented their deities as blocks of stone, rather than anthropomorphically like the Greeks and Romans, though under Hellenistic influence there are some examples of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images. See Patrich 1990.

Fig. 1.11a. The niche and baetyl mentioned in JSNab 39. In the passage through the mountain leading to the sanctuary area of Jabal Ithlib at Ḥegrā (modern Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) in north-west Arabia.
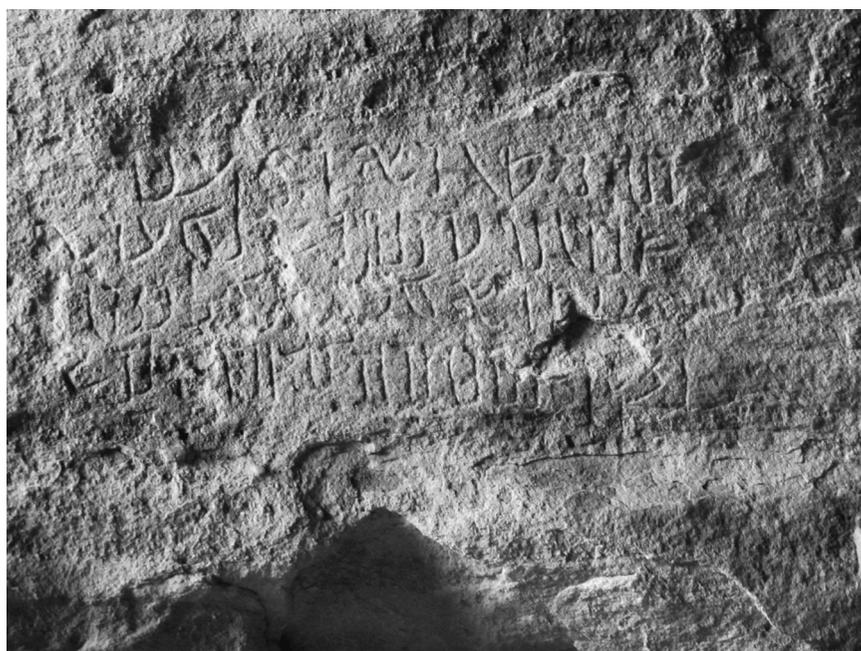
Fig. 1.11b. JSNab 39. Both photographs by Michael Macdonald.

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

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

[**1.12**] Stiehl[40] (Fig. 1.12)

1. *dnh [np]š[ʾ w-q]{b}{r}{t}ʾ dy [ʿbd]*
2. *ʿdy ——— br ḥny br šmwʾl ry{š}*
3. *ḥgrʾ ʿl mwyh ʾtt-h brt*
4. *ʿmr{w} br ʿdywn br šmwʾl*
5. *ryš tymʾ dy mytt b-yrḥ*
6. *ʾb šnt mʾtyn w-ḥmšyn*
7. *w-ʾḥdy brt šnyn tltyn*
8. *w-tmny*

This is [the memorial and tomb] which ʿdy[wn?] son of Ḥny son of Šmwʾl, Chief [citizen?] of Ḥegrāʾ, [made] for Mwyh his wife, daughter of ʿmrw son of ʿdywn son of Šmwʾl, Chief [citizen?] of Taymāʾ, who died in the month of Ab in the year 251 at the age of thirty-eight.

The inscription is almost certainly dated according to the era of the Roman province of Arabia, in which the month of Ab in the year 251 would be equivalent to August AD 356.[41] This era continued to be used up to the Islamic conquests of the mid-seventh century in much of the area originally covered by the Nabataean kingdom, even in places which, after the alterations to the borders of the province under Diocletian and his successors, were included in other provinces (*Palaestina Salutaris*, and then *Palaestina III*) or which, like north-west Arabia, were to all intents and purposes abandoned by Rome from the end of the third century onwards.

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

[37] See Healey 2001: 97–100.

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

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

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

[41] For a comprehensive discussion of the era of the province of Arabia (or the era of Boṣrā, as it was also known), see Meimaris 1992: 146–61, and Ch. 7.
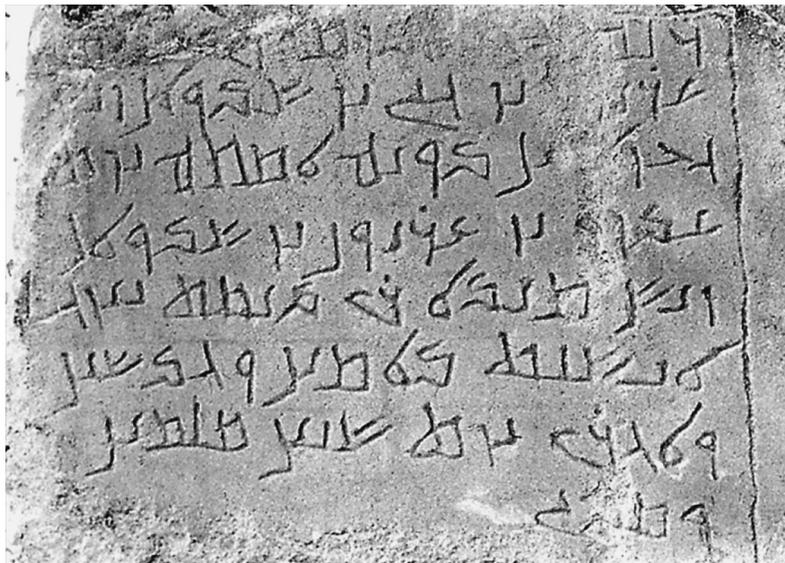
Fig. 1.12. The gravestone of Mwyh dated to August AD 356. The latest monumental inscription in Nabataean Aramaic. Photograph by Ruth Altheim-Stiehl.

After Rome withdrew from north-west Arabia, it seems that local forms of government sprang up in the major oases. According to Islamic sources,[42] Taymāʾ was ruled by Jewish families for an unspecified period before and after the coming of Islam. If the titles *ryš ḥgrʾ* and *ryš tymʾ* mean 'ruler' or 'chief citizen' of Ḥegrā and Taymāʾ respectively, then it is possible that both places were ruled by men with the Jewish name Šmwʾl (i.e. Samuel) two generations before this inscription was carved.[43] However, the name was also used by Christians[44] and all the other names in this text have North Arabian (i.e. Arabic or Ancient North Arabian) rather than Jewish etymologies.[45] Indeed, the name of the deceased, Mwyh (Mavia), was popular among the ruling families of the Arabs in the fourth and fifth centuries and a Mavia 'queen of the Saracens' defeated the Roman armies in AD 377/8 (see section 'Queen Mavia').[46]

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

[43] See the discussion in Al-Najem and Macdonald 2009: 213–15. It is less likely that Šmwʾl was the grandfather of both ʿdy[wn] and Mwyh since that would make him chief of both Ḥegrā and Taymāʾ, in which case one would expect *ryš ḥgrʾ w-tymʾ at the end of both genealogies, rather than *ḥgrʾ* at the end of one and *tymʾ* at the end of the other.

[44] See al-Najem and Macdonald 2009: 214.

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

[46] See Bowersock 1980.

Ḥaṭrā

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

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

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

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

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

[50] See Ibrahim 1986: 93–4.

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

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

[53] See *EI²* s.v. 'al-Ḥaḍr' (C. Pellat). Pellat points out that by this time the city was the stuff of legends and that while some writers attributed its destruction to Ardashīr I others credited it to Shapur I, or even to Shapur II in the following century. It is nevertheless remarkable that memory of its very existence should have survived so long.

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

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

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

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

[55] Apart from in the phrase *mrʾ-nʾ*, 'our lord'.

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

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

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

[60] The phrase is *ḥṭryʾ qšyšʾ w-drdqʾ w-ʿrbyʾ kl-hwn* . . . 'the Hatrans, old and young, and the Arabs, all of them . . .'.

[61] See Healey 1993: 73.

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

Examples of Hatran Inscriptions

Many of the most important inscriptions have been beautifully presented in
Healey 2009: 276–310.[63] The readings, translations, and brief commentaries
given here are based on that edition, with only very minor changes.

> [**1.13**] H79 [see Healey 2009: 289–92, no. 70] (Fig. 1.13)
> I. [*slmʾ dy*] *sn*[*ṭrwq mlkʾ dy ʿrb*]
> II.
>   1. *zkyʾ d-gnd-h ʿm*
>   2. *ʾlhʾ br ʿbdsmyʾ*
>   3. *mlkʾ d-ʾyqmw l-h b-byld-h*
>   4. *d-gndʾ dy ḥdyn b-h dyl-hwn*
>   5. *yhbrmryn w ʾlkwd bnʾ šmšbrk*
>   6. *br ʾlkwd br šmšbrk br*
>   7. *ʾlkwd w ʾḥr-h<wn> w yhbrmryn*
>   8. *w ʾlkwd w bny-hwn w nk<d>y-hwn d-lbr*
>   9. *w lgw b-mrn nšrʾ w b-mlkwt-h w b-gndʾ*
>   10. *d-ʿrb w b-smyʾ d-mškn w b-gnd-hwn*
>   11. *d-snṭrwq mlkʾ w zrʿ-h w bny-hy kl-hwn*
>   12. *d-l-ʿlm lʾ l-dbrhn w ʾnš mn bnʾ dr-hwn*
>   13. *b-qṭyrʾ mʿnʾ br snṭrwq mlkʾ*
>   14. *dkyryn l-ʿlm b-ḥṭrʾ w ʿrb wʾl*

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

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

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

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

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

Sanaṭrūq, son of King ʿAbdsamiya, was Sanaṭrūq II who reigned *c.*AD 200–40. The word translated as 'Protective Deity' is *gnd'* which, in the form *gd*, is also found in Safaitic[65] and Palmyrene as the supernatural being which protects individuals, groups, and places.[66] It is possible that the *gnd'* was so closely identified with the person, place, or thing it was protecting that it came to represent him, her, or it, so that 'the birthday of his *gnd'*' is an elaborate way

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[65] See **1.7**.
[66] See Teixidor 1979: 88–100 and Kaizer 1998, and in relation to H79 at pp. 52–3.

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

> [**1.14**] H343 (see Healey 2009: 307–9, no. 79) On the eastern gate of Ḥaṭrā below a relief of an eagle (Fig. 1.14)
> 1. *b-yrḥ knwn d-4 x 100 + 20 + 20 + 20 + 1 + 1 + 1 b-mlkʾ dy*
> 2. *ʾlhʾ ʾṣṭbw šmšbrk rbytʾ*
> 3. *w ḥṭryʾ qšyšʾ w drdqʾ w ʿrbyʾ*
> 4. *kl-hwn w kwl dy ʿmr b-ḥṭr w hkyn psq[w]*
> 5. *dy kwl d-l-gnwb lgw mn mlʾ hdyn*
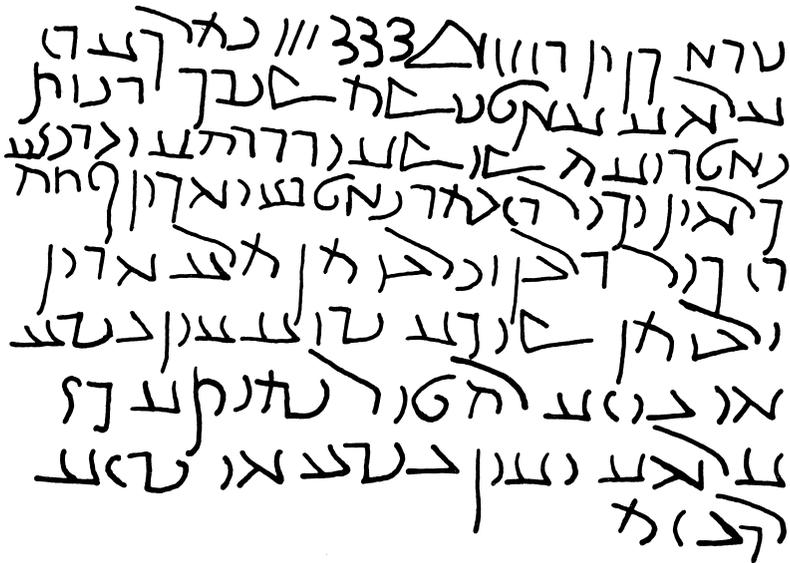
Fig. 1.14. Hatran inscription 343. From Ibrahim 1982: 123.

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[67] See Dijkstra 1990: 88.

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

6. *w lgwʾ mn šwrʾ bryʾ ʾyn gbrʾ*
7. *hw gwyʾ l-qṭyl b-mwtʾ dy*
8. *ʾlhʾ w ʾyn gbrʾ hw bryʾ*
9. *l-rgym*

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

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

Old Syriac of Edessa and its Surroundings

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

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[69] See Meimaris 1992: 53–5.
[70] For instance by Dijkstra 1990: 90–7. For a caution against such assumptions see Macdonald 2003a: 308–11.
[71] See Kaizer 2006: 149–50.
[72] On Edessa, see Segal 1970; Drijvers 1977: 863–96; Drijvers and Healey 1999: 34–41. For Edessa between Rome and Persia from the reigns of Trajan to Caracalla, see Sartre 2001: 630–7 and Bertinelli 1976.

became a buffer state between Rome and the Parthian empire until it was brought under Roman control following a campaign by Lucius Verus (AD 163–6) and was eventually made a province in AD 195. However, Edessa remained a client state until 212–13.[73] Despite being conquered more than once by the Sasanians, it remained in Roman hands until the Arab conquest in AD 638.

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

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

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

[**1.15**] As47 (after Healey 2009: 232–4, no. 50) (Fig. 1.15)
1. *hlyn ṣlmʾ d-ʿbd*
2. *wʾl br mwtrw [nwhd]rʾ*
3. *d-prr l-wʾl šlyṭ d-ʿrb*
4. *br wʾl w l-wʾl br-h*
5. *nwhdrʾ d-šwr mr-why*
6. *w ʿbdy ṭbt-h*

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[73] For the problems with the exact chronology of these events see Bertinelli 1976: 39–41.
[74] See Drijvers and Healey 1999: 37–8, and Drijvers 1977: 875–6.
[75] See Pliny, *HN* 5.85, 5.86; see also 6.25, 6.117, 6.129.
[76] For useful discussions of what is known of the title *šlyṭ d-ʿrb* see Segal 1954: 25, and Drijvers and Healey 1999: 105–6.
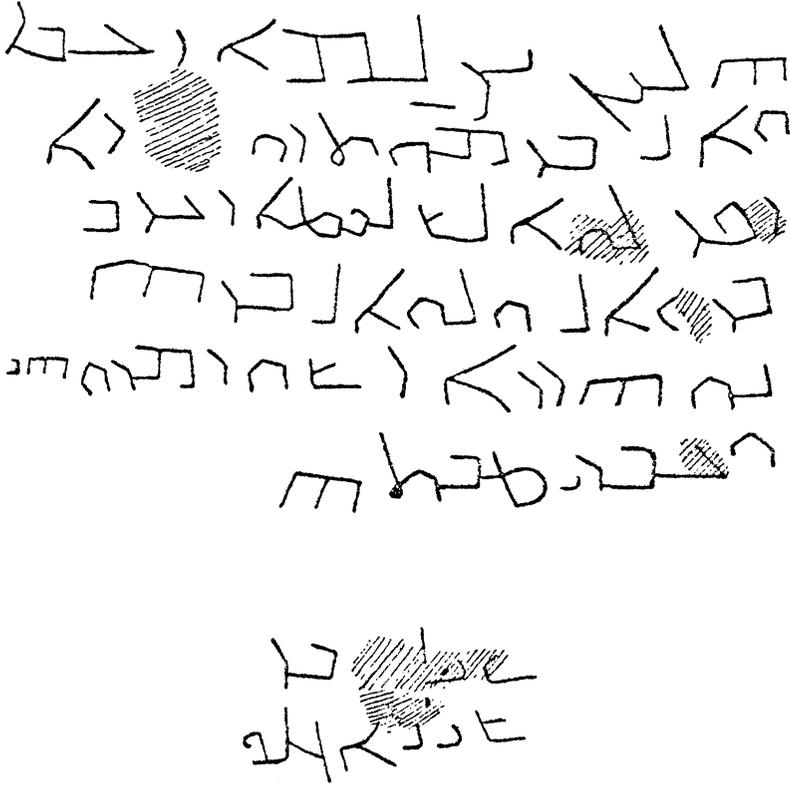
Fig. 1.15. Old Syriac inscription As47. From Pognon 1907: Pl. XIV, no. 5.

7. *[. . .] br*
8. *šylʾ glp*

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

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

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[77] Drijvers and Healey 1999: 128. Since *r* and *d* have identical shapes the following word, read here as *prr*, could equally well be *pdd*, *pdr*, or *prd* but unfortunately none of these has been identified. It has been suggested that *šwr* refers to a town in northern Mesopotamia known as *šūra* in the cuneiform sources.
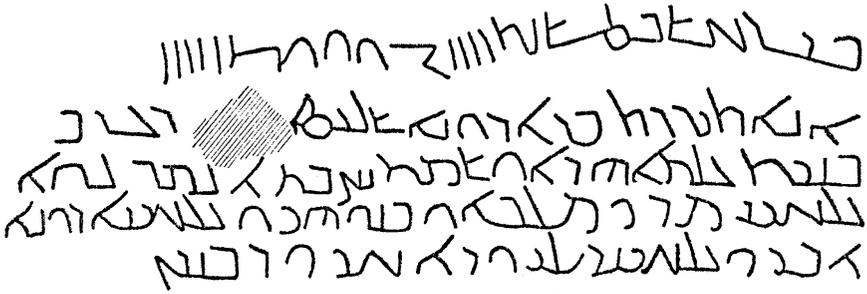
Fig. 1.16. Old Syriac inscription As36. From Segal 1954: 24. © Cambridge University Press.

[**1.16**] As36 (after Healey 2009: 228–30, no. 48) Dedication of an altar and baetyl[78] found at Sumatar Harabesi[79] (Fig. 1.16)

1. *b-yrḥ šbṭ šnt 4 x100 + 20 +20 + 20 + 10 + 6*
2. *ʾnʾ tyrdt br ʾdwnʾ šlyṭ d-ʿrb*
3. *bnyt ʿltʾ hdʾ w śmt nṣbtʾ l-mrlhʾ*
4. *ʿl ḥyy mr-y mlkʾ w bn-why w ʿl ḥyy ʾdwnʾ*
5. *ʾb-y w ʿl ḥyy dyl-y w d-ʾḥy w d-bnyn*

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

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

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

1. *d-ʿbd brnhr*
2. *br dyny šlyṭ*
3. *d-ʿrb l-ʾwrylws*

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

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

[80] See Dijkstra 1995.

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

4. *ḥpsy br*
5. *br[klb]ʾ ʾplwtrʾ*
6. *[d-ʾn]ṭwnyns*
7. *[qs]r mr-h w ʿbd*
8. *[ṭb]t-h*

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

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

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

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

The Ruwāfa Inscriptions

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

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

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

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[82] Drijvers 1980: 131.

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

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

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

[86] For all this information and the plan of the building in Fig. 1.18, see Parr, Harding, and Dayton 1968–9: 215–19, pls 14–20. Note, however, that nearby in the Hawatif valley Philby 'found signs of cultivation, with fairly extensive patches cleared for barley and wheat crops on the floods resulting from the autumn and later rains. Slender fences of brushwood surrounded these tracts, and even served as temporary barriers to delay the passage of the flood-water' (1957: 147). This was clearly contemporary opportunist agriculture by the local Bedouin, but it suggests that some small settlement might have been possible there in antiquity.
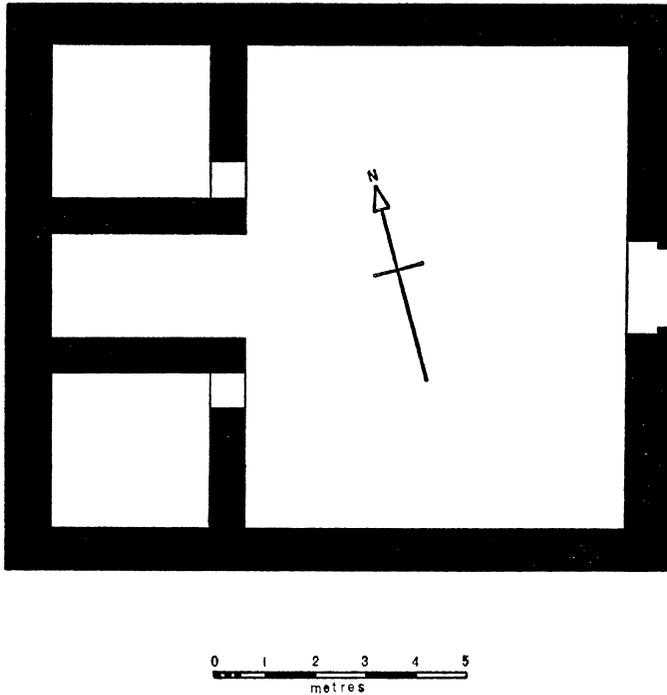
Fig. 1.18. A plan of the temple at al-Ruwāfa. From Parr, Harding, and Dayton 1968–9: 216, fig. 8. © Institute of Archaeology.

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

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

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

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

Fig. 1.19. Part of the lintel inscriptions from al-Ruwāfa showing lines 1–4 (inscription I) and lines 5b–6 (inscription II) with arrows pointing to the first occurrence of [Θ]αμουδηνῶν ἔ[θνος] in the Greek and {š}rkt tmwdw in the Nabataean. Photograph by Laïla Nehmé.

'Arabs' on the eastern Red Sea coast south of the entrance to the Gulf of ʿAqaba.[89] In the first century AD, Pliny, in a rather muddled passage, places them further inland[90] and mentions them immediately after the *Avalitae* (whom he places at Ḥegrā).[91] Ptolemy—who was writing at roughly the same time as the inscriptions were set up—gives two names, either (or both) of which may refer to the Thamūd. One, the Θαμυδῖται, he places on the Red Sea coast,[92] and the other, the Θαμουδηνοί, in the interior of north-west Arabia.[93] Finally, Uranius places the Θαμουδά near the Nabataeans.[94] They

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[89] See Agatharchides of Cnidus 154–5, and the map opposite p. 1 in Burstein's edition. Agatharchides describes this area as ἡ χώρα Θαμουδηνῶν Ἀράβων, 'the land of the Thamudaean Arabs'.

[90] Pliny, *HN* 6. 32.157: *Tamudaei (oppidum Baclanaza)* 'Thamūd (town Baclanaza)'. The town has not been identified.

[91] The *Avalitae* are almost certainly the Ḥwlt who appear as raiders and general enemies in the Safaitic inscriptions. See Macdonald 2009e: 308 and n. 36.

[92] See Ptolemy 1998: 86–7, §6.7.4. The area in which he places them, just south of the Aelanitic Gulf (i.e. the Gulf of ʿAqaba), corresponds with that in Agatharchides.

[93] See Ptolemy 1998: 102–3, §6.7.21 where they are placed next to the Σαρακηνοί.

[94] See *FGH* 342, no. 675, fr. 12.

also appear in the early fifth century AD in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, a register of the administration of the Roman empire,[95] in the names of two Roman military units, the *equites Saraceni Thamudeni*, stationed in Egypt, and the *equites Thamudeni Illyriciani,* stationed in *Palaestina I* (see further on the *Notitia*, section 'Arab Allies, Arab Enemies').

References to the Thamūd in indigenous sources are, however, far more rare.[96] Earlier writers such as van den Branden[97] confused the label 'Thamudic', created by Western scholars for various groups of Ancient North Arabian inscriptions, with the historical tribe of Thamūd and incorrectly assumed that the latter had carved the former.[98] However, a tribe of *ṯmd* (possibly Thamūd) is mentioned in two Safaitic inscriptions sometime between the first century BC and the fourth century AD.[99]

J. T. Milik, who published the first complete edition of the Ruwāfa inscriptions, translated the words ἔθνος as 'nation' and *šrkt* as 'fédération', on the assumption that Thamūd was a confederation of various nomadic tribes. Despite the fact that we have no evidence that this was so, his translation has been followed for many years.[100] In fact, in Arabic—from which the word *šrkt* was borrowed into Nabataean Aramaic—*šarikah* is an organization or agreement into which one has entered voluntarily, like a share-cropping agreement or, in the present day, a commercial company.[101] In a tribal society, one's membership of a social group, such as a tribe or confederation of tribes, is considered to be involuntary, because one is born into it. One's social identity is determined, not by what one does, but by one's genealogy, in the upper reaches of which the names of social groups are treated as ancestors, making it possible to show the relationship of one tribe or clan to another.[102]

I have suggested that the words ἔθνος and *šrkt* in the context of this inscription represent translations of the Latin word *natio*, which the Roman writer known to us only as Ps.-Hyginus uses to describe units of the Roman

[95] See *Nd. Or.* 28.17 (*equites Saraceni Thamudeni*); 73, *Nd. Or.* 24.22 (*equites Thamudeni Illyriciani*). See also Speidel 1975: 228–9.

[96] See the excellent and very careful discussion in Beaucamp 1979: cols 1470–1.

[97] See van den Branden 1958, 1960.

[98] On this see *EI*², s.v. 'Thamudic' (M .C. A. Macdonald and G. M. H. King).

[99] See Winnett and Harding 1978: nos 3792a . . . *s¹nt ḥrb gs²m ᵓl ṯmd* ('the year of the war between Gs²m and the tribe of Thamūd') and the same in an abbreviated form in 3792c.

[100] See, for instance, Graf and O'Connor 1977, and O'Connor 1986, who have been much quoted. For discussion of this problem see Macdonald 2009c: 6–9, 16–18.

[101] One could compare the English word 'company', which can mean a 'unit of soldiers' or a 'group working together for commercial purposes' (the normal meaning of Arabic *šarikah* today). In English, both meanings seem to have arisen at approximately the same time in the early fourteenth century. See Barnhart 1988: 196.

[102] See Macdonald 2009c: 6–8. It is worth noting that in inscription IV, the 'tribe of Thamūd' is translated by the normal Greek word for a tribe, φυλή, thus Θαμουδηνῶν φυλή.

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

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

In the Safaitic inscriptions a military unit of this kind was referred to by the loan-word from Aramaic, *ms¹rt*.[105] However, here we find *šrkt*, a loan-word, from Arabic which may have been the native language of the Thamūd. One might ask why the Aramaic term *mašrītā* was not used here. It occurs in a Nabataean inscription from al-Jawf[106] in the phrase *rb mšryt'*, 'commander of the camp/regiment', and it is possible that a different term was used here to avoid the ambiguity inherent in *mšryt'*.[107] Alternatively, it may be that the members of the Thamūd who had joined the unit already had their own (Arabic) word for this type of organization.

The Θαμουδηνῶν ἔθνος or *šrkt tmwdw* would, I suggest, be a *natio* or indigenous unit raised, in this case, from the tribe of Thamūd. We saw in a Safaitic inscription (**1.8**) that a nomad could express his identity through his membership of such a military unit drawn from his tribe, and it seems that this is a similar case.[108] The temple with its dedication to the emperors, in what to us looks like the back of beyond but which was presumably a significant place in the territory of the Thamūd, was thus a symbol of their integration into the Roman empire and, specifically, the Roman army. The inscriptions are in Greek for the Roman side[109] and in Nabataean Aramaic for the local side. This does not imply that the members of the Thamūd tribe could read Nabataean or Greek, but simply that Nabataean was the local written language, as it continued to be in north-west Arabia until the Nabataean Aramaic language gradually fell out of use and its script came to be used to write Arabic.[110] Inscriptions of this sort are records and symbols and are not necessarily aimed at a particular readership.[111]

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

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

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

[105] See **1.8** and Macdonald 2014: 157–8.   [106] See Savignac and Starcky 1957.

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

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

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

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

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

[112] See Milik 1971: 55, who treats it as one text with two Greek sections and one Nabataean, and this has been followed by all subsequent treatments.
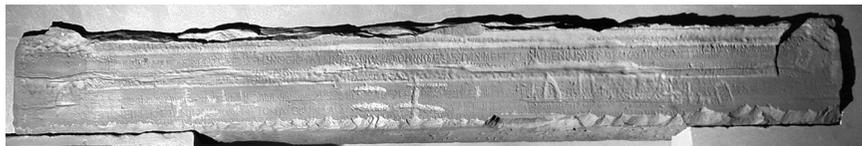
Fig. 1.20. The complete lintel from al-Ruwāfa with inscription I and the first one and a half lines of inscription II. Photograph by Laïla Nehmé.

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

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

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

Lucius Verus took the title *Armeniacus* in AD 163 and Marcus Aurelius a year later. In inscription I the emperors are called simply *Armeniaci*, and so this would date this text to 164.[115] In inscription II they are called not only *Armeniaci*, but *Parthici Maximi*, a title which they both assumed in 165, and possibly *Medici*,[116] which they took in 166.[117] If correct, this suggests that inscription I was carved in AD 164 and inscription II between 166 and the death of Lucius Verus in 169.

The Lintel Inscriptions

[**1.18**] Inscription I[118]

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

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

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

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

[116] Only [*Mηδι*] κῶν survives.   [117] See Birley 1996: 220.

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

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

1. Ὑπὲρ αἰωνίου διαμονῆς κρατήσεως τῶν θειοτάτων κοσμοκρατόρων Σεβαστῶν μεγίστων Ἀρμενιακῶν Μάρκου Αὐρηλίου Ἀντωνείνου καὶ Λουκίου

2. [Αὐ]ρηλίου Οὐήρου π [lacuna of approximately 14 letters] ν [Θ]αμουδηνῶν ἔ[θνος lacuna of approximately 60 letters] ΣΤΑ καθείδρυσεν· μετὰ προτρο[πῆς]

3. [lacuna of approximately 5 letters?][120] καὶ ἐκ πει[121] [lacuna of approximately 25 letters Κοί]ντο [υ lacuna]

4. ʾl šlmʾ dy mt[lacuna of approximately 30 letters mrqs] ʾwrlys ʾntwnyns w-lwqys ʾwrlys [wr]s dy ʾ{ . . . }ʾ[122] [lacuna] dnh nwsʾ dy ʿbdt {š}rkt tmwdw qdmy šrk{t}-h l-mhwʾ [š]{w}h mn yd-hm w-mšmš-{h}[m l-ʿl]m

5a. [lacuna] w-ḥf{y}t [lacuna of approximately 12 letters][123] [ʾ]{dw}nṭs {ʾ}{d/r/w} {.}{.}ty[124] [lacuna of approximately 10 letters] w-{r}mṣ-hm

Translation: Greek (lines 1–3)

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

Translation: Nabataean (lines 4–5a)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5a And with the {encouragement} of [. . . *ṭ* . . . *ṭ* . . . A]dventus [. . .] and at their [i.e. the Thamūd's or their leaders'] {request}.[126]

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

[**1.19**] Inscription II

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

5b. Ἐπὶ νείκῃ καὶ αἰωνίῳ διαμονῇ αὐτοκρατόρων Καισάρων [Μ]άρκου [Αὐ]ρηλίου Ἀντωνείνου

6. καὶ Λουκίου Αὐρηλίου Οὐήρου Σεβ(αστῶν) Ἀρμενιακῶν [Μηδι]κῶν Παρθικῶν μεγ[ί]στων καὶ τοῦ παντὸς οἴ[κου α]ὐτῶν τὸ τῶν Θαμουδηνῶν ἔθνος [lacuna]

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

7. τὸν νεὼ[129] συνετέλεσεν

8. καὶ τὸ ἱερὸν καθειέρωσεν

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

9. [. . . Κλ] αυδίου Μοδέστου

10. [. . .]β ἀντιστρατ (ήγου).

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

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

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

[129] Milik reads νεὼ<ν>, but Bowersock (1975: 516) points out that the <ν> is unnecessary.

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

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

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

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

It would seem that this inscription was added to mark the completion and consecration of the temple under the aegis of the next governor of *Provincia Arabia*, Lucius Claudius Modestus. The fact that the text starts in a line (5) half of which was already occupied and spills onto the capitals which presumably
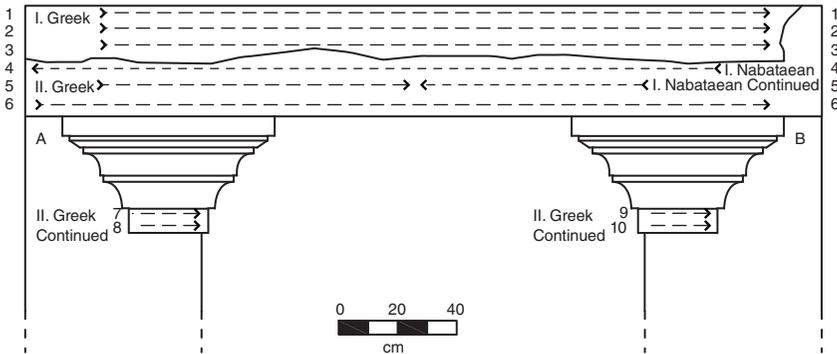
Fig. 1.23. A reconstruction of the original layout of the inscriptions on the lintel and capitals from al-Ruwāfa. Drawing by Aaron Styba.

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

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

[**1.20**] Inscription III

A fragment of a Greek inscription within a *tabula ansata*. Philby[134] apparently found it in the temple and copied it. His copy was then published by Seyrig

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[131] See Birley 1996: 220.   [132] See Macdonald 2009c: 12–13.
[133] See al-Talhi and al-Daire 2005 and the excellent discussion in Villeneuve 2010. The inscription is dated to AD 175–7 and deals with restoration work in the city by the 'chief citizen' with the aid of two Roman centurions from the *Legio III Cyrenaica*, the legion occupying *Provincia Arabia*, which was based at Boṣrā.
[134] Philby 1957: 146, where he discusses it, and 154 where he notes that despite attempts to 'reduce it to portable dimensions . . . its essential contents [which he then quotes] had survived the act of vandalism'.

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

… [?]
1. ε/ϲυϲθαι/τ̣ου Θ[αμ]ο̣υ̣δηνῶ-
2. ν φυλῆϲ Ροβαθου οἰκοδό-
3. μηϲα<ν> τὸ εἱερὸν τοῦτο
… of the tribe of Thamūd of Rbtw they built this sanctuary.

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

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

The first surviving eight letters, which appear as ϹΙϹΘΑΙΟΙ on Philby's copy but which can now be seen to read ε/ϲυϲθαι/τ̣ου, have not yet been satisfactorily explained.[138] It is not certain whether any of them—and if so, how many—belong to the end of a word in the line above, if there was one. The ending -οι on Philby's copy suggested that it was a masculine noun in the nominative plural and this is presumably why Milik inserted the final ν on the verb οἰκοδόμηϲα<ν> to turn it from a first-person singular[139] to a third-person plural.

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[135] Seyrig 1957: 260; Milik 1971 [1972]: 58.
[136] However, this is not to endorse Philby's *derivation* of the modern name Ruwāfa from *Rbtw*/Ροβαθου, simply to suggest that the latter may have been the name of the place in antiquity. See the interesting discussion of *Rbtw*/Ροβαθου in Beaucamp 1979: 1472–3, where Philby's arguments are summarized.
[137] I am most grateful to Pierre-Louis Gatier for correcting my reading in the last line of this text and for pointing out an error in the translation. However, he is in no way responsible for my conclusions, with which he almost certainly disagrees.
[138] Van den Branden's attempt to explain them by reading the Θ as an Ο and relating the resulting combination of letters to the word ϲιϲοη, which he translates as 'manière de couper les cheveux en rond' (1958: 9, n. 24bis), is far-fetched and fits neither the context nor what can now be read on the stone.
[139] This was noted by Seyrig (1957: 260) and would be extremely unusual in a text of this sort.

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

[**1.21**] Inscription IV (Fig. 1.24)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[**1.22**] Inscription V

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

Michael C. A. Macdonald

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

[142] Thus, for instance, JSNab 226 *dy mn ṣlḥdw* 'who is from Salḫad [a town in the Ḥawrān]', Al-Dhīyīb 2002: no. 163 *dy mn ytrb* [Yathrib, modern al-Madīnah]', etc. Tribal affiliation is expressed by *dy mn ʾl* 'who is of the lineage of', for instance in Littmann 1914b: no. 44 *dy mn ʾl šlmw* 'who is of the lineage of Šlmw', Milik 1958: no. 6 *dy mn ʾl ʿmrt* 'who is of the lineage of ʿmrt'; Milik and Starcky 1970: no. 130 *dy mn ʾl qmyrw* 'who is of the lineage of Qmyrw', etc.

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

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

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

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

'Arabs' and 'Arabia' appear in lists of peoples and territories under Achaemenid control on a number of Persian royal inscriptions and reliefs.[147] The tomb of Darius I (r. 522–486) at Naqsh-i Rustam, for example, includes a tribute bearer from *Arabāya*, seemingly located between Egypt and Assyria. Earlier, Darius had claimed the fealty of Arabia, alongside many other regions of the Near East, in the famous trilingual Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian inscription from Bisitun (Behistun) in north-western Iran, completed in 519/18.[148] During his reign, Darius had also dispatched the Greek explorer Scylax of Caryanda to attempt a circumnavigation of the Arabian Peninsula, anticipating the similarly ambitious plans of Alexander the Great, two centuries later.[149]

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

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

[146] On the latter, see now Briant 2009.

[147] Darius I: DB, DPe, DSe, DSm, DNa; Xerxes: XPh. See Retsö 2003: 237–9; Bosworth 1983: 593, and *EI*³ s.v. 'Arabian Peninsula' (R. G. Hoyland) for further discussion. Greek observers, such as Herodotus and Xenophon (see section 'Herodotus and Xenophon') complement the picture provided by Persian epigraphic evidence.

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

[149] Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 4.

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

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

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

Just over a century later, the rise of the 'Arsacid' Parthian state signalled the emergence of a new non-Greek power in the Near East which would eventually regain much of the territory once ruled by the Achaemenids. Arsaces, leader of the Parni, a group of people living to the south of the Caspian Sea, had defeated and killed the Seleucid-appointed governor of the satrapy of Parthia in 238 BC, and, together with his own brother, had assumed control of the region. Over the next two centuries, the Arsacid kings took advantage of political uncertainties in
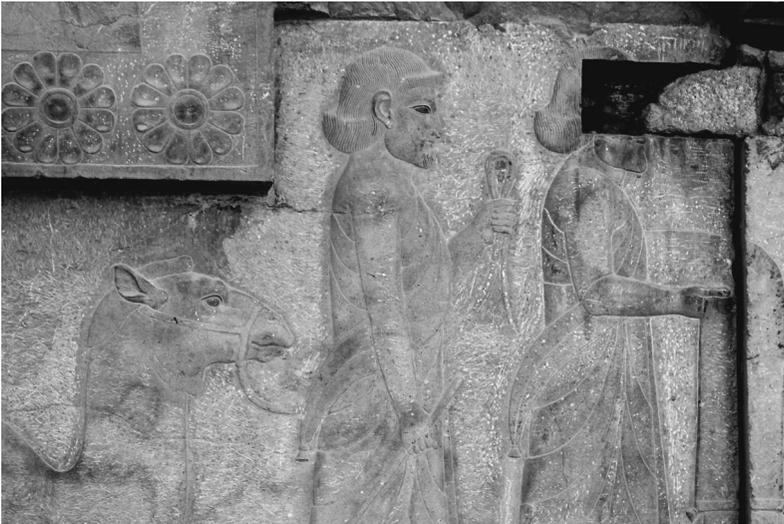
Fig. 1.25. The delegation of 'Arabs' from the Apadana, Persepolis. Photograph by Matthew Canepa.

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[150] XPh §3 = Kuhrt 2010: 305.

the Seleucid kingdom—beset by internal rivalries and dynastic squabbles, and under pressure from its neighbours—to extend their rule westwards, claiming Iran and Mesopotamia by 139 BC, and establishing Ctesiphon as the Parthian centre by the turn of the first century. Expansion to the west also brought Parthia and Rome into contact, and Parthia came under pressure to become involved in the long war between Rome and Mithridates VI. While Lucullus and Pompey had respected Parthia's refusal to be drawn into the Mithridatic war, the relationship with Rome quickly turned sour, especially after the largely unprompted assault (and defeat) of Crassus in 55 BC and, in the first and second centuries AD, over continued competition by both Rome and Parthia for influence in Armenia. After Trajan's famous campaigns against Parthia between AD 115 and 117, the Romans once again gained the upper hand under Marcus Aurelius (161) and Septimius Severus (197), and shortly afterwards the enfeebled Arsacids were displaced by the Sasanians, in 224.[151]

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

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

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[151] Curtis 2007: 7–14 and Dabrowa 2012: 168–78 offer concise summaries; see Millar 1993a: 1–141.
[152] Dabrowa 2012: 164–7.   [153] Dabrowa 2012: 167.   [154] Shayegan 2011: 206.
[155] *Astronomical Diaries*, vol. 3, no. 124 (Shayegan 2011: 206).
[156] *Astronomical Diaries*, vol. 3, nos 123 and 124 discussed in Shayegan 2011: 206.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[160] Herrmann and Howell 1980–83; Canepa 2013.

[161] Overlaet 2009; Robin 2012b: 295.

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

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

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

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

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[163] NPi §91 (trans. Humbach and Skjærvø, vol. 3/1: 71).
[164] See Fisher and Wood forthcoming for a detailed discussion.

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

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Touraj Daryaee, Greg Fisher, and Matt Gibbs

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Arabs and Arabias from Herodotus to Cassius Dio

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

Herodotus and Xenophon

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

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[165] See Bowersock 2004; Schiettecatte and Robin 2009; Robin 2012b: 295.
[166] The literature on Herodotus is extensive. For a detailed examination of the author see
Munson 2013; essays in Marincola and Dewald 2007; Marincola 2011; Hartog 1988; Luce 1997:
11–42.
[167] Retsö 2003: 235–50.
[168] E.g. Hdt. 2.8, 3.5, and 4.39; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 5–8.
[169] Hdt. 2.12.2 and 3.5.

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

In one part of his work (Hdt. 3.4–9) Herodotus tells how the Achaemenid king, Cambyses II (d. 522 BC), made an alliance with the king of these 'Arabs', perhaps the king of Liḥyān, who assisted him in conquering Egypt in 525.[171] This narrative provides an opportunity to describe the particular kinds of pledges in use among the Arabs, as well as to tell the reader about the deities whom they worship, such as Orotalt (Dionysus) and Alilat (Aphrodite Ourania).[172] As a consequence of the alliance between Cambyses and the Arabs, the latter won a favourable, autonomous status within the Persian empire, to the effect that under Darius they paid no tribute. Instead, they gave a voluntary gift of a thousand talents of frankincense every year.[173] The autonomy of the Arabs might thus be connected to their strategic role as 'guardians of the Egyptians'.[174] In the course of Xerxes' war against Greece, Arabs contributed infantry and camel-mounted troops.[175] The frankincense given by Arabs to the Persian king was in fact a product of the caravan trade with the areas on both sides of the Red Sea down to the Indian Ocean (South Arabia, Eritrea, Somaliland). This area, too, in a wider sense, is also called 'Arabia' by Herodotus: it is the 'most southern among the inhabited regions', about which the historian can only provide wonderful stories, rich in folktale-like details about perfumes, winged snakes, and the bird called the *phoenix*.[176]

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

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

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

[172] On the identification of this god, possibly Aʾarrā and al-Ilahāt, see Asheri et al. 2007: 407–8.

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

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

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

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

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

Aldo Corcella

Arrian and Diodorus

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

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

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  [180] Donner 1986.   [181] Retsö 1990; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 15.
  [182] Retsö 2003: 252.   [183] Xen. *An.* 7.8, 25–6.
  [184] Retsö 2003: 256–7; see too Klein 2013: 601–2.
  [185] Arrian, *Anab.* 7.20.1–8; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 22.
  [186] Retsö 2003: 268–9, and more generally on Alexander 263–81.
  [187] Cf. Arrian, *Ind.* 43, noting that Alexander's admiral Nearchus had noted a large cape or promontory—probably (according to Retsö 2003: 267) Rās Musandam. Arrian further says in

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

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

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

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

[188] Theophr. *Hist. Pl.* 9.4.4.   [189] See Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 11–14; Salles 1988.

[190] See Green 1990; Shipley 1990.

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

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

[193] Diod. Sic. 19.94.5, 8.

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

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

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

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

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[195] See Macdonald 2009b: 3.   [196] Diod. Sic. 19.94.9.
[197] Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 23.
[198] See Scharrer 2004, Briant 1982, and Shaw 1982; also Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 23–5, and Macdonald 2009b: 18–20, and *passim*, for the fallacy of equating 'Arab' with 'nomad'. Many of the attributes given to 'Arabs as nomads' by Classical writers later became favourite topoi of Christian writers (cf. Ch. 6), where they represent indications of barbarity which might be 'corrected' by conversion.
[199] Diod. Sic. 19.94.1, 95.1, 96.1.
[200] Retsö 2003: 285–9; see Hoyland 2001: 70–1; Bowersock 1983: 12–18.
[201] Diod. Sic. 19.97–8; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 30.
[202] Macdonald 2009b: 14–16, responding to Honigman 2002.
[203] Retsö 2003: 300–7.

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

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

Augustus, Strabo, and Arabia

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

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

[204] Polyb. 13.9.4–5; Hoyland 2001: 25. On Gerrha, see Robin and Prioletta 2013.
[205] Sartre 2005: 1–87; Butcher 2003: 19–78; Millar 1993a: 27–42.
[206] Plut. *Luc.* 25.5–6, 26.4; Schmitt 2005: 273.
[207] Plut. *Crass.* 21.1; see Retsö 2003: 394; Segal 1984: 95.
[208] Cf. Pliny, *HN* 6.32.160–2; Cass. Dio 53.29.3–8; Augustus, *Res Gestae* 26.5; Strab. *Geog.* 16.4.22–4.
[209] Augustus, *Res Gestae* 26.5.
[210] Strab. 16.4; see Retsö 2003: 263–328; Dueck et al. 2005; Dueck 2000. Hornblower and Spawforth 1998: 266–7; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 11, 18–19.

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

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

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

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[211] See Hoyland 2001: 2–5, 64.   [212] Strabo 16.4.25; Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 22–3.
[213] Strabo 16.4.24; Joseph. *AJ* 16.351–3.
[214] Sidebotham 1986: 120–30; Hoyland 2001: 45; Marek 1993.

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

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

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

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[215] Strabo 16.1.28.   [216] Cass. Dio 68.21.1ff.; see Isaac 2000: 238.
[217] Cass. Dio 68.22.2.
[218] The classic study of phylarchs remains Grouchevoy 1995. See also Fisher 2011a; Liebeschuetz 2007; Isaac 2000; Shahîd 1989b and 1984b; Mayerson 1991; Sartre 1993 and 1982; Paret 1958.
[219] E.g. Strabo 16.126–7; see also Macdonald 2001 [2009a, V]: 19–21.

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

The Trade in Luxury Goods

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

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

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

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[220] De Maigret 1997; Macdonald 1997.   [221] Hoyland 2001: 64; MacAdam 1989.
[222] Strabo 16.2.4.   [223] Young 2001: 95–6, 99–100.
[224] On Pliny see Healy 1999; Isager 1991; Hornblower and Spawforth 1998: 545–6.
[225] Pliny, *HN* 12.32; Hoyland 2001: 41–2.

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

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

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The New Testament

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

> Arabia and the Arabs in the New Testament
> [**1.23**] Acts 2.8–11 (NIV).
> Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians,
> Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus
> and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Lybia near Cyrene;
> visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we
> hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues.

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

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[226] Joseph. *BJ* 2.97; *AJ* 17.320.
[227] Lewin 1994: 112–13; Fiema 2003a: 38–43; Robin 2001a; see Hoyland 2001: 41.

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

> [**1.24**] Galatians 1.15–17 (NIV)
> But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

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

Donata Violante

Trajan and Septimius Severus

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

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228 Retsö 2003: 416–18.   229 See Gal. 1.13–4.
230 1 Kings 19.8.   231 Wright 1996.
232 Cass. Dio 68.22. On Dio see Millar 1964; Andersen and Hohl 1975.

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

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

Severus' rationale for the Hatran campaign, which is also reported in the *Historia Augusta*, was that Barsemius, the king of Ḥaṭrā, had given aid to Pescennius Niger; this was his punishment.[236] This *casus belli* is also reported by Herodian, in his Greek history of the period between AD 180 and 238.[237] Herodian describes just one siege by Severus, but Cassius Dio states that the emperor tried to capture it twice. The first attempt can be dated to the spring of the year 198, while the second was conducted some months later, probably during the autumn.[238] Ḥaṭrā was not, it seems, either large or rich, but it possessed formidable defences and its desert location presented logistical challenges for the army of Severus, as it had also done for that of Trajan. The ingenuity of the Hatrans was reported by Herodian, who said that they 'made clay containers filled with little flying insects that had poisonous stings, which were then fired off. When these missiles fell on to Severus' army, the insects crawled into the eyes and exposed parts of the skin of the soldiers without being noticed and stung them, causing severe injuries.'[239] Cassius Dio is explicit about the threat posed by the Arabian cavalry, reflecting the

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[233] Cass. Dio 68.31.   [234] Sartre 2005: 132–50; Millar 1993a: 90–140.

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

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

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

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

[239] Hdn 3.9.1–8 (trans. Whittaker).

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

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THE FOURTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES: ALLIES AND ENEMIES

The assassination of Severus Alexander in AD 235 accelerated a deteriorating security situation in the Roman empire. In the east, the emergence of the Sasanian dynasty a decade earlier, in 224, had heralded a new phase in Rome's wars against Persia. The economic, military, spiritual, and political challenges of the third century, and especially between 235 and 284, witnessed some of the most stunning setbacks for Roman power in the region, including the defeat and capture of Valerian near Edessa in 259/60, and the revolt of Palmyra. Towards the end of this turbulent period, tentative control was re-established by Aurelian (r. 270–5) and then, more firmly, by Diocletian (r. AD 284–305) and the Tetrarchy which he established.[241] Diocletian initiated a significant upgrade of Roman defences with the creation of the so-called *strata Diocletiana*, a fortified zone which stretched through much of the Syrian frontier.[242] While the Romans conducted campaigns against Arabs towards the end of the third century,[243] the main threat continued to come from the Persians, and in this contest the Romans regained some of the pride lost at Edessa. The Peace of Nisibis (AD 298), an extremely favourable settlement won on the back of the victorious campaigns of Diocletian's imperial colleague, Galerius, brought an equilibrium of sorts on the eastern frontier, lasting until Julian's disastrous Persian campaign in 363.[244]

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

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

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

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

[243] *Pan. Lat.* 3/2, 5.4–5.

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

[245] Schmitt 2005: 277; Edwell 2008.

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

The Fourth Century: From Constantine to Valens

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

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

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

[247] Isaac 2000: 240.

[248] Based on an identification with the Imruʾ al-Qays in al-Ṭabarī, 1.834.

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

Ammianus and the Saracens

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

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

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

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

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

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

[254] On this link, see Ch. 6.

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

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

One answer lies in the problems posed by the multiplicity of ways in which the word 'Arab' could be understood. In particular, it has been suggested that the creation of *Provincia Arabia* in 106 offered yet another layer of meaning to the label 'Arabia', and consequently another layer, too, to what the term 'Arab' might represent. Macdonald has suggested that it thus became desirable to make the distinction between inhabitants of the province, who could be called Arabs, and the 'tent-dwelling' Arabs of the desert, and that a word based on the North Arabian root s^2-r-q, which could mean 'to migrate to the inner desert', might have given rise to the use of 'Saracen' as a generic label for nomads.[257] Hoyland has further argued that the increased visibility to the Romans of Arabs who lived in the desert, a result of the dismantling of client states, the establishment of direct administration over the eastern provinces, combined with the greater role of Arabs as militia, might also have contributed to a desire to differentiate between different 'types' of Arabs.[258] These two explanations constitute the most plausible of the many available, but it is not known exactly why ancient authors started to call 'tent-dwellers' Saracens and Ṭayyāyē.

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

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

[257] Macdonald 2009c: 3–5.   [258] Hoyland 2001: 235.
[259] Schmitt 2005: 278, discussing Julian, *Or.* 1.15; on *foederati* see Heather 2001; Heather 1997.
[260] Amm. Marc. 23.3.8.   [261] Amm. Marc. 25.6.9–10.
[262] On subsidies, see e.g. Blockley 1985; Isaac 2000: 231, 245, 248, 260.
[263] Lib. *Or.* 24.6; Schmitt 2005: 278.   [264] Amm. Marc. 24.2.4.

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

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

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

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

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[265] Amm. Marc. 24.2.4 (trans. Rolfe).   [266] Isaac 2011; Matthews 1989: 352–3.

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

Queen Mavia

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

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

> The revolt of Queen Mavia
> [**1.26**] Sozomen, *HE* 6.38 (trans. Hartranft, pp. 374–5).
> About this period the king of the Saracens died, and the peace which had previously existed between that nation and the Romans was dissolved. Mania [Mavia], the widow of the late monarch, after attaining to the government of her race, led her troops into Phoenicia and Palestine, as far as the regions of Egypt lying to the left of those who sail towards the source of the Nile, and which are generally denominated Arabia. This war was by no means a contemptible one, although conducted by a woman. The Romans, it is said, considered it so arduous and so perilous, that the general of the Phoenician troops applied for assistance to the general of the entire cavalry and infantry of the East. This latter ridiculed the summons, and undertook to give battle alone. He accordingly attacked Mania,

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[267] Amm. Marc. 31.2.3–10. [268] Matthews 1989: 353 and Shaw 1982.
[269] Amm. Marc. 25.3.6.
[270] Amm. Marc. 25.7.9; Matthews 1989: 185–7; Potter 2004: 519.

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

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

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[271] See also Millar 2005: 309–12.

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

Mavia's uprising began in the spring of 377 and probably lasted until the beginning of 378.[273] According to Sozomen, the senior officer present, the *magister militum per Orientem*, was taken off-guard by the ferocity and skill of his enemy—who came close to defeating the Romans in a pitched battle—and needed to be rescued by his subordinates. The Arabs continued to plunder many of the eastern provinces, and consequently the Roman authorities were forced to ask for peace. After the war Mavia's daughter was given as wife to the *magister militum praesentalis*, Victor, then an old man, and probably very close to Valens, underscoring the importance that the emperor attached to ending the rebellion.[274] The word used by Sozomen (as well as Socrates) to describe the position of Mavia is *hypospondos* (pl. *hypospondoi*). The appearance of this technical term appears to confirm that the 'system' set in train by Constantius II for handling the empire's Arab allies was being continued.[275]

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

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

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

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

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

[275] Soc. Schol. *HE* 4.36; Soz. *HE* 6.38, 7.1.   [276] Theod. *HE* 4.23.

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

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

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

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

Arab Allies, Arab Enemies

A number of the sources discussed here underscore the growing use of Arabs as auxiliaries in the service of the state. A further perspective on the recruitment of Arabs is confirmed by the *Notitia Dignitatum*, a bureaucratic list of ranks and offices created in the 420s that includes valuable information on the disposition of Roman military units. The aim of the document seems to have been to present a full list of offices for a unified empire, but the eastern and western portions are dated differently, and the document as a whole is uneven and incomplete. The western section dates to the 420s, though inconsistencies in the material mean that it cannot be fixed to one date in time; on the other hand, the eastern section offers a more coherent whole, and probably dates to around 395.[285] The *Notitia* lists a number of units which appear to have been

[279] Fisher forthcoming; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 14–15.
[280] Soc. Schol. *HE* 5.1 (trans. Zenos); see too *Nd. Or.* 28.17, 32.27–8, describing Arab units which might be connected with the events here.
[281] Zos. *HE* 4.22.1–3. See Lenski 2002: 35, n. 94; Lewin forthcoming; Woods 2002.
[282] Amm. Marc. 31.16.5–6 (trans. Rolfe).
[283] Shahîd 1984b: 257; Woods 2002; Lenski 2002: 200–10.
[284] Isaac 2006: 207–11; Whately 2014: 222; cf. Hdt. 1.216, Diod. Sic. 32.3.
[285] See Whately 2013: 114–18, for overview and bibliography on the *Notitia*. For the date of the eastern section, see Zuckerman 1998.

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

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

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

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[286] *Nd. Or.* 32.27–8, 28.17, and 34.22. See Shahîd 1984a: 57–63.
[287] Cf. Fisher 2011a: 76 on the possible origins of this unit.
[288] E.g. *AÉ* 1976: 495; *AÉ* 1959: 188; see Spaul 1994: 176–8.

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

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

The Fifth Century: Theodosius, Bahram V, and Leo

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

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

[289] Walker 2006: 48–9.
[290] For Persia's frontier defences, see most recently Sauer et al. 2013.
[291] The literature on this topic is vast. See Parker 1987; Parker 1986; Isaac 2000; Fisher 2004; Kennedy 2004; Lewin 2007; Lewin 2015; Mayerson 1989; Mayerson 1986; Macdonald 2009e; Banning 1987; Banning 1986; Graf 1978; Luttwak 2009; Luttwak 1976.
[292] See Lenski 2011 and Chs 5 and 6.
[293] E.g. *AÉ* 1948 (AD 334); Iliffe 1942; Isaac 2000: 175–6; Zuckerman 1994; Parker and Betlyon 2006: 559.

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

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

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

Amorkesos and Leo
[**1.27**] Malchus, fragment 1 (trans. Blockley, pp. 405–7).
In the seventeenth year of the reign of Leo the Butcher, when everything everywhere seemed to be in confusion, a priest of the Christians amongst the Tent Arabs, whom they call Saracens, arrived for the following reason. When in the time of Theodosius the greatest war had broken out against the Persians, they

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[294] *Nov. Theod.* 24.2 (September 443); see Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 45; for a detailed study of the Theodosian Code, see Matthews 2000.
[295] Blockley 1992: 56–7; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 36–44; Greatrex 1993; Holum 1977, for the religious context of the war.
[296] Soc. Schol. *HE* 7.18 (trans. Zenos).   [297] Millar 2005: 301–2.

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

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

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

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[298] Treadgold 2010: 79–80, on Photius.

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

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

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

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

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

[301] Blockley 1992: 78.   [302] See Fisher 2004.

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

mention of Ṣāliḥ by Graeco-Roman authors, unless one accepts the (doubtful) association of the fifth-century convert Zokomos with this tribe (see **6.2**), this must remain a hypothesis.[304] Further compounding attempts at identifying the groups of people behind the series of events reported by Malchus, the tribe 'Nomalius' is not well known, and the name as it appears here has been emended from 'Nokalius', found in the first printed version of Malchus' work, from 1603.[305]

Arab raiding continued throughout the Near East in the fifth century. Priscus, the late fifth-century Roman historian, encountered a Roman general settling a conflict with Saracen ambassadors near Damascus, following an incursion into Roman territory.[306] During the same period, Arab raids prompted a dramatic literary outpouring in Syriac by the poet Isaac of Antioch, who lamented that 'the son of Hagar, like a famished wolf, raids in our neighbourhood'.[307] It seems that drought and famine, together with the opportunity provided by tensions between Rome and Persia, combined to unleash Arab raiders, whom Isaac characterized as vague and nebulous agents of destruction.[308] At another point, the poet is more blatant about the savagery of the Arabs, 'children of Hagar, those furious wild asses', in the well-known account of the sack of Beth Ḥur, near Nisibis, *c.*474.[309] Isaac claims that the Arabs sacrificed to ʿUzzai (Venus/Aphrodite; see Ch. 6).[310] Notably, Evagrius, possibly discussing the same event, and using similar generic language, noted an assault carried out by 'barbarian Scenitae, laying waste everything'.[311]

Greg Fisher, Ariel Lewin, and Conor Whately

CONCLUSION

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

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[304] See for discussion Elton 2014: 235.
[305] Elton 2014: 243. See too on Amorkesos Isaac 2000: 247; Mayerson 1992; Fisher 2011a: 40; Fisher forthcoming; Shahîd 1989b: 61, who connects Amorkesos with Ghassān.
[306] Priscus, fr. 26; see Elton 2014: 237.
[307] Isaac of Antioch, 14.105/p.250 (trans. after Bickell).   [308] Segal 1984: 106–7.
[309] Isaac of Antioch, 11.37–95/pp. 208–10, excerpts (trans. after Bickell).
[310] See Segal 1984: 105–6; Greatrex 1998a; Klugkist 1987; Shahîd 1989b: 38–9.
[311] Evag. *HE* 3.2 (trans. Whitby); see too Theoph. *Chron.* AM 5996/p. 120.

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

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

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

Greg Fisher and Michael C. A. Macdonald

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

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Before Ḥimyar

Epigraphic Evidence for the Kingdoms
of South Arabia

Christian Julien Robin

INTRODUCTION

One of the salient features of Yemen (and, to a lesser extent, Arabia) is the substantial quantity of epigraphic documents—texts written on non-perishable materials, such as stone and metal, or on durable media, such as wood—yielded by these regions.[1] As the numerous inscriptions discussed throughout this volume demonstrate, epigraphic texts are of crucial importance to historians. But they become especially valuable for areas such as South Arabia where external sources, such as Assyrian inscriptions, the Bible, Graeco-Roman literature, and ecclesiastical historians writing in Greek, Latin, or Syriac, provide only limited information on regional history. The local scholarly tradition for South Arabia is also of limited utility, for while its echoes can be detected among Arab writers of the Islamic period, it enlightens us only on the two or three generations preceding the Prophet Muḥammad.[2]

Comparing epigraphic and literary texts also reveals substantial differences in purpose and outlook. Inscriptions were generally written by famous characters who wished to either recall or consolidate their social standing; they are stereotyped in terms of their form and content; they are documents which were tightly controlled by the authorities. They represent 'originals' which, with a very few exceptions, were not altered from their time of composition. Literary sources, most often transmitted by a long chain of scholars and scribes, are more likely to undergo reformulations, additions, manipulations,

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[1] Ch. 2 is translated by Martin Makinson.
[2] Robin and al-Garoo 2014; Robin 2005b, 2013a.

or recompositions. Furthermore, they were the products of authors who were not necessarily players and characters in the events which they described, and they do not always mirror the ideas of the powerful people of the day.[3] Clearly, history written from literary sources cannot be completely objective; but objectivity is even more of a problem when history is based on epigraphic sources which can be defined, even in a superficial way, as propaganda of the ruling classes.

If one excludes some foreign, more ancient, sources—an Egyptian cartouche from north-western Arabia, and some Akkadian ancient records on the islands of the Arab-Persian Gulf—the oldest epigraphic documents found in Arabia date back to the early first millennium BC. These early texts, sometimes clumsily incised (or painted) letters on pottery, could date back to the tenth century BC. The oldest local inscriptions, which originate from Yemen, were carefully carved texts and the work of professionals, and would date from the mid-eighth century BC. Inscriptions discovered in north-western Arabia, which might fit a similar chronology, have not been securely dated.[4]

Even this small number of examples reflects the range of inscriptions found in South Arabia:

Monumental inscriptions: Some texts were intended to be highly visible, and were carved with great care by professionals. Their content follows very strict rules. The style is always impersonal, as if one was dealing with a statement or report written by a third party. Verbs and pronouns are always in the third person. The content follows specific models and always reflects the authorities' opinion. These inscriptions could be part of a temple, a palace, or comprise a wall's ornamentation. Their authors are identified by name; very few of them were enacted by an assembly or institution, without the mention of an individual (e.g. **2.20**).

Most monumental inscriptions commemorate the performance of religious rites or programmes of public works, and their function is to highlight the position of their authors with respect to gods or men.[5] Monumental inscriptions could also serve as property deeds, while others could be chronicles or biographical testimonies (**2.31**).

'Prescriptive' monumental texts are quite scarce and usually relate to either water management (**2.19**) or to religious matters (**2.18**). They sometimes betray concerns also found in later Islamic legislation. A decree from before

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[3] In antiquity it is very rare that one of history's actors becomes a chronicler of the events that he has lived through and experienced, as for instance Xenophon or Julius Caesar. It is just as infrequent to find an author who makes allusions to himself in his works; autobiography was an unknown genre. In the Near East, the first autobiography ever written dates from the 13th century—the work of the Syrian Usāma b. Munqidh.

[4] Sass 2005.

[5] E.g. 'In the eyes of gods', because some inscriptions are not easily readable by men: this is the case of six of them located at the rock sanctuary of al-Miʿsāl, carved on a rock face looming some 20 to 30 m in height. See **2.7** and Figs 2.3 and 2.4.

the Christian era, promulgated by the commune of Maṭirat some 40 km to the
north-east of Ṣanʿāʾ, thus prohibits the murder of daughters (**2.20**), just like
the Qurʾān, which condemns the *waʾd*, the killing of a female newborn baby.[6]
(The term 'commune', originated by A. F. L. Beeston and used here and in
Ch. 3, refers to the sedentary tribes of South Arabia.[7])

Archive documents: In the last 40 years thousands of archive documents,
written on wooden sticks with a stylus, have emerged on the black market.
Their contents suggest that they all originated from Nashshān (present-day al-
Sawdāʾ). The form of writing is cursive, and each text has its own writing style
(i.e. of the hand that wrote it), which makes reading and comprehension a
challenge. These texts were probably the work of professionals; it seems that
private individuals would have preferred to write on perishable media, wax
tablets and perhaps papyri, all of which have vanished.

Archive documents are typically pragmatic in content, and focus on a small
range of concerns. They include contracts (**2.21**), samples of correspondence
(**2.22–3**), lists of people (**2.28**), and occasionally scribal exercises. Their focus
on daily concerns, and their use of the first-and second-personal pronouns (in
correspondence) distinguishes them in content from monumental inscrip-
tions. Notably, none of these documents is a poem, a hymn, a collection of
sayings, a mythological narration, a chronicle, a manual, or indeed any other
sort of literary or technical composition.[8]

Graffiti: Graffiti are small texts carved by non-professionals. They are found
in large numbers on rocks near sanctuaries in the countryside and steppe, in
areas where shepherds would graze their flocks, and finally, along certain
thoroughfares, particularly at the edge of the most desolate deserts (cf. the
examples discussed in Ch. 1). In general, they are very brief documents,
yielding the identity of the pilgrim, the shepherd, or the traveller. All of
these people have two names: the author's personal name and that of his
father, with for the upper segments of society, that also of the lineage. Details
of activity or origin are rare; pilgrims normally add a brief religious formula.

The main interest of graffiti is in the light they shed on social classes and
populations who have generally not left any other inscriptions. They demon-
strate, first of all, that the practice of writing was widespread. They also reveal a
significant variance in the local forms of writing. Some of these inscriptions,
for example, were written in a perfectly 'regular' Sabaean script, while others
were composed in scripts that showed distinctive regional features whose
decipherment presents certain challenges. In South Arabia these variations
in script tend to be found in the deserts at the periphery of the Yemeni
mountain ranges.

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[6] Waʾd al-Banāt in *EI²* (F. Leemhuis).   [7] Beeston 1976: 2–3.
[8] Ryckmans (J.) et al. 1994; Stein 2010.

The south-west of the Arabian Peninsula has yielded thousands of texts belonging to each of these categories, and this area also features a dense collection of spectacular archaeological remains.[9] There are, for example, numerous cities,[10] the largest of which are the capitals of the kingdoms of Sabaʾ (Maryab—later Marib, and the Maʾrib of today, a site totalling a surface of 115 ha), and those of the kingdom of Ḥaḍramawt (Shabwat, modern Shabwa, *c.*15 ha). These urban centres, containing temples and aristocratic dwellings, were protected by stone enclosures, which could reach 14 m in height. The most important temple was often located outside the wall, protected only by its sanctity (**2.9**). In the irrigated regions of the piedmont and in the cultivated lands of mountainous and highland areas, the numerous hydraulic and agricultural installations—dams, canals, sluice gates, wells, or terraced fields—testify to a high degree of technical skill associated with these settlements (**2.19** and **2.27**).[11]

Inscriptions produced by the peoples of South Arabia number in the thousands between the eighth century BC and the end of the third century AD. They subsequently become progressively more scarce—for the period AD 350–600, they number only around 150—and disappear entirely a little after the mid-sixth century AD.[12] They are all written in the Sabaean script, but in four different languages. One of them, Sabaʾic, is quite close to Arabic. The others—Maʿinic (Minaic), Qatabānic, and Ḥaḍramawtic—differ in varying degrees (see **2.1–3, 2.9, 2.14, 2.18, 2.29–30**). Arabic, or rather 'Old Arabic' (see **2.4, 2.35**, Ch. 7), is found only at the periphery of the South Arabian kingdoms.

The inscriptions are of fundamental importance in revealing the establishment and development of the South Arabian kingdoms, and as such it is crucial to establish a precise chronology for them. From the first century AD the chronological framework is based on specific information provided by some inscriptions, referring to three eras: that of Ḥimyar, and that of two southern communes. The starting point of these eras has been established with some precision (see **2.7–8**). More than 50 dated inscriptions provide further chronological 'benchmarks' for the period between the second and sixth centuries AD. The year was probably lunar-solar, with 12 lunar months and the occasional addition of an extra month, seven times for each period of 19 years. The order of months is known from later Arabic texts; the new year probably began with the vernal equinox.[13]

Chronological uncertainty increases, however, the further one goes back before the first and second centuries AD. Here, we must rely on palaeography, which provides only a relative chronology, that is, indicating that a document is before or after another one. Occasionally, absolute chronological benchmarks are found—for example, two Sabaean rulers mentioned in Assyrian

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[9] Robin and Vogt 1997.   [10] Breton 1994; Fontaine and Arbach 2006.
[11] See Schiettecatte 2011; Mouton and Schiettecatte 2014.   [12] Robin 2009b.
[13] Nebes 2004b; Robin 1998 and 2012c.

texts of the eighth and seventh centuries BC (**2.5, 2.31**); a war between Chaldea and Ionia during the first half of the sixth century BC (**2.24**); an Egyptian revolt against the Achaemenid Persians in the fourth century BC, quoted in a Minaean text (**2.1**); and the Macedonian king Seleucus, whose regal years are used to date two inscriptions written in Yemen by people coming from the Gulf *c*.300 BC (**2.6**). Curiously, no text from Yemen mentions the Roman expedition of 25–24 BC, which failed to take Maryab, the capital of the kingdom of Sabaʾ.[14] In principle there was no reason to silence memories of this event, which was more of a success for Sabaʾ than for Rome, but the profound political disruptions triggered by the Roman expedition are instead, perhaps, to blame.

THE POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF SOUTH ARABIA

The Kingdom of Saba and its Neighbours

Until the end of the third century AD, when the kingdom of Ḥimyar, which had just expelled an Ethiopian invasion, annexed the kingdom of Sabaʾ and conquered Ḥaḍramawt (Ch. 3), South Arabia was divided between numerous kingdoms (Fig. 2.1). This partition was also reflected in the linguistic diversity of the region, with five major languages attested—Sabaʾic, Maʿinic, Qatabānic, Ḥaḍramawtic, and Old Arabic. However, an intriguing cultural unity spanned these divisions, represented in the widespread use of a single script, Sabaean, and an iconographic repertoire. Between the eighth century BC and the third century AD the kingdom of Sabaʾ held a position of cultural leadership throughout the region, and became a model in a number of fields. The name Sabaʾ appears in around 750 BC in the titles of the first known rulers of the kingdom. Sabaʾ's capital was Maryab (modern day Maʾrib), a city on the edge of the inland desert, at the outlet of a valley draining the waters of a large mountain basin. Sabaʾ's culture was represented through a language, Sabaʾic, a pantheon, a calendar, and a dating system, all specific to this kingdom.

Two rulers, Yathaʿʾamar and Karibʾīl, known in Assyrian sources under the names ʿItaʾamra the Sabaean' (*c*.716 BC) and 'Karibilu king of Saba' (between 689 and 681) extended their hegemony over a large section of South Arabia (**2.5, 2.31**). Subsequently, the Sabaean 'cultural model' spread over a wide area including the entirety of Yemen, Ethiopia, the areas neighbouring Yemen, such as Najrān, western Arabia between Najrān and the Levant, and as far as the shores of the Arab-Persian Gulf, as indicated by evidence for the use of

[14] Ch. 1; Robin 1996b, cols 1131–3.
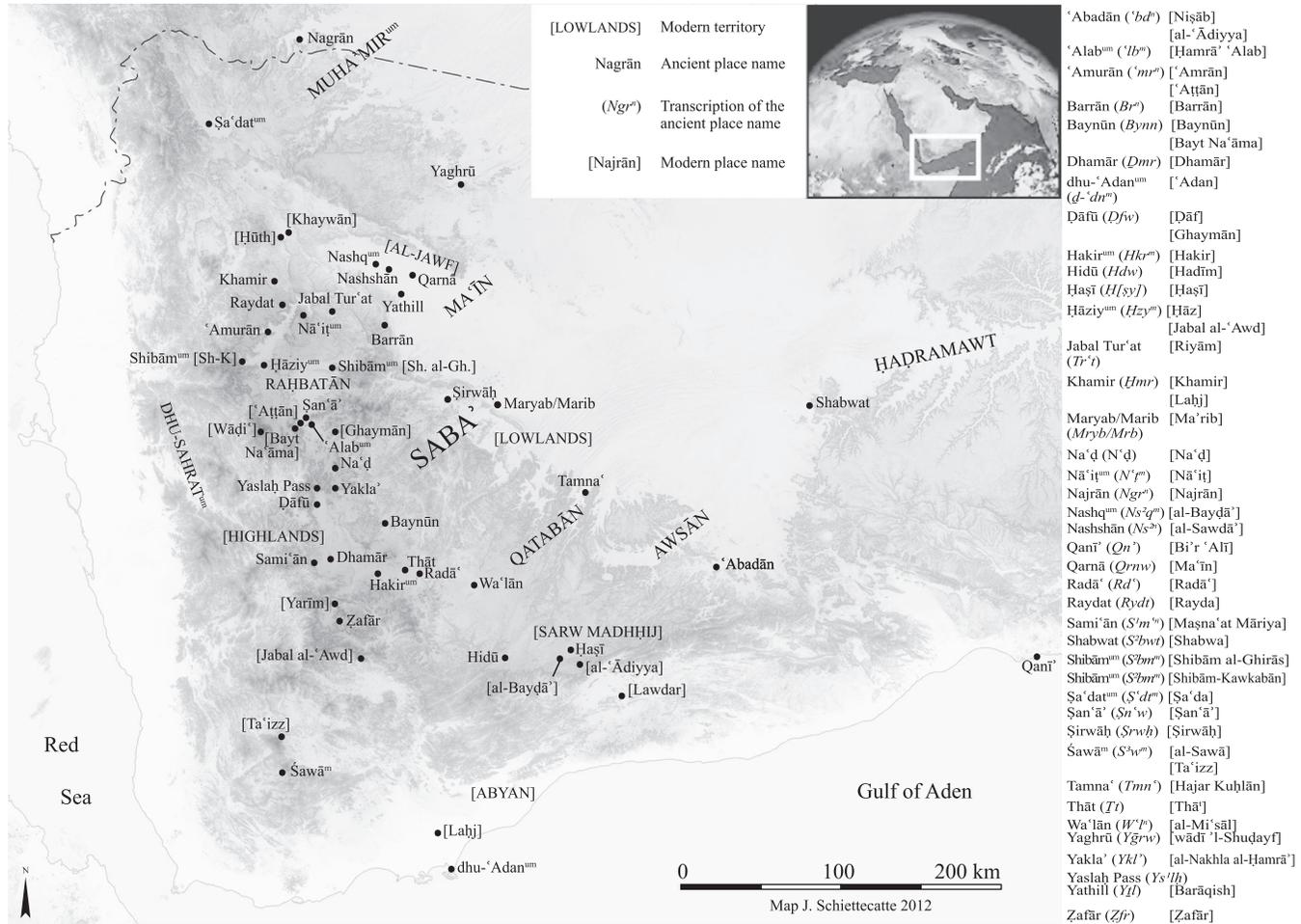
Fig. 2.1. Yemen before the emergence of the kingdom of Ḥimyar. Map drawn by Jérémie Schiettecatte.

the Sabaean alphabet. Sabaean culture was expressed in the lexicon and phrase-ology of inscriptions and in the use of writing for decorative purposes. It is also reflected in an iconographic repertoire which applies a range of geometric figures, such as denticles, striations, and hollowed-out rectangles; emblematic animals, such as ibexes, oryxes, bulls, bucrania, ostriches; symbols, such as the hand, the crescent, the circle; and stylized representations, such as 'eye stelae'.

Two other important kingdoms appeared at the same time as Saba': Qata-bān to the south and Ḥaḍramawt to the east. They used the Sabaean script, but both possessed their own specific language. As in the case of Saba', they drew their resources from agriculture and animal husbandry, but also from the export and transport of aromatic goods, most notably frankincense and myrrh, over which the region had a quasi-complete monopoly (**2.29**; cf. Ch. 1).

The organization of caravan trade, at first under the control of Saba', underwent changes in the course of the sixth century BC. Saba' slowly lost ground to one of its tributaries, the small kingdom of Maʿīn (**2.24**). The reasons for this change are unknown, but are perhaps to be related to the widespread disruptions caused by the conquest of the Ḥijāz oases by Naboni-dus (see Ch. 1). Maʿīn's capital was Qarnā, in the Jawf, about 100 km to the north-west of Maryab. The Minaeans used a language unique to their people, as well as a pantheon and specific institutions, but for the remainder of their cultural expression—notably, writing, architecture, and their decorative repertoire—they cannot be distinguished from the Sabaeans.

In contrast with Saba', as well as with Qatabān and Ḥaḍramawt, the kingdom of Maʿīn possessed little political or military power, and Minaean inscriptions never celebrate martial exploits. The king, who was assisted by various councils (**2.18**), seems to have had only limited powers. He did not strike coins, for example, and he was not responsible for the construction of the fortified enclosures of the main cities. This remained the prerogative of the great families (**2.1**). It would even appear that he was not provided with a real palace, a symbol of power and legitimacy, something which stands in contrast to the rulers of other South Arabian kingdoms. Maʿīn strongly resembled a 'merchant republic', controlling various alliance networks, as Mecca would on the eve of Islam.

The production of aromatic and perfumed substances, and their transport by caravans between Yemen and the states of the Near East, represented a lucrative source of revenue for the South Arabian kingdoms. Neverthless, Ptolemaic Egypt emerged as a key competitor through developing maritime trade in the Red Sea, and later, following the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra (30 BC), the Romans built a commercial relationship with India, diverting the flow of Arabian trade. The frequency of trade via the caravan trails across Arabia declined (see Ch. 1).[15]

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[15] See Robin 2014c.

Among the more modest powers which played a part in the history of South Arabia, in the contact zones between Yemen and *Arabia Deserta*, mention should be made of Nagrān (present-day Najrān), the capital of a small kingdom prior to its annexation by Sabaʾ in the second century AD. Its renown was due above all to the massacre of pro-Roman Christians by a Jewish king of Ḥimyar in November 523 (see **3.16–17**; **6.45–8**; **8.7–9**).

Another city, Qaryat (present-day Qaryat al-Faʾw), some 300 km north-east of Najrān, was the capital of a small kingdom which was initially seized by the tribe of Madhḥig (Arabic Madhḥij) (**2.35**) and subsequently by Kiddat (Arabic Kinda) during the first centuries of the Christian era (cf. Ch. 3). The remains of this great city have led to a reappraisal of an idea, common in older studies of Arabia, that tribes were only 'nomadic' (cf. Ch. 1, section 'Introduction'). Excavators from King Saʿūd University uncovered a large building designed for trade and exchange, as well as many temples, a vast domestic quarter, and a necropolis with monumental tombs. The palaces, whose walls were decorated with figurative frescoes, yielded a wealth of small finds revealing both local and foreign production.[16] Inscriptions were discovered at the site, which used the Sabaean script, but were written in local varieties of Maʿīnic and Old Arabic (**2.4, 2.35**).[17]

Religious Belief and Society in South Arabia

The inscriptions from South Arabia list an extensive number of deities and allude to numerous religious rites. The distribution of the names of the gods suggests that each kingdom had a pantheon made up of three to five deities, who were worshipped jointly during collective rituals, and it seems that the pantheon's deities had complementary functions. For example, the deities that constituted Sabaʾ's pantheon are typically presented in this order: ʿAthtar, Hawbas, *Almaqah,[18] dhāt Ḥimyam, and dhāt Baʿdān[um].[19] In all of the known South Arabian pantheons, the major deity is always a god: *Almaqah at Sabaʾ, ʿAmm at Qatabān, Sayīn in Ḥaḍramawt, and ʿAthtar at Maʿīn and Ḥimyar. The main god was worshipped in the central temple, visited by all the kingdom's communes during a great annual pilgrimage (**2.17**). The specifics of the rites carried out during this pilgrimage are not known in detail.

In each kingdom, every commune had its own temple consecrated to a regional characterization of the main god: in the kingdom of Sabaʾ, for example, the common temple was consecrated to *Almaqah *Thahwān,

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[16] al-Ansary 1982; al-Ghabban 2010.
[17] Macdonald 2008b. Old Arabic is written with the Sabaean script in South Arabia, but with the Nabataean script in the north-west of the Peninsula.
[18] A * before a proper name signals an arbitrary vocalization.
[19] For the pantheon of Maʿīn and of Qatabān, see **2.1–2**.

'master of *Awām'; the commune of Ṣirwāḥ, by contrast, venerated *Almaqah under the name *Almaqah, 'master of the ibexes', and that of Tanʿim^um under the name of *Almaqah, 'master of Shawḥat'. These characterizations can be compared to the diverse forms of the Virgin Mary's cult or to that of Jesus observed among Christians: Mary of the Seven Sorrows, Our Lady of Safe Keeping, or the Sacred Heart.

Apart from these deities, the supernatural world included many others which either addressed a particular need or function (health or rainfall, for example) or were specific to a certain commune, a place, a gender, an age group, or an activity. The range of beliefs also encompassed apotropaic beings who protected people from evil or bad luck, the messengers between the upper worlds ('the heavens') and the lower ones ('the earth')—or even deified ancestors.

Society was not egalitarian. At its summit were free men in the oases, and princes or *qayl* in the mountain communes, who paid homage to the king only, himself a *primus inter pares* (e.g. 2.4, 2.7–8, for example). Below the king, the princes, and the free men, lay the nobility, the people, and no doubt several degrees of servitude. A character mentioning a dependent individual would call the latter *ʿabd* (pl. *adam,* fem. *amat*), which did not mean 'slave', but someone of inferior rank. Conversely, each individual would invoke his superior by calling him 'lord' (*maraʾ*, pl. *amrāʾ*). Social rank was reflected in peoples' names; a member of the higher aristocracy had a double name (name and attributive adjective)[20] and would usually mention his father and his lineage. A humbler person would have given his name, that of his father, or simply a name. South Arabian onomastics were related to those of the Near East, with names often including a subject and a verb: Arab onomastics, which notably differ from the South Arabian ones, changed this approach considerably in the sixth century, or shortly afterwards.

The communes themselves (*shaʿb*, pl. *ʾashʿub*) were purely territorial entities. In the mountains they were subdivided into fractions and into territories also called *shaʿb*. In the foothills and piedmont the communes, such as Sabaʾ or Maʿīn, were divided into clans which seem to have defined themselves by reference to a common, and real, ancestor.

THE INSCRIPTIONS

The following section offers examples of inscriptions, organized thematically, which illustrate the diversity of form, content, and outlook discussed above,

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[20] Initially only kings, then kings and priests, held this double name.

and demonstrate the utility and importance of the epigraphic material for understanding the South Arabian kingdoms.

The Alphabet and Editorial Conventions

South Arabian writing uses an alphabet of 29 consonants. It is specific to Arabia, but probably derives from Ugaritic and is related to Phoenician. As a general rule it does not render vowels except if these are long and in final position. These final vowels (at least three in number, *ā*, *ī*, and *ū*) are rendered with two symbols, the *w* and the *y*. In addition to these two *matres lectionis*, the Maʿīnic and Ḥaḍra-mawtic languages attribute a vocal value to the consonant *h*, not only at the end of a word, but also inside it. The 29 consonants are transliterated in the Latin alphabet so that each South Arabian symbol is represented by one (and only one) letter of the Latin alphabet, occasionally with a diacritical mark:

  ʾ ʿ *b d ḏ ḍ f g ḡ h ḫ ḥ k l m n q r s¹ s² s³ ṣ t ṯ ṭ w y z ẓ*

In the translations, the transcription of proper nouns uses a simplified form of notation, which replaces the dash written below or above a letter (e.g. *ḏ* or *ḡ*) by an *h* (so *dh* or *gh*) and gives a phonetic value to sibilants:

  ʾ ʿ *b d dh ḍ f g gh h kh ḥ k l m n q r s sh ś ṣ t th ṭ w y z ẓ*

This system enables specialists to rediscover the original form of a noun, even if it is rewritten by omitting diacritical signs. So as to facilitate the recognition of words, the ending in –*um* (which marks the undetermined state) is transcribed, as for instance in Ḥimyar[um].

Unwritten vowels can be reconstructed in a secure manner when the name is attested in Arabic (in later texts) or in an ancient language (mainly Assyrian, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or Geʿez). It is also possible to base any reconstruction on the noun's structure and on nouns that are similar in place names or onomastics. In this volume, we have chosen to vocalize a large number of names, particularly the most common ones, in order to facilitate reading. When the vocalization is equivocal, the name is preceded by a star. Names whose vowels are unknown, and which are rare, are simply transliterated without vowels.

Our understanding of South Arabian languages rests first of all on 'Semitic comparatism', which consists of identifying terms with the same meaning in other Semitic languages. It is also based on establishing parallels between texts dealing with a same subject, because the analysis of stylistic variations provides the opportunity to grasp better the meaning and sense of words. This understanding is adequate or good when one possesses a range of texts. It is imperfect in the opposite case, or when one is dealing with very technical language and idioms (particularly legal terminology) or archaizing texts with mannerisms (such as poetry). Passages whose understanding is poor are signalled with a question mark (?).

With regard to dates (i.e. before the first century AD) they are, apart from a few exceptions, based on palaeography and are prone to substantial margins of error, for reasons outlined above. These dates are therefore mere indications. The terms 'about' or 'approximately' are given only for the least securely dated texts.

Symbols:

[. . .]: part of a text which has disappeared, due to the alteration of the media on which it was written or to its break; it sometimes occurs that it can be restored or reconstructed when one is dealing with formulae that are repeated.

(. . .): part of a text whose reading is not secure.

{ . . . }: transcription of South Arabian words or comment.

[2]: passage from line 1 to line 2.

Italics: transcription of South Arabian terms.

Roman letters: translation.

< . . . >: addition according to context or correction.

s.n.: under the number.

*: the star in front of a proper noun signalling that vocalization is arbitrary.

#: transcription of the South Arabian symbol which signals the beginning and the end of a figure expressed in numbers.

Unless otherwise specified, the inscriptions are in Sabaʾic language and all translations are those of the author.

Inscriptions in Different Languages

A text in the Maʿīnic language

[**2.1**]   B-Mur 257 = M 247 = *RES* 3022

ʿAmmīsadaq son of Ḥamīʿathat dhu-*Yfʿn* and Saʿd son of *ʾlg* dhu-*Ḍfgⁿ*, *kabīr* {chiefs} of caravan leaders, and the Minaean caravan leaders, men who left on an expedition and engaged in trade with both of them in Egypt {*Mṣr*}, in Assyria-Babylonia {*ʾs²r*} and in the Transeuphratene {*ʿbr Nhrⁿ*, modern-day Syria}, during the magistracy of . . . . . dhu-Radāʿ, taking on the function of *kabīr* for the first time, have consecrated, built, and dedicated to ʿAthtar dhu-*Qabḍᵘᵐ* the curtain wall Tanʿim—a facade decorated with a corniche and cut stones, from the base until the summit, and its stone back wall—the entire curtain wall which is between the towers Ẓirbān and Labuʾān, with contributions and offerings they deposited for ʿAth²tar dhu-*Qabḍᵘᵐ*, they who acquitted themselves and obeyed, ʿAthtar dhu-*Qabḍ* proving satisfied with the contributions and offerings for the construction of this curtain wall, while ʿAthtar dhu-*Qabḍᵘᵐ*, Waddᵘᵐ et *Nakraḥᵘᵐ made them and their goods safe and warned them of the hostilities Sabaʾ and Khawlān had launched against them, against their beasts of burden on the trail between Maʿīn and Ragmat {= Najrān}, and of the war taking place between the North and the South, and as ʿAthtar dhu-*Qabḍᵘᵐ*, Waddᵘᵐ and *Nakraḥᵘᵐ saved them and their goods in the midst of Egypt during the [3] insurgency which took place between the Medes and Egypt and that ʿAthtar dhu-*Qabḍᵘᵐ* ensured

to their persons and their goods peace and integrity until their return in their city of Qarnā. With ʿAthtar Shāri[qān] {the Easterner} with ʿAthtar dhu-*Qabd[um], with Wadd[um], with *Nakraḥ[um], with ʿAthtar dhu-Yuharīq, with dhāt-Nashq[um], with all the deities of Maʿīn and of Yathill, with Abīyadaʿ Yathaʿ king of Maʿīn and with the sons of Maʿdīkarib son of Ilīyafaʿ {predecessor of Abīyadaʿ on the throne}, with their commune Maʿīn and dhu-Yathill and with the chiefs of caravans ʿAmmīṣadaq and Saʿd[um]. ʿAmmīṣadaq,[4]Saʿd and the Minaean caravan leaders have entrusted their dedication and their inscription {'their lines'} to the deities of Maʿīn and of Yathill, to the king of Maʿīn and to Maʿīn against whoever would like to remove, destroy, and da[mage] their inscription from its location. With ʿAmmīsamaʿ dhu-*Balaḥ, *kabīr* {governor} of Yathill.

The inscription, from the mid-fourth century BC, is in the Maʿīnic language, and is carved between the two towers of the enclosure wall of the city of Yathill (modern day Barāqish; see Plate 3), in the Jawf region of Yemen. It commemorates the construction of a curtain wall, and also recalls a successful trade expedition.[21]

A text in the Qatabānic language
[2.2] ʿAqabat Buraʿ 1 (Gajda et al. 2009: 166–8, figs 5–6)
Yadaʿʾab Dhubyān son of Shahr *mukarrib* of Qatabān, of all the offspring of ʿAmm, of Awsān,[2] of *Kaḥd, of *Dahas[um], of Tubanū and of all Yarfaʾ, its people of the North and its people of the South, first-born of *A[3]nbī and of *Ḥawkum, who orders and prohibits(?), treasurer, minister, eponym priest of the year, seer, supreme priest of ʿA[4]mm Rayʿān master of *Ẕrbt, ltk[b-ḏ]bḥt'[m] and with *ʾḏfr'[m] in the temple of Qn[5]y Hwrn, has built, made level, and opened the Burāʿ[um] pass with the levy of a workforce of Maḍḥà[m]. With ʿAthta[6]r, with ʿAmm, with *Anbī, with dhāt *Ṣanat[um] and with dhāt Ẓahrān.

A rock inscription in the Qatabānic language from the third or second century BC, commemorating the construction of a pathway between the Upper Lands of the region of al-Bayḍāʾ (at an elevation of about 2000 m above sea level) and the plain of Lawdar (1000 m below). The name Burāʿ[um], which has survived to this day, refers to a wādī. The author, a *mukarrib* of Qatabān, bears an extremely long and complex list of titles, in which are listed the component parts of his kingdom, then the religious offices he held and duties he carried out (and whose nature is not always well understood). The title of '*mukarrib*', which is borne by certain rulers, is attested only during the first millennium BC. It is first known in Sabaʾ, then in Qatabān, and, exceptionally, is held by a ruler of Awsān and two of Ḥaḍramawt. Its meaning has still not been made clear. A hypothesis would be that it was borne by rulers who claimed a certain pre-eminence over South Arabia as a whole.

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[21] M et *RES s.n.*; illustrations: de Maigret and Robin 1989: 274–6 and 262 (pl. 1), 264 (pl. 2), 266 (pl. 3).

A text in the Ḥaḍramawtic language
[**2.3**]   Ja 931 = *RES* 4859 (Jamme 1963: 44–5, pl. I B)
Khayrī and ʿAzīz[um] the Palmyre[2]nes {*tḏmryᵗyhn*}, dhu-*Mtrn* and *Flqt* [3] the
Chaldeans {*ks²dyyhn*}, *Dhrdh* and *M*[4]*ndh* the Indians {*hndyyhn*} have escorted [5]
their lord Ilīʿazz Yaluṭ k[6]ing of Ḥaḍramawt.

The text, in the Ḥaḍramawtic language, is carved on the face of a large rock
with a tower built on top, at al-ʿUqla, 15 km to the west of Shabwa, and dates
to the beginning of the third century AD. The site features several texts of the
second and third centuries AD, carved by kings and members of their retinue,
particularly foreign merchants, as in this case. This place was apparently where
the kings of Ḥaḍramawt were officially proclaimed.

A text from Qaryat
[**2.4**]   Inscription of ʿIgl
ʿIgl son of Hōfāʿamm has built for his brother Rabībīl son of Hō[2]fāʿamm <this>
tomb, as well as for himself, for his children, for his w[3]ife, for the children
{belonging to her}, for their grandchildren and for their women, nobles of the
lineage of Ghalwān. Then [5] he entrusted it to Kahl, to Allāh, to ʿAththar [6] al-
Shāriq against whoever powerful and weak,[7] buyer and lender/pawner, for
eternity, [8] against any damage, so long as shall yield [9] rain the sky and [as long
as] the ear[10]th {shall be covered in} grass.

This funerary stela, dating to the first century AD, was found during excava-
tions by the King Saʿūd University expedition at the site of Qaryat al-Faʾw
(ancient Qaryat), 300 km to the north-east of Najrān. The language of the text,
in South Arabian writing, is a variety of the Old Arabic language, an opinion
which is not accepted by all scholars.[22]

Chronology

An inscription of the Sabaean *mukarrib* Yathaʿʾamar Watār (Fig. 2.2)
[**2.5**]   AO 31 929 (Caubet and Gajda 2003)
Yathaʿʾamar Watār son of Yakrubmalik mukarrib of Sabaʾ dedicated <this altar>
to Aranyadaʿ the Patron when Aranyadaʿ came back from Kaminahū to Nash-
shān in the days of Yathaʿ[3]ʾamar, when Yathaʿʾamar attributed the territories of
Aranyadaʿ and of Nashshān and avenged [4]Nashshān at the expense of Kaminahū,
because Nashshān had maintained the alliance of *Almaqah and of Aranyadaʿ, of
Yathaʿ[5]amar and of Malikwaqah, of Sabaʾ and of Nashshān, because of {the oath}
of god and patron, of pact and alliance.

The *mukarrib* Yathaʿʾamar Watār was the first Sabaean ruler who extended
his dominion over a large part of Yemen. His rule was commemorated on a
large, recently discovered inscription in the temple of Ṣirwāḥ, which lists his

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[22] al-Ansary 1979; al-Ansary 1982: 146.

Fig. 2.2. Bronze altar (AO 31 929) offered by the Sabaean ruler Yathaʾʿamar Watār at the principal sanctuary of the kingdom of Nashshān (modern al-Sawdāʾ, in the Jawf of Yemen). End of the eighth century BC. Photograph by the Musée du Louvre. © Musée du Louvre.

achievements.[23] It can be dated to the end of the eighth century BC as there are good reasons to identify him with 'Itaʾamra the Sabaean' mentioned in an Assyrian source around 716. The second *mukarrib* who played a founding part in Sabaean hegemony was Karibʾīl Watār (see **2.31**).

> An offering deposited in a temple of South Arabia by merchants coming from the Gulf
>
> [**2.6**]   University Museum of Ṣanʿāʾ, A-20-216
>
> [. . . . . .] and his brother {of her} and their son {of them}, the sons of Amat Sh [. . .]ʾ *son of Ḍbdt*, he of the Ḥddn clan, he of the tribe of ʿqn,[2] have dedicated to Shams and to the Ḡr deities {on the one hand}, to the Goddess {hn ʾlt}, to She who is in the Heavens {ḏt b-S¹mwy}, to Son-of-Malkiya {Brmlky}, to Daughter-of-Malkiyaʾ {Btmlkyʾ} and [3] to the deities [of Grḍ] {on the other hand} and their selves and their lives and their children and their possessions and their goods, [with Sha]ms,[4] the Goddess, She who is in the Heavens, Son-of-Malkiyaʾ, Daughter-of-Malkiyaʾ and the deities of Grḍ, with ʿA[5]thtar and Al<ma>qah, with dhāt Ḥimyam et with dhat Nashqᵘᵐ, the year seven of Seleucus the king, and with Yadaʿ[6]ʾīl Bayān; they entrusted their inscription to ʿAthtar and to *Almaqah against {any} displacement and damage.

The inscription is dated to 298/7 BC according to the regnal years of Seleucus I (305/4–281). Written in the Sabaʾic language, it is carved on a stone block whose provenance is unknown. The writing style of this document provides a precious and useful clue for palaeographic dating.[24]

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[23] Nebes 2007 and 2011.   [24] Prioletta 2011.
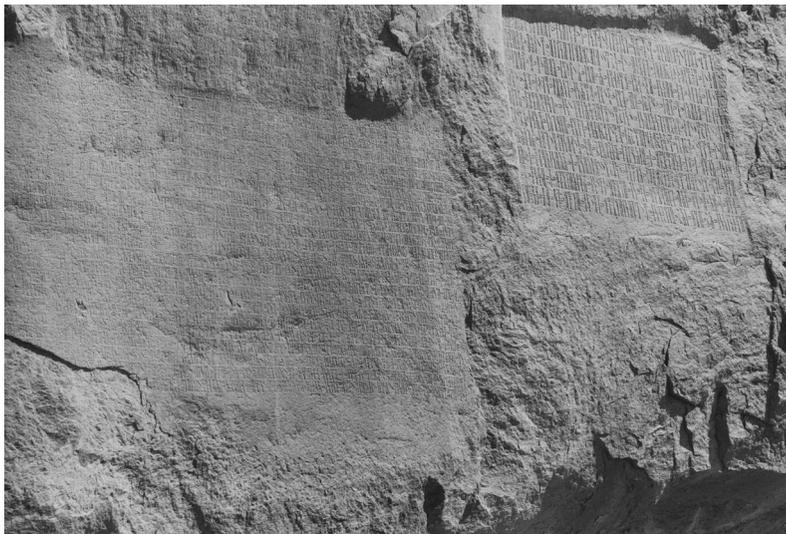
Fig. 2.3. Inscriptions from al-Miʿsāl (Yemen, 150 km south-east of Ṣanʿāʾ), 1, 2 (**2.7**), and 3. Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

Fig. 2.4. Photography of the al-Miʿsāl texts by a Belgian team, Alain Grignard and René Lévêque. Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

A thanksgiving at a Ḥimyarite rock sanctuary (Figs 2.3, 2.4)

[**2.7**]   al-Miʿsāl 2 (Robin 1981: 323)

Laḥayʿat Awkan ibn Yaʿziz, ibn Maʿāhir and dhu-Khawlān, Ḥazyān ibn Kalʿān, dhu-*Bt*ⁿ and dhu-Raymān, prince of the commune Radmān and Khawlān, governor of the ² commune Dhubḥān, has expressed his joy and has written this inscription in the sanctuary of his *Shams* Very-High, mistress of mount Shiḥrārᵘᵐ, {inscription} in which her servant Laḥayʿat Awkan ³ expresses that he praises Her with gratitude, because She made him return safe and sound from the plain of dhu-Ḥurmatᵘᵐ {15 or 20 km east of Dhamār}, from the battle where his lord Karibʾīl Ayfaʿ, king of Sabaʾ ⁴ and of dhu-Raydān, and his army, the army of Ḥimyarᵘᵐ, attacked Ilīsharaḥ Yaḥḍub, king of Sabaʾ, and his army, the army of Sabaʾ, and they fought and attacked the {king} ⁵ at dawn until the end(?) of the day in the plain of dhu-*Ḥurmatᵘᵐ. And then they returned with a good catch, and the losses {inflicted upon the enemy}, men and horses, slain in combat and alive, ⁶ notably Yaḥmad ibn Murāthid and his horse, prince of the commune Bakīlᵘᵐ of ʿAmurān, notably Saʿadʾalaw ibn *Qdm*ⁿ and his horse Yar⁷kham—he was brought alive with all his household servants and with all his equipment— particularly one of the officers of dhu-Hamdān with the horse he was riding during the campaign ⁸ and he brought him back alive, in addition to the men, riding horses, infantry men he wounded, and {in addition} to what there was in terms of brave deeds done by Ḥimyarᵘᵐ's army which was assigned close to him. ⁹ After this battle, the king of Sabaʾ, with his army, returned a third time and went back home. As for their lord Karibʾīl ¹⁰ Ayfaʿ, and as for his army, Ḥimyarᵘᵐ's army, they remained there for days, as many as they wanted, then they returned to the city of Hakirᵘᵐ with trophies, me¹¹n and horses alive and slain. Laḥayʿat Awkan made this inscription in conformity with a promise to collect and establish what would {occur}, be it victory ¹² or defeat, before this day; now, never did he return disappointed in his hopes, victims, good catch, and trophies, or even weapons—spears, shields, ¹³ and bows—rings of gold and silver, gold in plaits and in fragments, all that the Abyssinians wear on their heads and so that they pro¹⁴tect their arms. This mission was a success and a token of security, in the month of madhraʾān {July} 179 of the era of Abīʿalī b. Rataʿ ¹⁵ of the calendar of Ḥimyar, 363 of the era of Mabḥaḍ ibn [Abḥaḍ].

This thanksgiving text, from al-Miʿsāl (ancient Waʿlān), dated to July AD 253 by means of a double chronology, is carved halfway up the face of a very high rocky peak, which used to be the family sanctuary of the princes of the commune of Radmān (Fig. 2.4 illustrates the height involved). The inscription is dated according to the local era of Radmān (or 'of Abīʿalī son of Rataʿ', beginning in AD 74), and also gives the equivalent date according to the Ḥimyarite era (also called 'era of Mabḥūḍ son of Abḥaḍ', beginning in 110 BC).²⁵

An inscription dated by means of a local era (Nabaṭᵘᵐ dhu-Kharīf) mentions Ḥimyarite kings (Fig. 2.5)

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²⁵ See also Robin 1991: 22; Müller 2010: 25–7.

Fig. 2.5. Ḥayd Mūsà 1 = *RES* 4196. Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

[**2.8**]   Ḥayd Mūsà 1 = *RES* 4196 (Robin 1998: 144–5 and fig. 8)
Farʿān Yazāl ibn Dharāniḥ, Ḥaṣbaḥ and Yaʿguf, prince of the communes Qasham[um]
and Maḏḥàʿ[um], 2 has built from the foundations to the summit their two basins
S¹wrᵐ and Yarʿaẓ for their vine dhu-Qaylān 3 and the two {vines} of Dhahab[um], with
the support of their lords Yāsir[um] Yuhanʿim and his son Shammar Yuhar[ʿi]sh,
kings of Sa⁴baʾ and of dhu-Raydān, in the month of madhraʾān {July} of the year
three hundred and sixteen, {according to the} era of Na⁵baṭ[um] dhu-Kharīf.

The inscription from the Wādī Shirjān, dating to around AD 283, commem-
orates works on two dams in order to irrigate a vineyard. These were a source
of pride and prestige for the princes of antiquity. Thanks to the mention of the
Ḥimyarite kings, the inception of the era of Nabaṭ can be placed in 33 BC, with
a margin of error of ten years.[26]

Commemorations

The construction of a temple
[**2.9**]   Maʿīn 82 (Bron 1998: 89–90)

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[26] See also Müller 2010: 37.

Khālīkarib Ṣadiq son of Abīyadaʿ king of Maʿīn has built and made as new Riṣāf^um, temple of ʿAthtar dhu-*Qabḍ^um. He entrusted the Ri²ṣāf^um temple to ʿAthtar Shāriqān and to all the deities of the commune, {those of the oath} of god and patron, of pact and alliance, against whoever would harm it and against whoever would de³sacralize it, and against whoever would cause destructions and against whoever would cause damage in the Riṣāf^um temple in times of war and of peace in days of earth and of heaven.

This inscription, from the fifth century BC, in Maʿinic, is carved on the lintel of the propylaeum giving access to the Great Temple of the kingdom of Maʿīn, which is located 100 m east of the site of Maʿīn (ancient Qarnā). Its author is a king of Maʿīn, who commemorates the building of a temple and claims its inviolability and sacredness.

A princely hunt
[**2.10**]   Kuḥl 1 (Robin 1979: 183)
Sharḥ^um Ayman ibn Bataʿ and Hamdān ² hunted in the mountains of Ṣawlān and killed, until the {moment} he wrote ³ this inscription, three thousand ibexes, ⁴ plus three hundred, and again seven hundred.

The inscription from the second century BC is carved on a rock in a gorge which allows passage from the Bawn valley to the plateau, 70 km to the north of Ṣanʿāʾ. It commemorates an exceptional hunt. In the early days of South Arabian civilization the hunt, which was endowed with a sacred character, was apparently a royal privilege. A little before the beginning of the Christian era, this privilege began to be shared with princes of the communes. The ibexes killed during each hunt numbered in their thousands; notably, ibexes have almost entirely vanished in the region.[27]

The restoration of a Ḥimyarite fortress (Fig. 2.6)
[**2.11**]   Iryānī 40 (Robin 1987a)
Sharaḥʿathat Yaʾman ibn Dharāniḥ, masters of the Aḥram palace, princes of the commune of *Dhamārī,[28] a frac²tion of *Qasham^um, built, laid the foundations, erected, completed and refurnished their fortress ³ Taʿriman, all its domestic quarters, its towers, its enclosure wall, and its two cisterns, a⁴fter Ilīsharaḥ Yaḥḍub, king of Sabaʾ, burnt it and destroyed it, while were at war ⁵ the kings of Sabaʾ and the banū dhu-Raydān, as well as their armies, before this day. They completed all ⁶ their work in less than two months while there was an arbitration. They refurbished it with the help of ʿAthtar Shāriqān, ⁷ of *Wagl, of Sumūyadaʿ, of their two deities ʿAthtar-ʿAzīz^um dhu-*Gaʾwab^um, master of the temple of *Ṭarar, and dhā⁸t-Baʿdān, and their household deities Raymān and Shams^um, with the help of their lord Shammar Yuhaḥmid, ⁹ king of Sabaʾ and of dhu-

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[27] Robin 1979: 183.
[28] The terms 'masters' and 'princes' are in the plural because they apply to all lineage members.

Fig. 2.6. Ḥimyarite inscription (Iryānī 40). National Museum of Ṣanʿāʾ. Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

Raydān and with the help of the forces of their commune of *Dhamārī, a fraction of *Qasham^um.

The inscription is from Bayt Ḍabʿān, 45 km to the south of Ṣanʿāʾ, dating to *c.* AD 230 or 240, and is carved in relief on an elegant slab. It commemorates the reconstruction of a destroyed Ḥimyarite fortress close to the Sabaean border. The quality of the sculpture shows it had an ornamental function, and perhaps decorated either the facade or the entrance.

The earliest mention of the Marib Dam
[**2.12**]   Ja 671 + 788 (Jamme 1962, pp. 176–8, 234–5, and pl. 42)
[Sharaḥʿathat Ashwaʿ and his] son ² Mar[thad^um] Asʿar banū Su[kh]³aym^um mas[ters of the pala]ce of Raymān, princes of the two commu⁴nes Yarsum of *Samʿī, the third of *Haga⁵r^um, and Khawlān Gudādatān, have dedicated to their lo⁶[rd] *Almaqahū *Thahwān master of *Awām ⁷ a bronze statue when order was given to him by his two lo⁸rds Thaʾrān Yuhanʿim and his son Malkīkaⁱrib Yuʾmin, kings of Sabaʾ, of dhu-Raydān, of Ḥa¹⁰ḍramawt and of Yamnat, to take the lead of the army with the Arabs ¹¹ when the Dam was breached at Ḥabābiḍ and *Raḥb^um, ¹² and was breached the entire great wall which is between Ḥabābiḍ and ¹³ *Raḥb^um and, of the dam, were breached 70 *shawḥa¹⁴t; and they praised the power of their lord *Almaqah¹⁵ū-*Thahwān master of *Awām because He granted them ¹⁶ their fulfilment, with his order to retain for [t]¹⁷hem the flood until they completed their works; and he ¹⁸ praised their lord *Almaqahū-

*Thawān master [19] of *Awām because He granted them the oracles that to Him [20] had been demanded; and may He continue to grant them the fa[21]vour and the benevolence of their two lords Thaʾrān Yuhanʿim [22] and his son Malkīkarib Yuʾmin, kings [23] of Sabaʾ, of dhu-Raydān, of Ḥaḍramōt, and of Yamnat; and they rep[24]aired this breach in three months, [25] during dhu-Sabaʾ, <dhu>-*Ilʾilāt, and <dhu>-*Abhī.

This inscription is carved on a long stela from the Great Temple of the god *Almaqah at Marib, dating to *c*.AD 360 or 370. Its main object is to commemorate the offering of a bronze statuette, probably fixed at the stela's summit. Incidentally, one of the two authors, who were princes of a commune close to Ṣanʿāʾ, says that the kings ordered him to take command of the army and repair the Marib Dam (Plate 4), which had just breached. The restoration commemorated here is also the most important of the known renovations to this structure: it lasted three months, and involved the entire great wall of the southern sluice and the retaining wall, over a length of 70 *shawḥaṭ*, that is, approximately 140 m.[29]

During the first century AD the nature of inscriptions commemorating offerings to gods had changed. A long narrative was added to the description of the offerings, detailing all of the reasons that led the person to dedicate a gift in the temple. This development is on the one hand a series of thanks to the deity, but, on the other, could also be seen as an act of propaganda.[30]

Rites

The 'Man of Bronze' (Fig. 2.7)
[**2.13**]   Gajda, *L'homme de bronze* (Demange et al. 2007)
Hawtarʿathat son of Raḍawʾīl ibn *S²l²l^m* servant of dhu-Madhāb has dedicated to *Almaqah master of the Sett[3]lers of Nashq^um the bronze statue <made> with the taxes they acquitted themselves of towards [4] Him, himself {Hawtarʿathat} and his father Raḍawʾīl, as well as Laḥayʿathat, his [5] son Raʾabʿathat, all of his wives, of his children, of his household servants and of his palaces, at Maryab and at Nashq^um, all of his pal[7]m groves, of his vineyards and of his fields in the plain of Nash[8]q^um, the day when *Almaqah granted him all that He had announced. With [9] ʿAthtar and *Almaqah, with dhāt-*Ḥimyam, with dhāt-Ba[10]dan^um, with dhāt-Nashq^um, and with Yadaʿʾīl Bayān king of Saba[11]ʾ, with his lords Yashraḥʾīl and Ilī Sharaḥ dhu-Madhā[12]b and with his father Raḍawʾīl.

The inscription from al-Bayḍāʾ (ancient Nashq^um), dating to the sixth century BC, is incised on the chest of a bronze, near life-size statue, depicting a standing man dressed in a piece of cloth wrapped around the bottom part of the body. The torso is bare. The meaning behind the offering is still uncertain. Some of the oldest South Arabian inscriptions commemorate the offering of a person

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[29] Darles et al. 2013: 20–4.   [30] See also Robin 2014c: 197–8.

Fig. 2.7. The 'Man of Bronze', sixth century BC. Photograph by the Musée du Louvre (following restoration work, entrusted by the National Museum of Yemen). © Musée du Louvre.

in a temple, implying that the person entered the deity's service and became his property.[31] Later, an image might replace the offering of a physical person. The consecration of a person to a deity would have thus become symbolic, with no doubt the hope of special protection as a counterpart to a beautiful

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[31] See **2.17** and Robin 2002: 191–7 and 201–2.

offering. It is nevertheless plausible that it implied entering a religious brotherhood.

A dedication of people to the Qatabānite god *Ḥawkum
[**2.14**]   Cox 4 (Robin 2005a: 283–5 and fig. 176 (p. 366))
ʿAmmīdhakar son of Laḥayʿamm ibn ʾbr[n] has dedicated to *Ḥawkum his own person, his capacities, his [2] goods, his son Hawfāʿathat, his brothers Abīʾanas, Nabaṭʿamm, Hawtar[3]ʿathat, Abīʿalī, and ʿAmmīʾanas, as well as all their children, the day when ʿAmmīdhakar [4] handed over(?) to *Ḥawkum part of his income(?), because *Ḥawkum fulfilled ʿAmmīdhakar and all that he had [5] asked Him and because He fulfilled him in <times of> war and of peace. With ʿAmm, with *Anbī, with *Ḥaw[6]kum, with dhāt *Ṣanat[um], with dhāt Raḥbān, with dhāt Ẓahrān, with dhāt *Ḥim[7]yam, with Yadaʿʿab *Dhubyān king of Qatabān, and with his commune and his princes, people of dhu-Marya[8]mat[um]. ʿAmmīdhakar has entrusted to *Ḥawkum his dedication against whoever would divert it from its location.

This inscription from 300 BC is in the Qatabānic language, and commemorates an offering. It is cast in relief on a large bronze slab and was most likely inserted into a wall of the sanctuary. For a discussion of its meaning, see the commentary on **2.13**.

A public confession
[**2.15**]   Haram 34 = *CIH* 533 (Robin 1992)
Amat Abīhā has confessed herself and has made pena[2]nce to dhu-<ʾl>-Samāwī master of Bayān because [3] a man approached her on the third da[4]y of the pilgrimage, while she had her period, and he left withou[5]t washing, and she went back to a man and . . . [. . .

The inscription, recording the repentance of a (female) worshipper who publicly confessed her misdeed, is cast in relief on a bronze tablet dating to the end of the first century BC. It was probably set in either a wall or a pillar of the *Bayān temple. This practice of public confessions is peculiar to peoples of the Jawf, both the Minaeans and the tribe of Amīr[um] (a tribe of Nagrān which speaks a language of the Old Arabic family).

A procession to the Great Temple of Marib to obtain rain
[**2.16**]   Ja 735 (Jamme 1962: 136–8)
[The commune of Sabaʾ Kahlān] in the city of Marib and its valleys Kahlān, people [2] of the valleys, have dedicated to their lord *Almaqah-master-of-*Awām the two bronze statues in gra[3]tefulness because He granted and announced to his servants the commune of Sabaʾ Kahlān he would grant and [4] would make summer rains plentiful in the month of dhu-*abhī of the year of *Tubbaʿkarib son of Wadadʾīl b. Kabīr Kha[5]līl, the ninth, after irrigation and rain that was wanting in the land of Marib, in its valleys and in its irrigated plots {ʾkl}, [6] for three rainy seasons before this season, while the fields {ʾmṭr} were undergoing dessication, were suffering from drought all the valleys and [7] irrigated plots of Marib, [and] part of the palm trees {ʿmd} were dying of thirst and part of the

wells were dry. We[8]nt to *Almaqah in the dhu-*Awām sanctuary all the commune of Saba᾽ and the daughters of Marib, while their wizards were lam[9]enting and were giving tokens to their lord *Almaqah, as well as the women with their cries { ʿ*ṭwf?*}. They implored [10] as an oracle and requested as an announcement upon their lord *Almaqah to grant them rain and to abundantly water Marib, [11] the [fi]elds, the valleys [. . . . . .] *Almaqahū with a celestial omen whereas he would give them rain. At the end o[12]f this day, came from the *mn* of the dhu-*Awām sanctuary rains and came the flood during the n[13]ight; they filled the fields and satiated with water all the valleys and they continued to fill [14] and flood all the palm groves and the lands in abundance, with reserves in large quantity. The[15]n, they opened the sluices and flooded all the irrigated plots. Were all praising—his servants, the commune [16] Saba᾽ Kahlān—the might and the power of their lord *Almaqah-master-of-*Awām because he granted [17] and allotted this rainy season in agreement with what he had announced to his servants. May *Almaqah-master-of-*Awām continue—to his servants the commune Saba᾽ Kahlān—to provide all the omens they will continue [19] to ask for and request from Him. With *Almaqah-master-of-*Awām.

This is a dedicatory inscription from Marib, dating to the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century AD, on a stone stela originating from the same temple as **2.12**.

The earliest mention of the *Almaqah pilgrimage to Maryab (Marib)
[**2.17**]   YM 375 = 1064
Yaśaqʾīl son of *Brr[2m]*, the *Baramite, dedicated [3] to *Niswar ʿAmmīshafaq the d[4]ay he carried out the duty of priest and the day he [5] made the pilgrimage of *Al [6]maqah in the {month of }*abhī. With *A[7]lmaqah, with Karibʾī[8]l and with Nabaṭyafaʿ.

This small inscription from Marib, which is carved on a stone slab in alternate directions (*boustrophedon*), dates to the end of the eighth century BC. It commemorates the dedication of a person to the Sabaean deity (god or goddess?) Niswar.[32]

Rules and Norms

The founding of a sanctuary consecrated to *Nakraḥ, the Minaean healing god
[**2.18**]   Darb al-Ṣabī 1 (Robin and Ryckmans 1988: 99–109 and 145 (pl. 1))
As has ordered and established *Nakra[2]ḥ[um] in an oracular consultation in the adyton. May [3] the boundary markers of the *Fathʿān sanctuary be [4] according to the boundary marking of the king and of the venerable council {*ḥfy nfs¹*}. May it be a s[5]anctuary upon *Nakraḥ's command. May, if someone intro[6]duces in haste a dying person or <a woman> who aborts and has a miscarriage within the limi[7]ts

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[32] Müller 1994: 92.

of the sanctuary of the ill, he be indebted with a bull [8] with its double harness and of a white kid(?). Thus has ordered [9] *Nakraḥ in an oracular consultation in the adyton. May, if someone harasses [10] she who aborts or she who gives birth or he who is stricken with [11] a deadly disease, he be excluded from the *makhtan Ḍr*[n]; [12] and concerning she who would come to die there or to abort and do a miscarriage, [13] or he who would die <there>, may he be indebted to the *makhtan Ḍr*[n] [14] and to its courtyard with a male goat and with a ram. The area [15] {which is} sacred is the very one which is defined by the boundary marking which is sacred.

The inscription, written in Maʿīnic, is from the vicinity of Barāqish (ancient Yathill). Dating from the second or first century BC, it is incised on the upper part of a large stone slab inserted into the ground. This slab is located near the entrance of a small construction built inside the sanctuary's sacred territory (the *maḥram*). This territory is bordered by boundary markers bearing the inscription 'limit of the sanctuary' (*qf-ḏn-mḥrm*[n]).[33]

If our understanding is clear, the sanctuary (*maḥram*) of Darb al-Ṣabī, a large perimeter bounded by boundary stones (of which some ten still remain today), was called *Fathʿān*. The small temple within this sacred space, in the courtyard in which was set upright a stela bearing a text, was called the *makhtan Ḍr*[n]. The 'sanctuary of the ill' (*mḥrmh ḍl*[n]) was probably identical to the *maḥram Fathʿān*.

A ruling concerning irrigation
[**2.19**]   Ḥuṣn Āl Ṣāliḥ 1 (Robin 1987b: 167–9 and pls 2–3)
Thus has arbitrated the council of Yathill between the land[2]lords of Yaʿṣub and of *Sawmān and has given his guarantee the chief {pater familias} of [3] Yaʿṣub} concerning the flow in the sluice {*m ʾḫḏ*} of Naʿmā[4]n in relation to the sluice of *ʿIṣāmān dhu-Wadd[um]. When [5] is opened the channel {*mty ʾ*} of Naʿmān, may {also} be opened the channel of [6] *ʿIsāmān. When is increased <the flow of> Naʿmān, may {also} [7] be increased <the flow of> ʿIsāmān. If one of them is put in operation, may none precede the other. The quantity [9] of water which will exit from the sluice of Naʿmān towards [10] *Sharwān will be {equal to} the quantity which will exit of the sluice of *ʿIṣāmān towards dhu-*Waśḥ[um]. The regulator: Nashaʾkari[12]b, governor of Yathill, son of Hālik[um].

The inscription, also from the vicinity of Barāqish (Yathill), is written in Sabaʾic; it dates from the Sabaean occupation of the city (before the beginning of the seventh century BC) and is carved on a large stone slab, set into the alluvial ground in the vicinity of a sluice.

A decree of the city of Maṭirat[um]
[**2.20**]   MAFRAY-Quṭra 1
May it be forbidden to expel from the city of Maṭi[2]rat[um] any *ḥṣm* {category of people of undetermined nature} without the order and [3] the authorization of Ibn

[33] Robin and Ryckmans 1988: 99–109 and 145 (pl. 1).

Sukhaym^um; and forbidden to wed ⁴ one of the daughters of the city of Maṭirat^um in any ⁵ place and city other than the city of Ma⁶ṭirat^um; and forbidden to kill one's daughters in ⁷ all of the commune of dhu-Maṭirat^um [. . . . . .].

The inscription, from Quṭra (ancient Maṭirat^um, some 40 km to the north-east of Ṣanʿāʾ), records three decisions probably enacted by the commune of dhu-Maṭirat^um and by its lords the banū Sukhaym^um.³⁴ It dates to the second century BC.

> A contract entrusting to a shepherd the breeding of three animals
> [**2.21**]   ʿAbd Allāh, *Festschrift Müller*
> This is what have recorded Awsʿathat dhu-*Ganʾān, his brothers and his sons, banū dhu-*Ganʾān, clients of dhu-Nashshān. ² May himself {Awsʿathat} take grazing for *Bāriʾ^um, female servant of Saʿd^um b. Awsʾīl, three grown animals, for their breeding with the sharing between two of their offspring ³ and of their sheared fleeces; dhu-*Ganʾān and *Bāriʾ^um will share in half the offspring and the sheared fleeces of these three animals when the year ⁴ is over; and to *Bāriʾ^um are guaranteed these three animals in their physical integrity. After this year, dhu-*Ganʾān will give, in agreement with his pledges, ⁵ these three animals and the offspring he will have shared with her, to *Bāriʾ^um; dhu-*Ganʾān is responsible for these three animals ⁶ and for her share of the offspring that they will deliver, as concerns its food, sluggishness, fraud, and good condition, but dhu-*Ganʾān is not responsible ⁷ for a robbery, for a decision of authority, and for an exceptional event. The physical integrity of these three animals will be guaranteed to *Bāriʾ^um. This contract ⁸ will give the status ⁹ of he who took grazing in the pastures with a firm contract. This contract was established in the month of dhu-hawbas of the year of Biʿathtar, son of ¹⁰ Abīʾamar b. Ḥazfar^um dhu-*Matbʿum.

The text of the contract is incised on a wooden stick and is written in cursive script. It is probably from al-Sawdāʾ (ancient Nashshān) and dates to the Sabaeo-Raydānite period. The three animals (*qny*) which *Bāriʾ^um must take care of are probably either ewes or goats. Curiously, however, the text does not clarify the matter, as if the word *qny* clearly designated a specific animal.³⁵

Correspondence

> A sample of royal correspondence
> [**2.22**]   X.BSB 139 = Mon.script.sab. 320 (Stein 2010, vol. 1: 486–90)
> To Saʿdʾawām dhu-*Yaqnaʿam and to the commanders who are on duty at Na²shq^um, as well as to the troops of Nashq^um, on behalf of your lord Thaʾrā³n, king of Sabaʾ, dhu-Raydān, Ḥaḍramawt, and Yamnat, as ⁴ for you, do not intervene against their two servants ⁵ Amathalaf^um and *Qashbat during their

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³⁴ Robin 1979: 185–90; Beeston 1981: 21–5; Kropp 1998.
³⁵ ʿAbd Allāh 1994; Bron and Lafont 2003; Nebes 2004a: 309–10.

mission, in any way! [6] This is what he has granted {to both of them} and guaranteed to not fail and des[7]pair(?). As for you, you have guaranteed that you would give him [8] news which has not reached him yet. [9] As he has ordered <to him>, do, and with something else [10] do not deal! In the month of dhu-Hōbas.

The text in cursive script is incised on a wooden stick, likely from al-Sawdāʾ and dating to the fourth century AD. It is the only known example of royal correspondence. The author is apparently not a king of Ḥimyar, but a viceroy of sorts for the Jawf region.

A request for food
[2.23]   YM 11729 = TYA 7 (Ryckmans et al. 1994: 54–5, 86–7)
To Waʿdkarib and *Qassās[um], from Rathadʾīl dhu-*Qishbān. [2] For him, may you give some sign of life and may ʿAthtar and *Almaqahū satisfy you [3] with benefits and with this {letter} hail to you. They are [4] full of gratitude and, as for what concerns them, all is well. If [5] you bring back from Yahniʾ the camel rider's home, two *miʿshār of sesame, [6] bring from Raʾabʾawām the *mkrb* a bag full of [7] flour, and together with this four *miʿshār and one *subāʿat of [8] salt, of lentils, and of *ms¹ḥy*. For you, benefits.

The text, also likely from al-Sawdāʾ (ancient Nashshān), is incised in cursive script on a wooden stick.

Trade and Economic Life

A Sabaean trade expedition reaching the cities of Yahūd and the island of Kition (Cyprus)
[2.24]   Demirjian 1 (Robin and de Maigret 2009: 81–93)
Ṣabaḥuhumū son of ʿAmmīshafaq ibn Rashwān [2] the Nashqite has dedicated to *Almaqah master of *May[3]fa[um] <this> inscribed tablet—and has deposited it—as well as all of his ch[4]ildren and all of his goods at Nashq[um] and in his perimetre [5] under irrigation,

—after having fought with Sabaʾ and the troops [6] {which were} mounted, valiantly, and having seized the caravan of Maʿīn[um] down[7]stream from Atmā;

—after having fought {together} with his unit, [8] the mounted troops, accompanying the caravan of Sabaʾ, towards the La[9]nd of Ḥaḍramōt, when they annihilated thr[ee . . . .][10] . . . , having seized Mayfaʿat and (F)[. . . , having seized] [11] *Mfgrt*, having seized *Kaḥd dhu-[. . . . . . ʿU][12]barat and having seized *Kaḥd dhu-Tadan[. . . . . .];[13]

—after trading and departing towards Dedān[, Ghazz][14]at, and the cities of Yahūd {Judaea} and having enjoyed peace and having been spa[15]red while he was travelling to Ghazzat {Gaza} to Kitī {= Kition} during the war of [16] Kashd[um] {Chaldea} and of Yawān {Ionia};

—after having been invested and [17] charged with a mission by Yadaʿʿīl Bayān son of Yathaʿ[18]ʾamar, king of Sabaʾ, in the lands of *Dhakar[um], Li[19]ḥyān, *Abīʾōs and *Ḥanak, those of the four[20]teen ʾrgl, and he carried out all that [21] had charged and invested him with Yadaʿʾīl, [22] <who> honoured him with his trust [23] and with three distinctions, by granting him a thousand [24] items #1 000#, and he clad him <with an honorific piece of clothing> and has . . . [. . . [25] . . . . .] the fearless;

—after he waged war {together} with [his] comm[26][une . . .

The inscription is cast in relief on a bronze tablet which comes from clandestine excavations from a temple at al-Bayḍāʾ (ancient Nashq[um]); it dates to *c*.550 BC. The text is incomplete at the bottom, and features a series of images of four people in the Mesopotamian style.

The last text mentioning a caravan (cf. Ch. 1).
[**2.25**]   R 1850
Ḥārith[um] son of *Lgn*[n] the Ḥaḍramite has [2] led the caravan of the South and of the North with a troop of Ḥaḍramites.

This graffito is from the vicinity of Ḥimà (some 100 km north-east of Najrān), carved on a desert rock along the trail leading from Najrān to the Levant or to the Arab-Persian Gulf. On palaeographical grounds, it would date approximately to the first century AD.[36]

A substantial financial contribution given by a woman to her husband
[**2.26**]   Barrān 3 (Frantsouzoff forthcoming)
Magduḥalak wife of a {member of the lineage of} Ṣhbt has done a favour [2] and provided her help to her husband Laḥayʿathat for [3] their reception room Yafaʿān, with 200 co[4]ins of silver for the cut stones and decorative stones.

The inscription, very carefully written, is from Barrān (ancient Barrān) in Nihm, some 60 km to the north-east of Ṣanʿāʾ. Dating to the first century BC, it is carved on a long stone block which probably decorated a monument's facade.

An agreement between the banū Gadan[um] and the banū Saṭrān of Maryab
[**2.27**]   *CIH* 611
. . . . and they will acquire and take possession of the pl[ot] of the *Maṭ [rān] palm grove [2] [. . . . .] towards the south and the plot of *Saṭrān as from this *Maṭrān palm grove [3] they will open the channel {fnwt} taking the water towards the east which brings the water from the great canal of A[4]byan to irrigate the plot of Ibn Gadan[um] from this palm grove *Maṭrān which is to the south. As for the banū [5] Gadan[um], may they make no complaint against the banū *Saṭrān on all the products obtained with this channel, including the pa[6]lm and jujube trees {ziziphus spina-christi, ʿilb} which are located at the edge of the plot which is to the west. As for the banu *Saṭr[7]ān and their descendants, may they not deny to

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[36] Robin 2001a; 2014c: 276–9.

the banū Gadan[um] and to their descendants the use for themselves of thi[8]s channel taking water to irrigate the plot of Ibn Gadan[um] from this palm grove of *Maṭrān which is to the south.

The text, from Marib (ancient Maryab), dating to the first century BC, is inscribed with great care on a square pillar, of which only the lower part has remained.[37]

> A list detailing the provision of a work force
> [2.28]   TYA 4 = YM 11735 (Ryckmans et al. 1994: 50–1, 81–2)
> Clients of the banū *Muqār[um]: 15. Clients of dhu-ʾhl[n]: 24. And [2] those that dhu-Nashshān provides: five men; and dhu-*Yāfiʿ[um]: two people; and dhu-Ḍhr[n], two [3] people. Obligation filled by dhu-Nashshān, dhu-ʾhl[n], the two dhu-S²gb, Thawbʾil, and Qmys[24m], and S²bl[m], and Yaʿmar, the two dhu-*Ganʾān, and Ghawth[um] b. *Dhākhirat.

The text, in cursive script, is incised on a wooden stick; like the others, it is likely from al-Sawdāʾ (ancient Nashshān).

> A Minaean buried in Egypt
> [2.29]   *RES* 3427 = M 338; Cairo Egyptian Museum, no. 27 SS/B 4
> [This mummy(?) and this] sarcophagus belong to Zaydʾil son of Zayd dhū-Ẓayrān, member of the Wabb(?), who provided the essences of myrrh and of sweet flag to the temples of Egypt's gods, in the days of Ptolemy son of Ptolemy, [2] [. . . . . .].. and Zaydʾil died in the month of Ḥathur {Hathor} and received as gifts from all the temples of Egypt's gods their cloths, <i.e.> the cloth of his mummy's strips, and he was taken, [3] <i.e.> his *ba*, until the enclosure of the temple of Osiris-Apis the god. In the month of Kayḥak {Koyakh}, the year 22 of Ptolemy the king. Zaydʾil entrusted his mummy(?) and his sarcophagus to Osiris-Apis and to the gods who are with him in his temple.

The inscription, in the Maʿinic language, is incised on a wooden sarcophagus. The clumsy script is not that of a professional Minaean stonecutter. The sarcophagus is from illicit excavations in Egypt, perhaps from Saqqāra's *Serapeum*.[38]

   Eight Ptolemies described as 'son of Ptolemy' ruled for at least 22 years. The script suggests a relatively late date, which points to either Ptolemy VIII Physcon (146–117), or Ptolemy X (107–88), whose 22nd year fell in 93/2. Ptolemy IX (117–81) is excluded since, during the 22nd year of his reign (in 96/5), he was not pharaoh over Egypt, but was ruling Cyprus.[39] Zaydʾil's inscription therefore dates to 125/4 or to 93/2 BC, with a margin of error of one year, according to how regnal years were counted.

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[37] Mazzini and Porter 2009.
[38] Robin 1994: 291 and fig. 8, pp. 293–6; Swiggers 1995.
[39] Ptolemy IX Lathyros was absent from Egypt between 107 and 88 BC: see Will 1967: 370.

An altar dedicated by a Minaean to his gods on the Greek island of Delos
[**2.30**]   *RES* 3570 = M 349 = Delos inv. A 1294 (inscription: 2320)

The inscription, from after 166 BC, is carved on an altar of cylindrical shape. It is in the Maʿīnic language, with a summary in Greek.
   In the language and script of Maʿīn:

   Three divine symbols Hāniʾ and Zaydʾīl of the {lineage of} *Ḫdb* [2] erected the altar of Wadd^{um} and of the deities [3] of Maʿīn at Delos {*Dlṯ*}

In Greek:

   {Property} of Oaddos, [2] god of the Minaeans
   To Oaddos

The Minaean text begins with the symbols of ʿAthtar dhu-*Qabḍ (a pattern recalling the shape of an hourglass), Wadd (the serpent), and Nakraḥ (a double-toothed fork).[40]

Warfare

The conquests and achievements of Karibʾīl the Great
[**2.31**]   *RES* 3945 + 3946
RES 3945

[Th]is is what Karibʾīl Watār [so]n of Dhamar[ʿa]l[ī], mukarrib of Sabaʾ, has transferred during h[is] rule, to *Almaqah and to Sabaʾ,
—when he put together an alliance of communes with a god and a patron and a pact and an alliance;
—offered as sacrifice to ʿAthtar three victims #3#;
—accomplished the *n*[*yl* ritual for Hawbas];
—[organized the ban]quet of ʿAthtar and made the sacrifice of fire to *Taraḥ and offered to ʿAthtar and to Hawbas a piece of clothing (?);
—when he summo[ned] the communal assemblies of Sabaʾ so that they pledge allegiance and succeed in taking action as a single {man} in a manner {that is} per²fect, and so that any man takes action for the safeguarding of his goods;
—when he abided by ʿAthtar and *Almaqah's orders so that may be attributed the waters of Raymān his flood plain and so may be {built} canal after canal and plot after plot;
—defined the territory regulated by his dam *ʾhl* to {irrigate} *Mʾwd*ⁿ in order to prevent devastating floods(?) from reaching the two flood plains and to *ʾrʿn*;
—attributed runoff of the regulated territory of *Mwtr*^m which is flooded from *Hwdy*ⁿ;

[40] Robin 1991: 62 and fig. 17 (facsimile, p. 61).

—acquired *Ḥṣṣ*[m] and *Ṯʿrt*[m], the flood plain of *Myd*[m], all the irrigated perimeter {*ms¹qy*} with water runoff from *Watār and [3] from *Wāqih and, by authority of Karibʾīl, water runoff of *Watār and *Waqih flowed and was distributed (?);

[First campaign]

When he crushed Suʾd[um], burnt *Nqbt*[m] and all the cities of Maʿāfirān, took control of *Ẓbr*, *Ẓalm[um], and Arwī, burnt all their cities, killed three thousand #3000# of them and seized eight thousand #8000#; doubled their tribute and imposed upon them, in addition to their tribute, cattle and small livestock which they owed together with their tri[4]bute; struck Dhubḫān dhu-*Qs²r*[m] and Shirgab, burnt their cities, and seized from their mountain *ʿs¹mt* and their stronghold (?) *Syr* for *Almaqah and for Sabaʾ;

[Second campaign]

When he crushed Awsān, killed sixteen thousand #16000# of them, captured forty thousand #40#; devastated *Wusr from Lagiʿat[um] to Ḥammān; burnt all the cities of *Anf[um]; put to the torch all the cities of Ḥabbān and of *Dhayb; [5] devastated their irrigated zones; laid waste to *Ns¹m*, the irrigated area of *Rs²ʾy*, and Girdān; crushed {Awsān} in Datīnat and burnt all its cities; obliterated *Tafiḍ, destroyed it, put it to the torch, and laid waste to its irrigated areas; overwhelmed {Awsān} until reaching the coast, burnt all of its ci[ties] which lie by the coast; crushed {Awsān} in *Wusr, until routing Awsān and *Muratti[ʿum] its king, inflicting as punishment {the delivery} of the council chiefs of Awsān to *S¹mht* and inflicting as punishment [6] massacre and captivity; brought back the looting of his palace Miswar and removed all the inscriptions which [Karib]ʾīl seized {ʿinflicted as punishmentʾ} in his palace Miswar and the inscriptions of his deities' temples; . . . [18 letters] . . . his palace Miswar; has caused to enter among the offspring of *Almaqah and his allies—his freemen and his serfs—{people} of the various territories of Awsān and of its cities, assigned to *Almaqah and to Sabaʾ *S¹rm* and its provinces, and *Ḥmd*[n] and its provinces, provided with an enclosure the [7] cities of *S¹rm*, had their irrigated areas cultivated and established Sabaʾ there.

[Third campaign]

When {Karibʾīl} struck *Dahs[um] and Tubnā and their city, two thousand {people} #2000#, captured five thousand #5000#, put their cities to the torch . . . [18 letters] . . . *Dahs[um] . . . [27 letters] . . ., {assigned} . . .. ., Tubnā and Datīnat to *Almaqah and to Sabaʾ; assigned ʿAwd[um] to the king of *Dahs[um]—while he [8] had seized the offspring of ʿAwd[um] and of his livestock, at the expense of Awsān—he {the king of *Dahs[um]} who had allied with *Almaqah and Sabaʾ; assigned the lands . . . [40 letters] . . . all his territory, *Anf[um] and his cities, its irrigated areas, its mountains, its valleys, its pastures, entirely, *Ns¹m*, *Rs²ʾy*, Girdān until Fakhdh Alaw, ʿIrmā dhāt *Kaḥd and [9] Saybān with its territory and its cities, Athakh, Ma[y]faʿ and Rathaḥ[um] and all the territory of ʿAbadān and its cities, its valley, and its pastures, and the men of ʿAbadān, be they free men or clients, entirely . . . [36 letters] . . . [D]atīnat *ḥlfw*, Maysar[um], Datīnat dhāt Thab-r[um], and Ḥarthū [and all of] their {cities} to both of them and their valleys [10] and their {territories}, their plai[ns], their mountains, and their pastures, entirely, and all the population of the clients of dhu-Thabar[um], and their children and their

small livestock until the sea . . . [12 letters] and its {territories}, its plai[ns], its [moun]tain, its [val]ley, and its pastures entirely and all the cities and territories of Ḥawl, the territory of Tafiḍ towards *Dahs^um, and those which are on the coast and all the shores and all the territory of ʾlʾy, of Shayʿān,[11] ʿUbārat, and Labnat, all their cities, their cultivated fields, their pastures, and their valleys, entirely, and all the livestock of *Muratti^ʿum and of his men in *Dahs^um and in Tubnā, and he has assigned *Yatham {or Yazham?}, its population, its plebs, its territory, its mountains, its valleys, and its pastures to *Almaqah and to Sabaʾ; seized *Kaḥd dhu-*Ḥaḍn^um, its population, and its plebs, [which he grant]ed to all those who were allies of Karib[12]ʾīl amongst . . . [8 letters] . . . , entirely for *Almaqah and for Sabaʾ; Karibʾīl became the owner of all the population of *Kaḥd, be it free or client, of their children, of their small livestock, and of all the men and serfs of Ylʾy, Shayʿān, and ʿUbārat, of their offspring and of their livestock, entirely, for *Almaqah and for Sabaʾ; assigned to Sayīn and to *Ḥawl and to Yadaʿʿīl and to Ḥaḍramawt their territories, removing them from the control of dhu-Awsān, and he assigned [13] the territories of ʿAmm and *Anbī and of Warawʾīl and Qatabān removing them from the control of Awsān because Ḥaḍramawt and Qatabān were allied to *Almaqah, Karibʾīl, and Sabaʾ.

[Fourth campaign]

When {Karibʾīl} struck *Kaḥd dhu-Sawṭ because they had committed aggression by smiting Lzw^m and Ḥḍbʿ, which were under the protection of Karibʾīl; killed of them five hundred #500#, captured their children {amounting to} one thousand #1000#, massacred their plebs {amounting to} two thousand #2000# and plundered and looted all [14] their large and small livestock.

[Fifth campaign]

When {Karibʾīl} struck Nashshān, put its cities to the torch, devastated *ʿUshr and Bayḥān and all its irrigated areas in a single campaign.

[Sixth campaign]

When he launched a second campaign, erected a wall with which were isolated Nashshān and Nashq^um, upon the order of ʿAthtar, for three years #3#, became the master of Nashq^um and of its territory for *Almaqah and for Sabaʾ, massacred a thousand #1000# Nashshānites, routed Sumhūyafaʿ and Nashshān, assigned the territories [15] —that the king of Sabaʾ had given to him {=to Sumhūyafaʿ}—to *Almaqah and to Sabaʾ; took hold of its cities *Qawm, *Gawʿal, *Dawr^um, *Fadhm, Shibām, and all the cities of *Ayk^um, all that belonged to Sumhūyafaʿ and to Nashshān in *Ayk^um; claimed ownership for *Almaqah and for Sabaʾ in his territory of all enough to reach the borders until the border of *Manhiyat^um; claimed ownership of the taxes(?) of *Ẓalam and the taxes(?) of *Ḥurmat, confiscated the share of the king of Nashshān and of Nashshān on the waters of Madhāb, destroyed the walled enclosure of his city Nashshān {'his city', i.e. the city of Sumhūyafaʿ king of Nashshān} until [16] uprooting it; as for the city of Nashshān, he spared it {from destruction by} fire; he inflicted as punishment to him {Sumhūyafaʿ} the looting of his palace *ʿAfrā and the looting of his city Nashshān; imposed upon the back of Nashshān, as tribute, ʾfklt; inflicted as punishment against Nashshān to be slaughtered if it failed to uphold its promises

towards the deities; inflicted as punishment to Sumhūyafaʿ and to Nashshān that he establish Sabaʾ in the city of Nashshān and that Sumhūyafaʿ and Nashshān build the temple of *Almaqah within the city of Nashshān; grabbed for himself the waters of dhu-Qf'ⁿ taken from [17] Sumhūyafaʿ and from Nashshān and assigned {them} to Yadhmurmalik, king of Haramᵘᵐ; seized, at Sumhūyafaʿ and Nashshān's expense, the dhāt-Malikwaqih dykes {ḥrrt} and assigned to Nabaṭʿalī, king of Kaminahū, and to Kaminahū, among the dykes of dhāt-Malikwaqih, {those that are} from the borders that Karibʾīl has marked as boundaries; erected the walled enclosure of Nashqᵘᵐ and populated it with Sabaeans for *Almaqah and for Sabaʾ.

[Seventh campaign]

When {Karibʾīl} struck *Ydhn, Gzbt*, and *ʿrbᵐ* and imposed upon them tribute for *Almaqah and for Sabaʾ.

[Eighth campaign]

[18] When {Karibʾīl} struck *S¹bl, Hrm*, and *Fnnⁿ*, seized all of their buildings, burnt the cities of *S¹bl*, of *Hrm*, and of *Fnnⁿ*, killed three thousand #3000# of them, slew their kings, captured five thousand #5000# of them, plundered their livestock—one hundred and fifty thousand #150#—imposed upon them tribute for *Almaqah and for Sabaʾ and a revenge which avenges the nobles of Sabaʾ and Ḍahr who were under Karib[19]ʾīl's protection, that they had slain; struck Muhaʾmirᵘᵐ, Amīrᵘᵐ, all the communes of Muhaʾmirᵘᵐ and *ʿwhbᵐ*, killed five thousand #5000# of them, captured their sons {amounting to} twelve thousand #12000#, plundered their livestock—camels, cows, asses, and small livestock—two hundred thousand #200#, put to the torch all the cities of Muhaʾmirᵘᵐ, seized *Yfʿt* and devastated it, claimed ownership—he, Karibʾīl—of a part [20] of the irrigated area of Muhaʾmirᵘᵐ at Nagrān, and imposed upon Muhaʾmirᵘᵐ a tribute for *Almaqah and for Sabaʾ

RES 3946

These are the cities and the territories which Karibʾīl Watār son of Dhamarʿalī mukarrib of Sabaʾ fortified and transferred to *Almaqah and to Sabaʾ:

—when he set [up an alliance of communes with a god and a patron and with a pact and an alliance];

— . . . *T*..[,] *Kutāl*ᵘᵐ, Yathill, Wanab, Radāʿ, *Wqbᵐ*, *ʾwwᵐ*, Yaʿāratᵘᵐ, *(Ḥ)nḏfⁿ*, *Nʿwt* dhāt *Fddᵐ*, *Ḥḏrʾb*, and *Tms¹ᵐ*;

—provided with an enclosure wall Talnin, Ṣnwt, *Ṣ*[15 signs]²*dm;*

—fortified Radāʿ and Mayfaʿ in *Hbʿᵐ*;

—fortified *Mḥrtᵐ* and the two irrigated perimeters of the two cities of Tamnaʿ;

—fortified Waʿlān, *Mwtbtᵐ*, and Kadūr;

—kept the Offspring of ʿAmm in its cities because they had 'taken as brothers' *Almaqah, Karibʾīl, [and Sabaʾ;]

—[acquired from] ʿAmmīwaqah dhu-Amīrᵘᵐ [the city] of *Ṭyb* as freehold and its estates in the irrigated perimeter of *Ngy* as freehold, *ʾfqᵐ* in perpetual ownership, *Ḥrtⁿ* as well as its mountain, its valley, and its pastures in full ownership, as well as [3] the valleys which descend from *Mrs¹* and their pastures {those of the valleys}, in full ownership;

—acquired from Ḥaḍarhumū b. *Mfʿlⁿ*: *S²ʿbⁿ*, its valleys, and its pastures from *Ms³rr* until [12 letters] *ʾbyt* until *ʿtk Wrḫⁿ* and *Ḏf* and all that he took possession of at *Bqṯṯ* and at *Dnⁿ*, in full ownership;

—acquired *Syḥw*, in full ownership;

—purchased *Ḥdnⁿ*, clients of Ḥaḍarhumū dhu-*Mfʿlⁿ*, and *Gbrⁿ*, clients of *Yʿṯq* dhu-Khawlān dhu-*Yrrt* and [4] added them to his subjects Fayshān;

—acquired from *Rʿbⁿ* son of Khālīʾamar dhu-*Wqbⁿ* all that he claimed from *Wqbⁿ*, its flood plain, its valley, its mountain, and [its pastures, in full ownership];

—acquired Yaʿāratᵘᵐ, its flood plain, its valley, its mountain, and [its pastures, in full ownership];

—acquired *ʾwwⁿ* and its irrigated area, in full ownership;

—acquired all that Khālīkarib dhu-*Ḡrⁿ* possessed at *Mḍyqt*, in full ownership;

—acquired *Ṯmdt*, its flood plain, its mountain, and its pasture, in full ownership; [5]

—acquired all that he claimed from *Mḍyqt* from the two hills (?){*gḏwty*} of *Ḥndfⁿ* to the city of *Ṯyb*, in full ownership;

—acquired all that he had claimed in the irrigated {*ms¹qy*} of *Ngy*, in full ownership;

—acquired *Zwt* and . . . , their . . . and their pastures, in full ownership;

—acquired *ʾkryy* and its flood plain, in full ownership;

—took possession of *Nwʿt* from *S²dm* and from *Ḥbʿ ⁿ* until its borders;

—built the upper part of Salḥᵘᵐ his palace from the bedrock upwards;

—built in {the valley of} Adhana⁶t the catchment {*ʿs¹n*} of *Tafīsh and its deflector {*mzf*} to irrigate Yasrān;

—built the catchment {*mʿs¹n*} of *Ylṭ* and its deflector to irrigate Abyan;

—built *Ẓrb* and *Mlkⁿ* for Yasrān;

—built and erected the structures of Yasrān and of Abyan in the middle of both of them;

—con[structed . . . 14 letters . . .]..

—Here are the palm groves which he acquired at Yasrān, increasing his estate: dhu-Yaqahmalik, Athʾabān, Madhābān, *Mfrs³nⁿ*, dhu-Anfān, Qaṭnatān, *S³fwtⁿ*, [7] *S¹lqⁿ*, dhu-*Fdhⁿ*, dhu-Awthānᵘᵐ, *Dbs¹w*, *Mfrs³ⁿ*, dhu-*Ḥbbⁿ*, *ʾmrw*, *Mhgwⁿ*. Those he acquired at *Ṯrq*: *ʿn(g)ny*, *Ḥdrw*, *S²s³ʿ*(ⁿ) [. . . 16 . . .] . . . and those with which he increased what he had acquired at Yasrān: *Frʿtⁿ*, *Tyws¹ⁿ*, and Athʾabān;

—when he did the hunt of *Krwm*;

—when he performed the *mhyʿ* rite of *Lqẓ* for ʿAthtar dhu-*Fs¹d*, built for ʿAthtar *Wrqⁿ* and acquired the slopes {*mfrs³t'ⁿ*} which {make up} the territory [8] {which is} regulated, from the border of *ʿqbⁿ* until dhu-Anfān, in full ownership;

—acquired all the property of Ḥaḍarhumū son of Khālīʾamar dhu-*Mfʿlⁿ* first born, all that he possessed on the territory of Wanab, all the territory of *Ftrⁿ* and *Qnt* and all his cities *Mfʿlⁿ*[, *Ftrⁿ*, *Qnt*, and Gaww, as well as his mountains,] his valleys, and the pastures of its cities, in full ownership, to add them to his subjects of Fayshān, clients he had bought at Ḥaḍarhumū dhu-*Mfʿlⁿ* in his cities *Mfʿlⁿ*, *Ftrⁿ*, *Qnt*, and Gaww.

This long text from Ṣirwāḥ (ancient Ṣirwāḥ), dated to 675–650 BC, is carved on two huge superimposed blocks, and assesses the achievements of the reign of

the Sabaean *mukarrib* Karibʾīl Watār. It is clearly later than the *mukarrib*'s death, and this ruler was not (formally) this inscription's author.

This exceptional document, comparable to the yet unpublished great text of Yathaʿʾamar Watār (see **2.5**), certainly took contemporary Assyrian annals as a model. During his reign, Karibʾīl Watār consolidated and extended Sabaean hegemony over a very large part of Yemen (Fig. 2.8). These successes were echoed abroad: the alabaster tablet deposited by Sennacherib, king of Assyria (r. 705–681), in the foundations of the Temple of the New Year at Ashshur, mentions an offering of precious stones and aromatic products sent by 'Karibilu king Saba'. It is quite remarkable that the Assyrian ruler gave a royal title to the foreign ruler, and that he considered the precious stones and aromatic products as a gift and not as tribute.

The text mentioning 'Karibilu' is later than 689, and predates Sennacherib's death in 681. If Karibilu's position was already recognized abroad, it might be supposed that he had been ruling for some time. The inscription above could have been written a few years after the offering to the temple at Ashshur, or perhaps even decades later. The text should therefore be placed somewhere between 675 and 650 BC. To the right and to the left of the text a vertical stroke isolates a narrow margin in which two symbols of the *mukarribs* appear.[41]

The conquest of Ḥaḍramawt at the beginning of the fourth century AD

[**2.32**]   Ir 32

Saʿdtaʾlab Yatlaf ibn Gadan[um], governor of the A[2]rabs of the king of Sabaʾ, i.e. Kiddat, Madhḥig[um], *Ḥarī[3]m[um], *Bāhil[um], and Zaydʾīl, and of all the Arabs of Saba[4]ʾ, Ḥimyar[um], Ḥaḍramawt, and Yamnat, dedicated to his lord [5] *Almaqah master of *Awām this bronze statue, as thanks[6]giving because there was his servant Saʿdtaʾlab dhū-Gadan[7um] and his troop {composed of} Arabs garrisoned at Nashq[um] {protecting} against Ḥa[8]ḍramawt, when reached them a call and a requisition [9] on behalf of their lord Dhamarʿalī Yuhabirr king Sabaʾ, [10] dhū-Raydān, Ḥaḍramawt, and Yamnat, so that may leave for a military campaign [11] and wage war Saʿdtaʾlab dhū-Gadan[um] {and his relatives} and that he may take the lead of the commune [12] of Sabaʾ, of notables of Marib, and Arabs of the king of Sabaʾ, i.e. Kidda[13]t, Nagrān, and *Suflān;

And they advanced until the temple of [14] <Ya>ghrū:

and they waited {there} for all of their troops during seven days; [15] and they did not leave again until {arrived} from Sabaʾ three hundred m[16]en, and of the Arabs three hundred et twen[17]ty men for the chase, riding horses, which had been sent[18] to them to keep watch in the city of Nashq[um], which fifty horses joined;

and they went on campaign and launched a foray against the cit[20]y of Ṣawʾarān, and began the battle against them the notables of Ṣaw[21]ʾarān at the gate of the city of Ṣawʾarān, and defeated dhū-Gadan[um] [22] and his army a part of them, causing dead, prisoners, cap[23]tives, and booty in quantity;

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[41] See Müller 1985: 652–8.
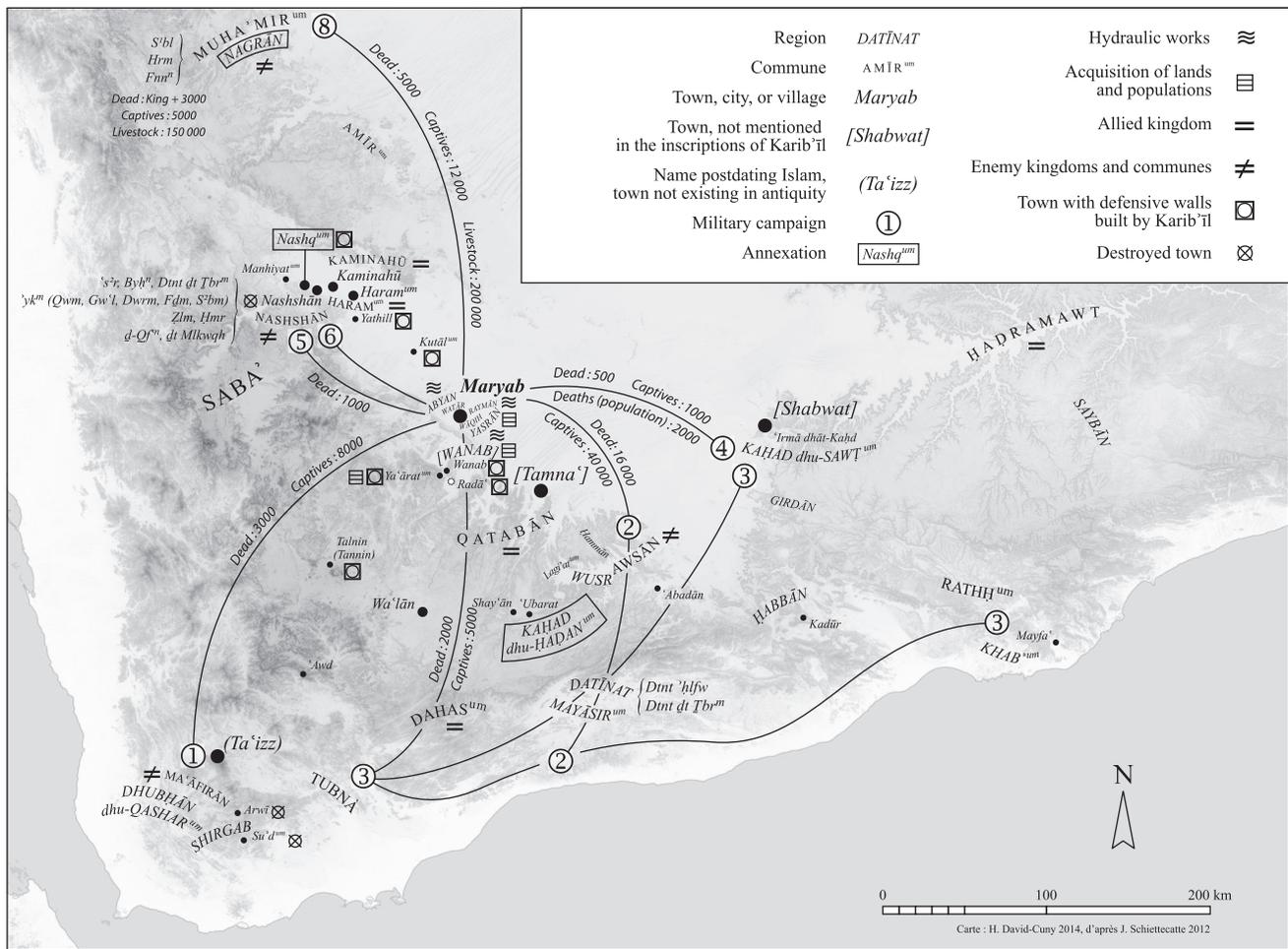
Fig. 2.8. The conquests and achievements of Karib'īl Watār, son of Dhamar'alī, *mukarrib* of Saba', at the beginning of the seventh century BC. Map drawn by H. David-Cuny, after Jérémie Schiettecatte, and amended by Carla Russo.

then, surrendered [24] before them and went on expedition with them the men of Ṣawʾarān against [25] the notables of Shibām and of Ṣadafān, and they began the battle and fought with [26] Ṣadafān and the notables of Shibām at the gate of Shibām, and they slew amo[27]ngst them seventy men, so that they retreated within their city, [28] entrenched themselves there and resisted against them thirteen da[29]ys until they surrendered;

then, they launched a foray and laid siege to [30] Raṭghat^um, Sayʾūn, Maryamat^um, and Ḥidb, and made them surrender, [31] and they launched a raid until ʿUrr *Ahlān, and Tarīm, and they went into battle with [32] the notables of Tarīm, and they slew a good number of notables of Tarīm, who [33] returned to their city in a disorderly way, and they encircled and besie[34]ged them for twelve days, and they felled two thousand palm trees {ʾʿmd}, and [35] they yielded and made a call, submitted, and surrendered in front of them;

a[36]fter that, they launched a raid against Dammūn, Mishṭat, and ʿUrr Kulayb^um [36] which surrendered in front of them, and they took control of all the cities of Ḥaḍramawt and of Sa[38]rīrān;

after that, they returned and went home with trophies, pri[39]soners, captives, and booty in abundance, and they slew one thousand three hu[40]ndred of the van-quished, and surrendered a hundred prisoners and t[41]hree thousand captives, and they returned and went home in the city of Ẓa[42]fār near their lord the king, and they brought back with them the ch[43]iefs who dominated Ḥaḍramawt, i.e. Rabīʿa b. Wāʾil^um, A[44]fṣā b. Gummān, Jusham b. Mālik^um, Asad^um b. Sa[45]lmān, ʿĀdiyat b. Nimr^um, Qays^um b. Basharʾil, [46] Buhth^um b. S³ky^m, and Thawbān b. Gadhīmat the Ṣadafites, and [47] Yadaʿ[....] the Saybānite, and Quḍāʿ^um the Saybānite, and four [48] [......]...[......].....[.........]may he come back with them from [49] [.........

The inscription, which is carved on a long stone stela, commemorates an offering consecrated to *Almaqah in the Great Temple of Marib, and includes an account of the conquest of Ḥaḍramawt by Ḥimyar at the beginning of the 320s AD. This account is from the perspective not of the main players involved, but from that of the Sabaean chief of auxiliary troops.[42]

Society

A Sabaean lady offers an important contribution
[**2.33**]   YMN 19 (Avanzini 1991: 159–60)
Khālīḥamad, wife of {a member of the lineage of} Gālidān, daughter of a member {of the lineage of} Ḥnz^m, has built from the foun²dations to the summit the house of *Tibāʿ and has helped her two husbands ³ Sharaḥ^um and Shaʿb^um, and her sons, banū Gālidān, with a thousand coi⁴ns of silver in the settlement of a conflict at the expense of the lineage (?) and to the advantage of the Ṣirwāḥite.

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[42] Müller 1981.

The inscription, probably from Bayt al-Jālid (some 45 km north of Ṣanʿāʾ), dating to the first century AD, is carved on a long stone block, which very likely decorated the facade of the house.[43]

Tombs

A collective burial
[**2.34**]   Gl 1379 = *CIH* 318 (Müller 1988: 622)
[ʿAmmīshibām . . . and Iliʾaws . . .[2] . . .] have dedicated to Taʾlab their tomb[3] on the mountain {to prohibit} its purchase and sale. May no one address any claim against them[4] concerning the tomb in all the commune of Samʿī. Thus have proclaimed (?)[5] ʿAmmīshibām and Iliʾaws that no one will claim in the tomb a part[6] and a section, even as they live (?). And may this tomb be used {only} as a tomb, and concerning any purchase, sale, and transaction, no one can elevate a claim while the tomb's entirety belongs to Taʾlab.

Modes of inhumation are varied, and can include tombs dug into the rock with many *loculi*, built tombs, and graves sunken into sediment. In the first two categories, space available is divided into a 'section' (*qs³mt*) and into a 'part' (*ṯ ʿdt*); the texts provide details on their distribution.

The funerary slab of Muʿāwiya son of Rabīʿa, king of Qaḥṭān
[**2.35**]   al-Anṣārī, *Stela of Muʿāwiya*
Tomb of Muʿāwiyat son of Rabīʿat of the clan of (*Ml*)ṯ the Qa²ḥṭānite, king of Qaḥṭān and of Madhḥig which has built over[3] him his servant Hōfāʿamm son of Barrān of the clan of ʾlʾ.

The inscription is carved on a long stone block, which in all likelihood decorated the construction which lay on top of the tomb underground.[44] It is from Qaryat al-Faʾw (ancient Qaryat), dating to the second century AD.

Even from this very brief survey, the wealth of detail provided by epigraphic texts is apparent. Inscriptions are also of great importance for understanding the period during which the South Arabian region developed more substantial connections with events taking place far to the north. This began with the conquest of South Arabia, and then *Arabia Deserta* by Ḥimyar—the subject of the following chapter.

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[43] See also Beeston 1997.   [44] al-Ansary 1979; al-Ansary 1982, facsimile p. 144.

3

Ḥimyar, Aksūm, and *Arabia Deserta* in Late Antiquity

The Epigraphic Evidence

Christian Julien Robin

INTRODUCTION

As noted in Ch. 2, Yemen, for most of its ancient history, was divided between several rival kingdoms (Fig. 2.1).[1] This division ended during the last quarter of the third century AD, when the kingdom of Ḥimyar[um] (Arabic Ḥimyar),[2] after repelling an Aksūmite (Ethiopian) invasion,[3] overwhelmed the kingdom of Saba[ʾ] in *c.* AD 275, and then conquered the Ḥaḍramawt in *c.*300 (cf. **2.32**). This unification was effected by Yāsir[um] Yuhanʿim (r. *c.* 265–87) and his Shammar Yuharʿish (r. *c.* 286–311). It was initially political, with rulers from then on called 'kings of Saba[ʾ], of dhu-Raydān (Ḥimyar), of Ḥaḍramawt, and of Yamnat (the South)', but this consolidation also became linguistic, since, from that point, Saba[ʾ]ic became the only language used in written documents. The unification would also eventually become institutional, with the general adoption of the Ḥimyarite calendar and era (which likely began with the vernal equinox of 110 BC) and, above all, a religious reform.[4]

This chapter examines the epigraphic evidence for certain aspects of Ḥimyar's religious culture, as well as its political relationship with its neighbours, specifically Aksūm and the peoples of *Arabia Deserta*. Several of the inscriptions also reflect the growing interaction of Ḥimyar with the Roman and Persian empires, and these complement the Graeco-Roman, Syriac, and

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[1] Ch. 3 is translated by Martin Makinson.
[2] In the text below, the ending *-um* is omitted when it is not necessary for the reader's understanding.
[3] Robin 2012b: 276–7.   [4] See generally on Ḥimyar: Yule 2007 and Gajda 2009.
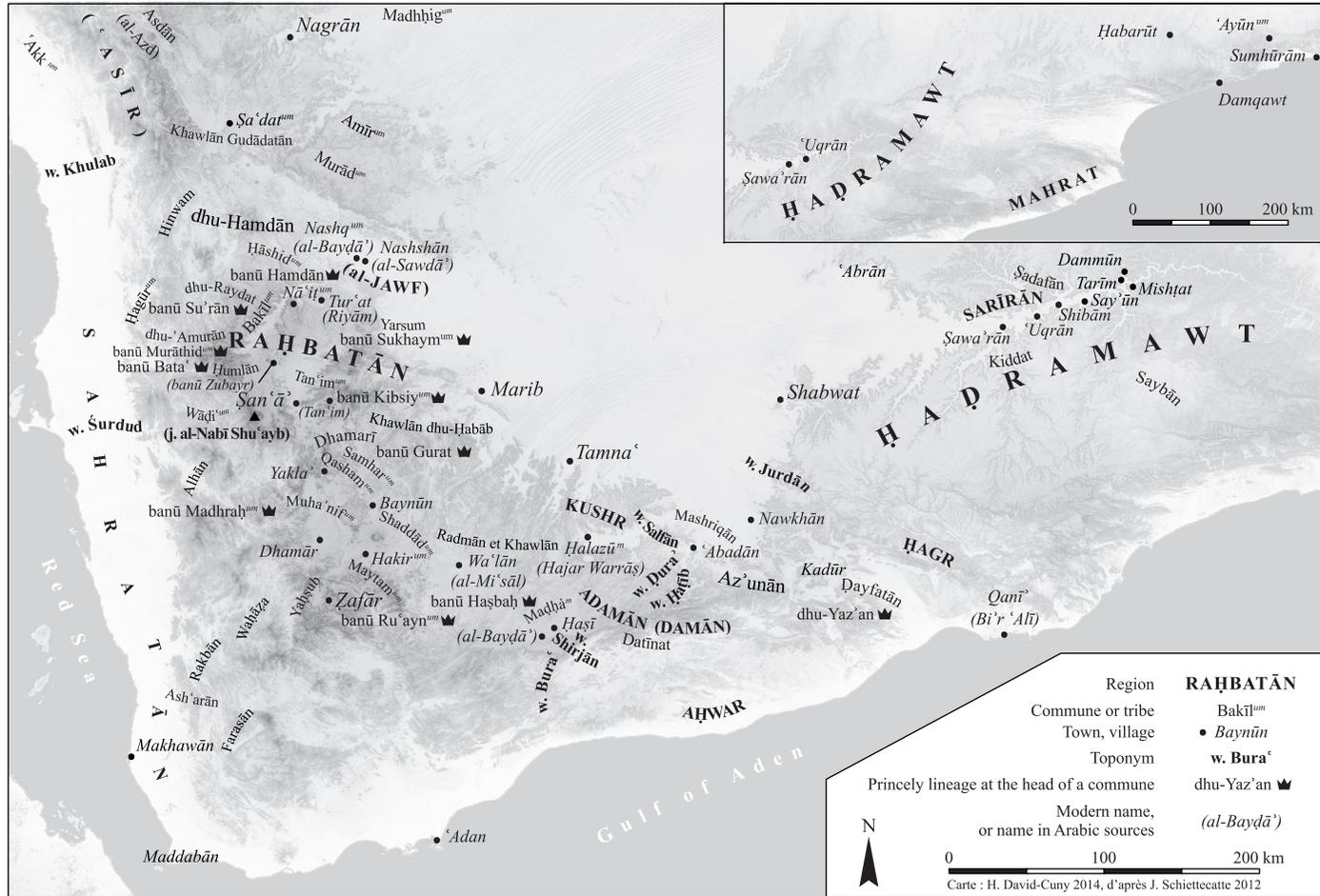
Fig. 3.1. Yemen in the time of the kingdom of Ḥimyar (first century BC–sixth century AD). Map drawn by H. David-Cuny, after Jérémie Schiettecatte; amended by Carla Russo.

Arabic sources discussed throughout this volume. For editorial and transliteration conventions in use here, see Ch. 2. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are those of the author.

RELIGIOUS REFORM: JUDAISM IN ḤIMYAR

Rather than adapting one of the ancient polytheistic cults of Arabia, the kings of Ḥimyar chose to reject polytheism and favour Judaism, but without formally adhering to its creed. This development is first observed in inscriptions written by individuals from *c.*320, and it eventually became the kingdom's official policy.[5]

This rejection of polytheism was radical, and final. In the whole of Yemen, no inscription later than 380 is explicitly pagan. The great temples, already neglected for decades, ceased to be visited by worshippers. The Great Temple of Marib, which yielded some 800 inscriptions from the first four centuries AD, shows no text which postdates 380.[6] This absence of any epigraphic reference to polytheism is significant, in that the 130 or so inscriptions available for the period 380–560 make up a substantial corpus of the available documents. This obviously does not imply the disappearance of polytheism itself, but only its exclusion from the public sphere. It is likely that pagan cults survived discreetly, outside the ruling circle.

The rejection of polytheism was not the result of internal evolution which gradually transformed a pagan deity—first into a supreme god, and then into a monotheistic deity. Instead, there was a decisive break, as shown by the abandonment of the old terminology and the sudden appearance, and common use, of loan words of Aramaic or Hebrew origin: for instance *āmēn*, *ʿālam* (world), *bāraka* (to bless), *haymanōt* (guarantee), *kanīsat* (meeting hall), *shālôm*, *ṣalāt* (prayer), *zakāt* (grace), *Yiśrāʾīl* (Israel), and so on.

Between 380 and *c.*530 the inscriptions of Ḥimyar reveal only two religious orientations: Judaism (**3.1–2**) and a 'bare' form of monotheism, the religion practised by the rulers in their inscriptions (**3.3**). These two religious orientations—Jews (**3.4**), and 'Judaeo-Monotheists' (**3.5**)—call their community hall or house (probably a place of prayer, study, and teaching) a *mikrāb*, a new word meaning 'place of blessing'. One can logically suggest that worshippers belonging to both creeds used the same *mikrāb*, since these buildings were built by the king or the local prince (**3.5–6**).

A noteworthy part of the aristocracy explicitly declared its adherence to Judaism via a claim to belong to Israel, an apparent reference to a new community within Ḥimyar, and indicating a break with their commune of origin (**3.7**).

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[5] Robin 2012b: 263–6, 270–2; Bowersock 2013: 78–91.
[6] Sabaʾ's capital was first called Maryab (*Mryb*), then Marib (*Mrb*); in Arabic, its name becomes Maʾrib.

Religious affiliation could also be shown more discreetly through the use of borrowed terms, like ritual exclamations such as *shālôm* or *āmēn* (**3.5**). It is quite often difficult to decide on the exact nature of the claim being made. For example, when a prince founded a cemetery meant for Jews only, off-limits to Gentiles (**3.4**), it is difficult to know whether he was either 'truly Jewish' or whether he was simply granting his protection to the Jews. The remainder of the aristocracy and the kings adhered to a monotheism which was in all likelihood a minimalist form of Judaism, with no explicit reference to Israel, and undoubtedly advocating a natural morality like the one stated in the Noachic laws.

If one takes into account that no known inscription contemporary to this period displays an orientation favourable to Christianity, one can conclude that the Ḥimyarite rulers had founded a new religion inspired from Judaism, called 'Raḥmānism' by A. F. L. Beeston, although the term 'Judaeo-Monotheism' is preferable. This new religion formalized a type of belief in Judaism seen elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, whose followers might be called 'fearers of God' (*metuentes* and *theosebeis*).[7] It is relevant to note that one Ḥimyarite inscription clearly reflects this notion, asking that 'God, Lord of the Sky and the Earth, grants | fear (*ṣbs¹*, probably a borrowing from Greek *sebas*) of His Name' (see **3.5**).

Ḥimyar's adoption of this religion necessarily affected relations with the Roman empire; under the reign of Constantius II (337–61) Theophilus the Indian had headed an embassy to promote Christianity in Ḥimyar, which had failed.[8] From the fourth century onwards, religious choice and political choice were increasingly inseparable (Chs 1, 6).[9]

Religious Reform: The Texts

[**3.1**] Bayt al-Ashwal 1 (Figs 3.2, 3.3)

Yəhûdâ Yakkuf built, laid the foundations of, and finished his palace Yakrub, from the base to the summit, [2] with the assistance and the grace of his Lord who created him, the Lord of the living and the dead, the Lord of the Sk[3]y and of the Earth, who created everything, thanks to the prayer of his people Israel, with the support of his lord Dha[4]ra''amar Ayma(')n, king of Sabaʾ, of dhu-Raydān, of Ḥaḍramawt, and of Yamnat, and with the support of [his sons] [5] and of his kin; and so that no one decides to cause harm {to this palace} while the ruling of the king in favor of the mikrāb Aḥlāk ..[. . . . .]

It should be noted that the translation of the last sentence, after 'so that no one', is very hypothetical.

[7] E.g. Joseph. *AJ* 14.72; see Robin 2014a.
[8] Philostorgius, *HE* 3.4; Robin 2012b: 265; Bowersock 2013: 80, 84.
[9] Robin 2012b: 293–7.

Fig. 3.2. The Jewish inscription from Bayt al-Ashwal (**3.1**). Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

Fig. 3.3. Detail of the Jewish inscription from Bayt al-Ashwal (**3.1**), showing the central monogram. Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

Monogram to the right: *Yhwd*ʾ, name of the author of the text.
Central monogram: *Ykrb*, name of the palace.
Monogram to the left: *Ykf*, the author's attribute.

In the area of the central monogram, one can read in Hebrew:

Yehūdah has written; let one remember in a good way; āmēn, shālôm, amen

The text, carefully written, is carved on a large block from Ẓafār, Ḥimyar's capital, and was reused in the nearby village of Bayt al-Ashwal. Its author, Yəhûdâ Yakkuf, commemorates the construction of a palace. The invocation to the king Dharaʾʾamar Ayman enables the text to be dated between *c*.380 and *c*.420.

The author, despite being close to the ruler, does not belong to the great nobility: he makes no mention of any title, any father's name, or any lineage. It is difficult to tell whether Yəhûdâ Yakkuf is a Ḥimyarite who converted to Judaism, or a Jew from the Diaspora who settled in Yemen. In favour of the former, one can invoke the adjective Yakkuf (Arabic Yankuf), which is typically Ḥimyarite, and was even known to have been borne by a king. If so, Yəhûdâ might be seen as a character simultaneously enjoying both a high position (he built a palace in the capital, and was the client of one of the ruling kings) as well as being of lowly social status (since he makes no mention of title or ancestry). It is, however, also possible that Yəhûdâ was a Jew of foreign origin, who settled temporarily or permanently in Ẓafār. If one is to argue in favour of this last hypothesis, one will recall that the text's author is familiar with Aramaic, since he twice uses the consonant *alif* to transliterate the sound /a/ (in *Yhwdʾ* and *ʾymʾn*).[10]

> [**3.2**] CIH 543 = ẒM 772 A + B[11]
> [May] He bless and be blessed, the name of Raḥmānān who is in the Sky, Israel and [2] his God, the Lord of the Jews, who has helped their servant Shahr^{um},[3] his mother *Bd^m*, his wife Shams^{um}, their chi[4]ldren {from them both} *Ḍm^m*, Abīshaʿar, and Miṣr[5]um, and all of their relativ[es . . .

This fragmentary text was carved in relief on a stone slab, also from Ẓafār. It contains only one blessing, so its purpose, perhaps the commemoration of a building or of a tomb, remains uncertain. It appears to differentiate Raḥmānān and the 'god of the Jews', respectively the God of the Monotheists ('Judeo-Monotheism'), and that of the Jews.

The social rank of its authors remains unknown because the end of their titles has disappeared. The local provenance of the names suggests that they are converted Ḥimyarites, and indeed none of these personal names seems to have a biblical or Jewish model. Two, Shahr^{um} and Shams^{um}, which mean 'new Moon' and 'Sun', seem to be inspired by polytheism. A third name, Abīshaʿr, could derive from a deity, if indeed one sees in Shaʿr the star Sirius (Arabic *al-Shiʿrà*: Qurʾān 53:49). One should note, however, that the root *s²ʿr* is attested in South Arabian onomastics as bearing no relation whatsoever with Sirius, as in *S²ʿr^m* or *S²ʿrwd*. The three last names of the inscription, *Bd^m*, *Ḍm^m*, and Miṣr^{um}, appear to be South Arabian, but they are uncommon. The text, which is undated, probably goes back to the period of 'triumphant' Judaism, that is, *c.*370–530.

> [**3.3**] Bayt al-Ashwal 2
> Malkīkarib Yuhaʾmin and his sons Abīkarib Asʿad and Dharaʾʾamar Ayman, kings of Sabaʾ, of dhu-Raydān, [2] of Ḥaḍramawt, and of Yamnat, have built, laid the foundations of, and completed the palace *Kln^{3m}*, from its base to its summit, with the support of their lord, the Lord of the Sky[4] in the month of dhu-diʾāwān {January} of the year four hundred and ninety-three.

[10] Garbini 1970: 153–61, pl. Ia; Degen and Müller 1974; Robin 1991: 145, pls 8 and 38.
[11] ʿAbd Allāh 1987.

Fig. 3.4. A decree creating a cemetery reserved for Jews (**3.4**). Facsimile drawn by Maria Gorea.

This text, dated to January 384 and carved in relief on a large block, also originated from Ẓafār and was reused in Bayt al-Ashwal. King Malkīkarib Yuhaʾmin, sharing the co-regency with his two sons, commemorating the construction of a new palace, publicly and for the first time expresses his rejection of polytheism and the establishment of a new religion, without giving the slightest indication about the exact nature of his monotheism.[12]

[**3.4**] Ḥaṣī 1 (Fig. 3.4)
1 Ilīyafaʿ Arśal ibn Ḥaṣbaḥ, Yaʿguf, *Yqʾmwt* dhu-Sufār
2 and Ashraq dhu-*Ṣ̌ht*, prince of the two communes Maḍhàᵐ and Sufārᵘᵐ, has gran-
3 ted to the Lord of the Sky four plots, next to this rock, descending
4 until the fence of the cultivated area, to bury the Jews there, with the guarantee
5 that the burial of a Gentile next to them will be avoided, so that they may fulfil their obligations towards the Jews. As for the three plots
6 and the well which are within the fence, {they are meant} as a concession, to the *mikrāb* Ṣūrī-
7 ʾīl, and as for the plot which is under Ṣūrīʾīl, that of the fence, {it is meant} for the *mikrāb*, in order that it may fulfil its obligations
8 and provide satisfaction. In compensation, they {the Jews} have given, chosen, and yielded to the lineage dhu-ʿĀ-

¹² Garbini 1970: 160–3 and pl. Ic; Müller 2010: 59.

9 mir(^um) a plot of same importance and same value, and to the lineage dhu-
    ʿĀmir^um they have conceded

10 a well and land which produces summer harvests and autumn harvests,
    {having} the importance and value of this

11 well and of {this} land. With the guarantee, the prohibition, and the threat of
    the Lord of the Sky

12 and of the Earth, one shall avoid burying a Gentile on these plots, between him
    and the Jews

13 and against those who do not give to the *mikrāb* its land and to the Jews their plots.

14 Concerning the incumbent (*ḥazzān*) of Ṣūrīʾīl, his subsistence has been
    provided for, as well as {that} of all who will serve the *mikrāb*, with a well
    made of masonry

15 downhill from the {wādī} Akbadī, with the guarantee that he will use the well
    {which is} at the place of those who will serve Ṣūrīʾīl.

This long text carved on granite was found at the edge of a valley a few
hundred metres from the site of the ancient city of Ḥaṣī (itself located some
210 km to the south-east of Ṣanʿāʾ). If the general sense—the creation of a
cemetery for Jews only—is not difficult to understand, the interpretation of
several passages remains hypothetical.

The author, who belongs to the lineage of the banū Ḥaṣbaḥ, is the prince
(*qayl*) of the commune of Maḍḥàʾ^m, of which Ḥaṣī is the main town. He
decrees that the cemetery meant only for the Jews is granted to God. He
does not seem to have himself given the plots on which this graveyard was
established, but he arbitrated between the various parts and he took care that
the guard would be paid an income of sorts.

The chronology of the text remains uncertain, but is perhaps to be placed
somewhere towards the end of the fourth or during the fifth century. The
prince shares with the Jews the faith in the same God and is apparently
favourable to them, but whether he is a Jew himself is uncertain.[13]

[**3.5**] Ry 534 + Rayda 1
Marthadʾīlān Yarīm ibn Hamdān, Suʾrān, Aśwaf and Agraʿ ....[.......] have
built and completed this synagogue Barīk for Īl, ² lord of the Sky and the Earth,
for the salvation of their lords Abīkarib Asʿad, Ḥaśś[ān Yu]haʾmin, Maʿdīkarib
Yuhanʿim, Marthadʾīlān Yaz³ʾan, and Shuriḥbiʾīl Yaʿfur, kings of Saba, of dhu-
Raydān, of Ḥaḍramawt, and [of Yamn]at, and so that God, Lord of the Sky and
the Earth, may grant them ⁴ fear {ṣbs¹} of his name and the salvation of their
selves, of their companions and of their subj[ects,] in times of war and peace. In
the month ⁵ of dhu-khirāfān {August}, of {the year} five hundred and forty-three.
Shālôm, shālôm, *mikrāb* Barīk.

The inscription, dated to August 433, which commemorates the construction
of a *mikrāb*, was carved in relief on a long stone slab, now broken into two
fragments reused separately at Rayda (ancient Raydat), 55 km to the north of

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[13] Robin 2001b.

Ṣanʿāʾ. Its author, who belongs to the lineage of the banū Hamdān, is the prince (*qayl*) of what was at the time the most important commune to the north of Ṣanʿāʾ. He gives the *mikrāb* the name of *Barīk*, 'Blessed' in Aramaic, and concludes the text with an exclamation twice repeating the word *shālôm* borrowed from Hebrew. It is likely that this prince belonged to a Ḥimyarite lineage which converted to Judaism.[14]

> [**3.6**] Ja 856 = Fa 60
> Malkīkarib Yuhaʾmin and his son [Abīkarib Asʿad, kings of] [2] Sabaʾ, of dhu-Raydān, of Ḥaḍramawt and [of Yamnat have built from the foundations to] [3] the summit their *mikrāb* Barīk for their salvation and [. . . . . .]

This, the most ancient inscription commemorating the construction of a *mikrāb*, is carved on a block of stone which probably originated from the monument's facade. It was found at Marib, the old capital of Sabaʾ, which still retained its status as a royal city under the Ḥimyarite dominance.

When this text was written, King Malkīkarib had only one co-regent, whose name has vanished. In the other texts there are two who ruled after him. It is therefore likely that Ja 856 dates to the early days of Malkīkarib's reign, between *c.*375 and January 384 (see **3.3**).

It is remarkable that the inscription does not include a religious invocation. One can suppose that the two rulers provided (financial) support to the Monotheists without adhering officially to the new religion. As with the previous text, the name of the *mikrāb*, *Bryk*—that is, 'Blessed'—is borrowed from Aramaic.[15]

> [**3.7**] ẒM 2000
> [Binyā]mîn Abīshammar, his wife Abīʿalī, and their children Ya[hû][2][dâ] Marthadʾilān, banū *Ḥry*[n], Dhāriḥ, Kahnal, *Bʾl*[n], [3] *Nḥs*[ln], and Haywat[um], have built, laid the foundations, and completed their home [4] Yaruśś for their own life and salvation as well as that of their children, of their kin [5] and of their servants. With [6] the assistance and the power of their lord Īlān, [7] master of the Sky and of the Earth, with the assistance [8] of their people Israël and with the assistance of their lord Shuriḥbi[9]ʾīl king of Sabaʾ, of dhu-Raydān, and of Ḥaḍramawt. May [10] Raḥmānān give them there <in this house> an exemplary life. In the month [11] of dhu-thābatān {April} five hundred and eighty. Āmēn.

On a beautiful slab from Ẓafār, a group of 'true' Ḥimyarites (as their lineage names indicate) commemorate the construction of a palace. The text's phraseology implies that they are of the Jewish faith, although the date of their conversion is not precisely stated. The date of the document, April 470, is some 90 years after the official adoption of Judeo-Monotheism.

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[14] Robin 1996a: 703–6 and figs 4 and 5; Müller 2010: 62. Concerning conversions to Judaism in an Arab tribe, see Robin 2013b.
[15] Jamme 1960; Ryckmans (G.) 1952.

The authors, whose lineages are not well known, apparently belong to the local nobility. On the one hand, they directly depend on the king and build a palace in the capital, but on the other, they are not ruling a territorial princedom. They do not reveal the commune to which they belong, which is normally named after the king, but mention 'Israel their people' before the king himself. However, the way that the terms such as *Yahūd* and *Iśrā'īl* are used in the Ḥimyarite inscriptions suggests that *Iśrā'īl* is a political community replacing the ancient communes.[16]

It should be noted that the readings of the personal names *[Binyā]mîn* and *Ya[hū]²[dâ]* are very hypothetical. If it were correct, it would lead to the supposition that the male authors bear a double name, the first one Jewish and the second Ḥimyarite.

ḤIMYAR CONQUERS *ARABIA DESERTA*

In the third century, the Sabaean army had not ventured beyond Qaryat al-Faʾw; in the fourth, Ḥimyarite armies ranged far afield, operating in the Ḥijāz, Najd, and the Ḥasāʾ (**3.8**). It is difficult to identify precisely which factors led the Ḥimyarites to extend their reach into *Arabia Deserta*. The forays were certainly not for mercantile reasons: long-distance caravan trade had gone into decline during the first century, in favour of maritime exchange (Chs 1 and 2).[17] The exaction of taxes on agricultural and craft products as well as livestock, both in the oases and from the nomads, could yield some secondary income, but was certainly not an aim which justified the extensive actions, and investment, taken by Ḥimyar. The most likely motive was to stop wars between communes and tribes within the kingdom, by offering them opportunities outside its confines. Financing such expensive actions might have been connected with the decline of polytheism; when pagan temples were neglected, and then closed in the fourth century, their treasuries could be harnessed for the wars to the north.[18]

This policy of expansion was not devoid of risk, and it seems that the unification of Yemen by Ḥimyar under the reign of Shammar Yuharʿish might have been a source of concern for the Sasanian Persians and the Romans. Indeed, several pieces of evidence in this early period suggest that the three states were becoming more aware of each other: for example, an Arab prince within the Roman and Persian sphere, Maraʾ (Imruʾ) al-Qays (see **7.3**) launched a raid against 'Nagrān, the city of Shammar'—that is, against the most northerly Ḥimyarite centre. A Ḥimyarite ambassador, dispatched by

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[16] Gajda 2004b; Robin 2004: 882–3 and fig. 13; Müller 2010: 81–2.
[17] Robin 2014b.   [18] Robin 2012b: 272.

Shammar to Ctesiphon and al-Ḥīra—which he calls 'Tanūkh'—was received without much enthusiasm (**3.9**). Another emissary, according to an unpublished text, travelled to 'Caesar king of the North' (*Qys¹rᵐ mlk S²ʾmt*). The relief at Bishapur discussed in Ch. 1, from the end of the third century, might also depict diplomatic relations between Persia and Ḥimyar.[19]

Although the conquest of *Arabia Deserta* seems to have been the initiative of the king, its execution was apparently left to others, and it was the princes of a vast group of communes of Western Ḥaḍramawt, the dhu-Yazʾan, who took responsibility for the expeditions in Central Arabia.[20] In doing so they used reinforcements from the Arab tribe of Kinda (*Kdt*) and from the tribal groups who depended on the latter, Madhḥij (*Mḏḥgᵐ*), and Murād (*Mrdᵐ*) (**3.8**).

Kinda, whose exact origins remain unknown, imposed its rule on the Qaryat al-Faʾw oasis in *c.*200, subjecting the tribes of Qaḥṭān and Madhḥij which had dominated the area beforehand. Kinda became a tributary of Sabaʾ a little later, around 220, when a Sabaean raid seized its king. Kinda was incorporated into the kingdom of Ḥimyar a few years before 300, when Shammar Yuharʿish received the homage of its ruler. From that point, it became a dependency of Ḥimyar, overseen by a 'delegate' (*ḫlft*) chosen from among members of the old royal family. A graffito informs us that this 'delegate', not recognized as a 'king' by the Ḥimyarites, still nevertheless claimed this title (**3.10**).

Ḥimyarite expansion became official when, at an unknown date between *c.*420 and *c.*445, Ḥimyar annexed extensive territories of Central and Western Arabia, as proven by the emergence of a new title: 'King of Sabaʾ, of dhu-Raydān, of Ḥaḍramawt, and of Yamnat, and of the Arabs of the Upper-Country and of the Coast'. In Central Arabia, Ḥimyar imposed its suzerainty upon the tribal confederation of Maʿaddᵘᵐ (Arabic Maʿadd), an event commemorated by a royal inscription carved in a desert ravine at Maʾsal al-Jumḥ, in the very heart of the Najd, some 205 km west of modern al-Riyāḍh (**3.11**; Plate 5). Apparently the Muḍar tribal confederation of Western Arabia, to which Quraysh was attached, also came under Ḥimyarite control. A fragmentary Ḥimyarite text mentions that a delegation of Muḍar and its king were travelling to Maʾsal. The author of the text, most certainly a king of Ḥimyar—perhaps Ḥaśśān Yuhaʾmin—suggests that Muḍar made allegiance to him (**3.12**).

The Arab-Islamic tradition does not dispute Ḥimyarite domination over *Arabia Deserta*, but it is more interested in Arab princes from the tribe of Kinda, to whom the Ḥimyarites would have granted the dignity of kings over Maʿadd (see **8.5–6**). This interest in Kinda reflects a rewriting of the past, undoubtedly the work of these kings' descendants, who had a clear interest in celebrating the antiquity and clout of their ancestors.[21]

It is difficult to gauge with precision the limits of the territory controlled by Ḥimyar, but it seems certain that this territory included almost all of *Arabia*

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[19] Overlaet 2009; Potts 2008.   [20] Robin 2014c.   [21] Robin 2012b: 272.

Deserta, right up to the vicinity of Lower Iraq and Palestine. This Ḥimyarite expansion probably took place at the expense of the Naṣrid kings of al-Ḥīra, clients of the Sasanians.

Ḥimyar and *Arabia Deserta*: The Texts

The deeds of the dhu-Yazʾan
[**3.8**] ʿAbadān 1 (Robin and Gajda 1994)

1 Malshān Aryam and his sons Khawliy^{um} Yazīd, Shuriḥbiʾīl ʾ(m.r), Maʿdīkarib [. . . . .] and Marthad^{um} ʾm(..), son of Malshān, and Barīl^{um} Yamgid, Khawliy^{um} Yazīd

2 and Shuriḥbiʾīl ʾ(..), son of Maʿdīkarib, of the {lineage of} Yazʾan, Yalghub, and Kibrān, princes [of the communes Mashriqān] and *Ḍayfatān, have carved and recorded in this inscription all

3 high deeds and hu[nts . . . .] .., agricultural estates (?) depending on the palaces, stone revetments {ʾs²ṣn}, deflectors {mḍlʾ}, terraced fields, [. . . . .v]ineyards, any feats and hunts they accomplished; they have accomplished all the high deeds that they

4 recorded in this inscription [. . . . . .]

Campaign 1
   Malshān left on an expedition while his son Khawliy^{um} was participating in battle for the first time with him [. . . . . .] Khawliy^{um} killed a man and captured a man; they took as booty captives and livestock in

5 abundance.

Campaign 2
   Khawliy^{um} then left on an expedition in the Sahratān with King Thaʾrān Yunʿim and killed two men; they took as booty captives and live[stock] in abundance.

Campaign 3
   Khawliy^{um} then left on an expedition, while, for the first time, was participating in battle his brother

6 Shuriḥbiʾīl [. . . . .]; Khawliy^{um} killed a man, Shuriḥbiʾīl captured a man and they took as booty captives and camels(?) in abundance.

Campaign 4
   Then left on an expedition Malshān and his sons Khawliy^{um}

7 and Shuriḥbiʾīl towards the Land of [. . . . .] and the A[ra]bs of Ḥaḍramawt . . . . and, from the land of Mahrat, against . . . . ..; they arrived at Yabrīn and, from Yabrīn,

8 . . . . the Arabs . . . . they gathered and returned . . . .

9 [. . . . .] they took as booty all the camels of the masters of . . . .

10 [. . . . .] they returned to the stronghold of ʿAbadān in the seventh month.

Campaign 5

Then Malshān, Khawliy^{um}, and Shuriḥbiʾī[l] left on an expedition

11 while Maʿ[dīkar]ib was participating in battle for the first time with them [. . . . . .] Mahrat and they fought Tughmaʾ; all the princes contributed to the massacre (?); their nobles and their commune captured, massacred, and defeated in battle seventy-two {warriors} and three hundred cap-

12 tives [. . .

Campaign 6

. . . . . .] Khawliy^{um}, Shuriḥbiʾīl, and Maʿdīkarib left on an expedition, while their brother Marthad^{um} was participating in battle for the first time and . . .

13 [. . . . .] and Murād^{um}, Mashriqān, *Ḍayfatān, and the Arabs of Ḥaḍra-mawt, of whom the Yazʾanids had taken the lead at the forefront

14 [. . . . .] Khawliy^{um} captured Thaʿlabat son of Salūl^{um}, chief of Iyāḍh^{um}; killed and defeated his brothers and

15 all the .. [. . . . .] and they took as booty [. . . . .] captives as well as two thousand five hundred camels; they seized and killed nine

16 horses [. . .

Campaign 7

. . . . . . Martha]d^{um} with king Thaʾrān Yunʿim in the Land of Asdān; they fought Ṣudāyān

17 and Rasan and killed [. . .

Campaign 8

. . . . . . Khawli]y^{um} and his brothers, sons of Malshān, against Gawwān and Khargān; they took the lead of

18 their commune and the citizens of Marib [. . . . .] . . ., Shaddād^{um} and Khawlān dhū-Ḥabāb and their commune, the citizens of Mashriqān and of *Ḍayfa-

19 tān; all their army was on the front li[ne . . . .] and three hundred horsemen; they waged war against the valiant Kharigat (?) and some tribes of Maʿadd^{um};

20 killed and defeated their nobles and their army .. [. . . . .] and a hundred captives; they took as booty three thousand two hundred camels

21 and seized and killed twenty-five horses.

Campaign 9

Then [. . . . .] left on an expedition together with his [brothers], sons of Malshān, with their commune, the citizens of Mashriqān and of *Ḍayfatān, against Mahrat,

22 two campaigns, when they took revenge on Waʾil^{um} son of [. . . . .] . . . Ḥabarūt, Q[..]m, ʿAyūn^{um}, Damqawt, *ʾf Rdẖ* and *Lbḥ^n*; they defeated and killed

23 the princes, twenty-one warriors in battle [. . . . .] . . . they killed three hundred and eighteen warriors in battle and prisoners and {took} six hundred and thirty captives and

24 two thousand three hundred and fifty camels [. . . . .] a thousand sheep.

Campaign 10

Then the princes, sons of Malshān, left on an expedition with King Thaʾrān Ayfaʿ against Sahratān

25 with their commune; the king waged war on Ghathayān in the valley of
Khulab . . . . . . [. . . . .] . . . Maʿdīkarib a man in battle and Marthad^um
captured a man; they took as booty, they, their commune, and their nobles,
three hundred camels,

26 two thousand cattle, and thirty-one captives and [. . .

Campaign 11

. . . Shuriḥ]bi[ʾīl] and Maʿdīkarib, with the king Dhamarʿalī Ayfaʿ, against
Sahratān, with their nobles {both of them}, after their brother Khawliy^um was
freed from his obligations;

27 the king waged war on ʿAkk^um in *S²wry^n* and Śurdud; Shuriḥbiʾīl captured a
man and they took as booty, their nobles and them, forty-three captives and
five camels.

Campaign 12

Then Maʿdīkarib and Marthad^um left on an expedition against Ma-

28 ʿadd^um after their brother Shuriḥbiʾīl was freed from his obligations
[. . . . .] Ma[shri]qān, *Ḍayfatān, Kiddat, Madhḥig^um and Murād^um—
the numbers in their army reached two thousand warriors and one hundred
and sixty

29 horsemen—while Barīl^um son of [Ma]ʿ[dīkari]b was participating in battle for
the first time [. . . . .] Maʿadd^um and . . . [. . . . . .] .. the tribe ʿAbdqaysān at
Siyyān, at the waters of the well Sigah, between the Land of Nizār^um and the
Land of Ghassān; they

30 waged war on the tribe Shann^um, on the banū Nukrat, on the banū Ṣabirat
[. . . . .] ʿAbdqaysān; Marthad^um captured two men; Barīl^um killed a
man in battle and captured two men; they killed

31 their n[ob]les and their army one hundred and fifty slain in battle and made
prisoners; they killed and seized eighteen horses and took as booty four
hundred captives, four

32 thousand camels and twelve thousand sh[eep].

Various construction works and hunts

[They] moreover completed {works} in their palaces and on their lands while
they were rebuilding their city ʿAbadān, after Ḥaḍramawt had destroyed it.

33 They built in the palace of dhū-Yazʾan three towers, Kawkabān, Yaghīl, and
Yathib, and restored their palace Yaḥḍur at dhū-Yalghab, at *Ḥlzw^m*; they
provided terraces and enhanced their terraced fields *Mṣ*=

34 *bḡt* and dhāt-*ʾmrḫ^n* at Haduwān and Aghyul^um, the terraced field of Ḥaṭīb,
the terraced fields of ʿAbadān {named} *Ys¹r, Yʿd*, dhāt-Athlān, *Mṭq^m*, and
Mlḥt^n, a field at Nawkhān, dhāt-*Ms³*=

35 *ḫr^m* at Ḍuraʾ, *Mqrṭ^m* and Ghaylān at the waters of *Gzʾy*. They created
plantations in all their terraced fields and in the midst of their uncultivated
lands at ʿAbadān, Ḍuraʾ, Salfān, *Ḥlzw^m*, and *Mlkt*,

36 twenty-three thousand planted patches, six thousand jujube trees, two thou-
sand moringas, and, at ʿAbadān and Girbat, five vineyards. They built in all
the estates of their palaces at ʿAba-

37 dān, Mashriqān, Adāmān, and *Ḍayfatān, forty-one deflectors {*mḍl*} and {their} stone revetments {*ʾs²ṣn*}. They bought from . . . . . . in the port of Qanīʾ five ships with their riggings. They hun-

38 ted in the mountains of Ḥagr, in the Land of Saybān, in the desolate regions of the upper country, in Gurdān, in the Land of *Ḍayfatān and in the mountains of Kushr with eight hundred warriors and five hundred dogs after were driven ibexes and

39 other game towards the mountains close to ʿAbadān. On their horses, they hunted the cows of Rayyān[um], as well as the bulls and onagers of Aṣwātān, of Datīnat, [A]ḥwar, and of *Ḍln*[n] and they killed cows, bulls, ona-

40 gers, ibexes, panthers, and game of all kinds in abundance. The princes, sons of Malshān, were the victors in all of these expeditions, with slain and prisoners: prince Khawliy[um],

41 eleven warriors; Shuriḥbiʾīl, ten warriors; Maʿdīkarib, nine warriors; Martha-d[um], ten warriors; and Barīl[um], three warriors. What they achieved and re-

42 corded as high deeds in this inscription was made {possible} thanks to the assistance and power of ʿAthtar Shāriqān and deities of their country and the power of their lords, the masters of Raydān. As for this inscription, they entrusted it against

43 any defacing and any damage to ʿAthtar Shāriqān, to Wadd[um], lord of Mayfaʿat and to Sayīn dhū-Alīm. In the month of dhū-madhraʾā[n] {July} four hundred and seventy of the

44 era of Yabḥuḍ {*to be corrected as* Mabḥūḍ} son of Abḥaḍ, i.e. in the Ḥaḍrami, calendar the month of (?) Shamsḥayy of Aslam[um] . . . .

The inscription, dated to July AD 360, is carved on a large rock located on the left bank of the wādī ʿAbadān, which leads to the city of Niṣāb (ancient ʿAbadān). It commemorates the success of a prominent princely family of Western Ḥaḍramawt—the dhu-Yazʾan, who played a key role in Ḥimyar's conquest of *Arabia Deserta*—during three generations. It first of all describes military deeds (depicted in Fig. 3.5), then various installations and works in the lands that they owned.[22]

Diplomatic missions under Shammar Yuharʿish
[**3.9**] Sharaf 31 (Sharaf 1967)
Raymān dhu-Ḥazfar[um] and ʿInānān have dedicated to *Al²maqah *Thahwān master of *Awām this statue of bron³ze which he had promised, as thanks to Him because He had allowed him to re⁴[turn f]rom dhu-Sahrat[um] with honours, with slain, ⁵ [capt]ives, and booty in all expeditions {in which} they were in the service ⁶ of their lord Shammar Yuharʿish, king of Sabaʾ, of dhu-⁷Raydān, of Ḥaḍramawt, and of Yamnat, and to provide thanks be⁸cause he came back with honours when he was sent by his lord ⁹ Shammar Yuharʿish to Mālik[um] son of ¹⁰ K[aʿb][um] king of al-Asd and {because} he made two expeditions ¹¹ travelling also to Ctesiphon and Seleucia {Qṭwsf w-Kwk}, the two ¹² royal cities of Persia, and to the land of Tanūkh; and was granted to him by ¹³ Almaqah to return with honours and to have reasons to rejoice every¹⁴where his lord sent him; and in gratefulness be¹⁵cause he returned with
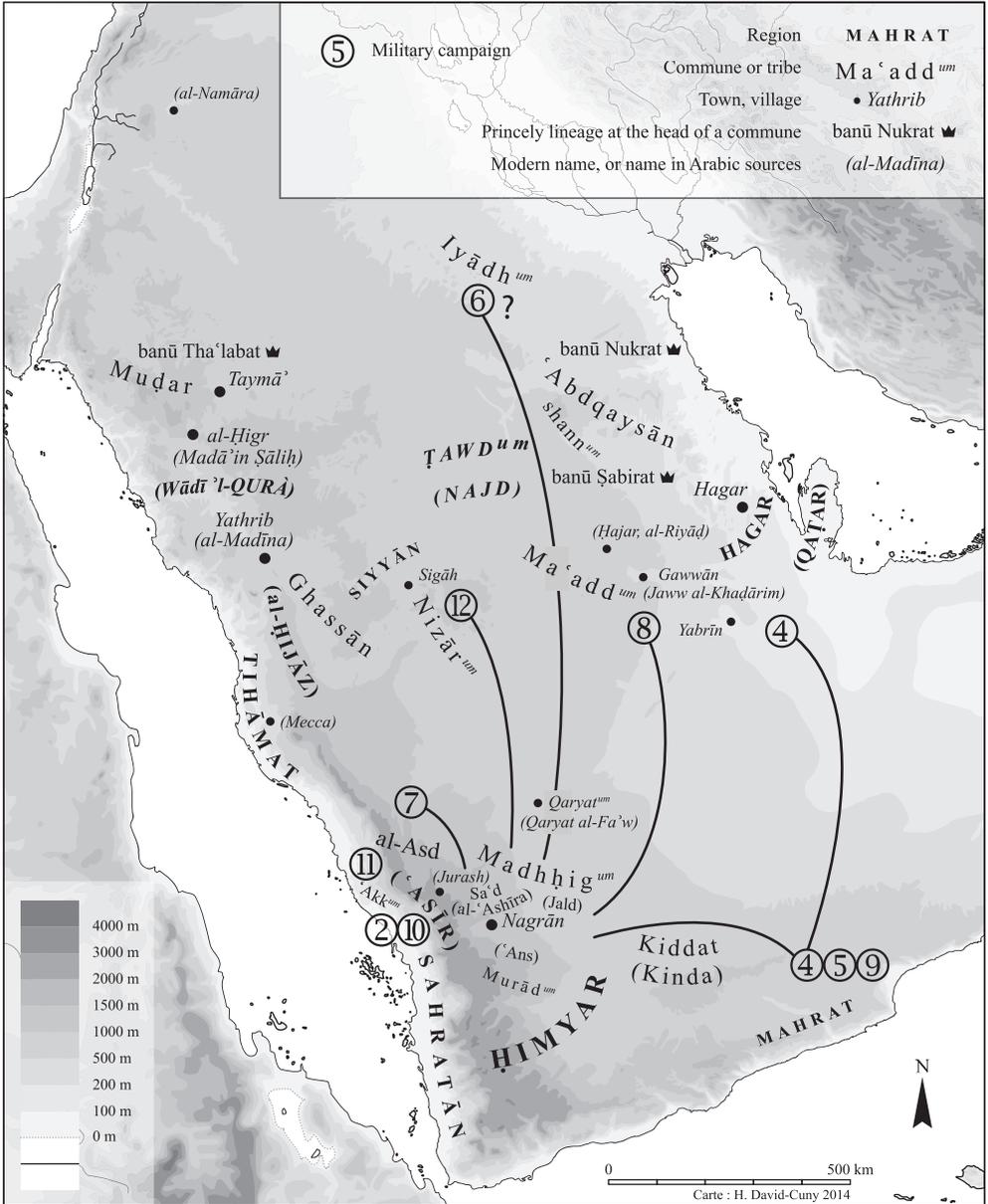

Fig. 3.5. The expeditions commemorated by the inscription of ʿAbadān. Map drawn by H. David-Cuny; amended by Carla Russo.

honours from the city of Ṣaʿdat[um][16] in the land of Khawlān when he was ordered by his lo[17]rd Shammar Yuharʿish to be a governor there {for} forty[18] years and {because} Almaqah provided him with rains[19] to his satisfaction, and with peace during all these years when he was the governor;[20] and may Almaqah also protect and save[21] his servant Raymān dhu-Ḥazfar[um] and ʿInānān, a former governor of the city of Ṣaʿdat[um] for 40 years.

The inscription is carved on a slab which was used as a support for a bronze statuette. It was discovered in the Great Temple of Marib, and its author belongs to one of the noblest of Sabaean families. The text was written around 310, at the very end of King Shammar's reign. As for the date of the two diplomatic missions, the only certainty is that they took place before this date, under the personal reign of Shammar Yuharʿish, that is, between *c*.AD 286 and *c*.310.[23]

The 'Ḥujrid' dynasty
[**3.10**] Ḥujr (Gajda 1996)
Ḥujr b. ʿAmr, king of Kiddat

The graffito is incised among many others on a rock to the north of the Kawkab mountain, 110 km to the north-north-east of Najrān. It is undated, but the palaeography implies a relatively late chronological attribution. The author can be identified in all likelihood with Ḥujr '*Ākil al-Murār*', the 'Eater of Bitter Grasses' (like those of the Jewish feast of Pesaḥ?), which would offer a date of the mid-fifth century (cf. **8.6**). The area where the graffito is located no doubt fell within Madhḥij's territory, which the kings of Kinda had annexed in the third century. It is likely that in the fifth century these kings still exercised authority over Madhḥij.

The annexation of Central Arabia
[**3.11**] Maʾsal 1 = Ry 509 (Robin 1996a)
Abīkarib Asʿad and his son Ḥaśśān Yuhaʾmin, kings of Sabaʾ,[2] of dhu-Raydān, of Ḥaḍramawt, and of Yamnat, and of the Arabs of the Upper-Country {*Twd*} and of the Coast {*Thmt*},[3] son of Ḥaśśān Malkīkarib Yuhaʾmin, king of Sabaʾ, of dhu-[4]Raydān, of Ḥaḍramawt, and of Yamnat, have had this inscription carved in the wād[5]ī Maʾsal Gumḥān, when they came and took possession of the Land[6] of Maʿadd[um] during the installation of garrisons provided by some of their communes, with their commune[7] Ḥaḍramawt and Sabaʾ—the sons of Marib—the junior offspring[8] of their princes, the youngest of their officers, their ag[9]ents, their huntsmen, and their troops, as well as their Arabs,[10] Kiddat, Saʿd, ʿUlah, and H[. . .]

This rock inscription is carved on the face of a desert ravine in Central Arabia, 205 km to the west of modern al-Riyāḍh (Plate 5). Its authors are King Abīkarib and his son, whom the Arab-Islamic tradition considers great conquerors.[24]

The text, which commemorates the annexation of Central Arabia by Ḥimyar, but which has yielded no date, introduces a new, very long titulature.

[23] See also Müller 1974; Overlaet 2009; Potts 2008.
[24] Robin 2012b: 267, with full references. Abīkarib Asʿad is known as Tubbaʿ Abū Karib Asʿad the Perfect (*al-Kāmi*) in the Islamic tradition (cf. **8.5**).

It is certainly later than *c*.400–20 because of the mention of Ḥaśśān, whose name appears only during the second half of Abīkarib's reign. Whether the text is later than 433 is uncertain, even if an inscription providing this date still uses the long-form (rather than the very long-form) titulature.

The king of Ḥimyar does not mention the crowning of the Kindite king Ḥujr 'Ākil al-Murār', who, according to the Arab-Islamic tradition (**8.6**), would have hence ruled over Maʿadd. However, Ḥaḍramawt and Kinda are mentioned first in the enumeration of Ḥimyarite troops and in that of Arab contingents, respectively. Ḥimyar's kings do therefore confirm, albeit in allusive form, the eminent role of dhu-Yazʾan, as well as Kinda's prince, in the conquest of *Arabia Deserta*.

A possible expedition to Central Arabia
[**3.12**] ʿIrāfa 1 (Gajda 2004a)
1 . . .]#. . . *Burd^um and the chiefs of Tanūkh, and among them they killed one hundred[. . .
2 . . .]#. . . downhill from Birk^um {modern Birk} and they reached Birk^um and submitted to them . . . [. . .
3 . . .]#. . . until Thahyān {modern Thahlān}, the waters of Sharafān { modern al-Sharaf}, and Madhḥig^um at Nīrān {modern al-Nīr}, and they besieged it [. . .
4 . . .]#. . . . . . Nuʿmānān and Muḍar at Maʾsal^um, Maʾsal Gumḥ^um { modern Maʾsal al-Jumḥ} [. . .
5 . . . Nuʿ]#(ma)nān, and they took possession of Qarmà, of Yamāmatān {modern al-Yamāma} until Hagar^um, of ʿAramat^um {modern al-ʿArama} and of [. . .
6 . . .]# Abān^um {modern Abān}, *Mt ʿlm* and Rummatān {modern al-Ruma}, the banū Suliyy, {i.e.} their *s²y* (?) . . . [. . .
7 . . .]# their . . . and their horsemen, and he sent them to Gaww^um and the king (?) [. . .

This slab with the fragmentary inscription in relief, reused in the small village of al-ʿIrāfa, comes from Ẓafār, and probably dates to the fifth century. The mention of Tanūkh (a name the Ḥimyarites gave to al-Ḥīra), the listing of approximately ten place names in Central Arabia, and the reception at Maʾsal in Central Arabia of a delegation from Muḍar, led by a certain Nuʿmānān (Arabic al-Nuʿmān), have led to the belief that this text's author, whose name is lost, is a king of Ḥimyar. Hypothetically the text might recount an expedition to Central Arabia during which a series of regions would have submitted to Ḥimyarite control.[25]

ḤIMYAR UNDER AKSŪMITE WARDSHIP

Around 500 the kingdom of Ḥimyar, which by now exercised more or less direct control over much of the Arabian Peninsula, looked to be at the apex of

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[25] See too Robin 2008a: 200–1, and fig. 3.
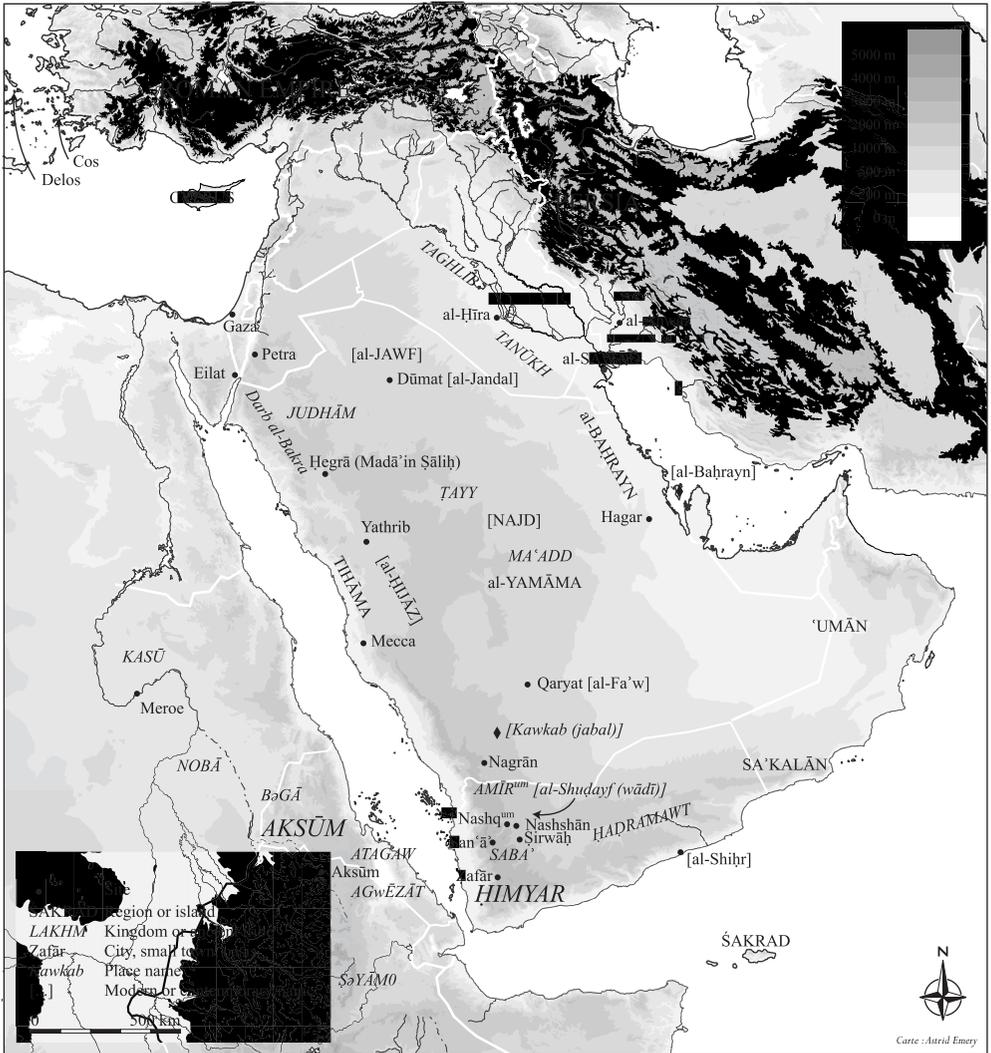
Fig. 3.6. Arabia and Ethiopia in the time of the kingdom of Ḥimyar. Map drawn by Astrid Emery; amended by Carla Russo.

its power (Fig. 3.6). Nevertheless, it soon fell under the domination of its neighbour, the African kingdom of Aksūm, which Arabian sources call Abyssinia (*Ḥabashat*).[26] While Ḥimyar had chosen Judaism, Aksūm had opted for Christianity and, as a consequence, for political alliance with the Roman empire (Ch. 6).

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[26] See generally Robin 2012b: 254–9; Bowersock 2013.

Aksūmite suzerainty over Ḥimyar, gaining traction when Marthadʾilān Yanūf ascended the throne around 500 (**3.13**), was more firmly established under his successor Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur (519–22).[27] Syriac sources recall that this king was Christian and that he was placed on the throne by Aksūm.[28] In addition, a Ḥimyarite inscription commemorates a military campaign against Lower ʿIrāq carried out by Maʿdīkarib, with the support of Muḍarite Arabs whose chiefs (the banū Thaʿlabat) are elsewhere known as the 'Arabs of the Romans' (**3.14**, and see **5.6**). Around the same period, the Kindite prince that Ḥimyar placed over Maʿadd in Central Arabia apparently concluded an alliance with the Roman emperor Anastasius (**5.4**); he was killed in *c.*528, and his descendants remained the object of Roman diplomatic interest (**5.14** and **5.18**).[29]

Joseph and Nagrān (Najrān)

When Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur died sometime between June 521 and June 522, Aksūm's king, whose name was Kālēb Ella Aṣbǝḥa (the 'Hellesthaeus' of Procopius, *Persian Wars* 1.20)[30] crowned a new ruler named Joseph (Yūsuf Asʾar Yathʾar).[31] In Syriac he is called Masrūq, which was probably his personal name. In Greek he is referred to as Dounaas, and in Arabic as Zurʿa dhū Nuwās.

Shortly afterwards, in the autumn of 522, Joseph rebelled. After massacring 300 men of the Aksūmite garrison in the capital Ẓafār, and setting fire to their church, he led an army to ravage the coastal areas of the Red Sea facing Abyssinia; Joseph perhaps had doubts about the loyalty of these areas.[32] The burning of a church in the port of Makhāwān (Arabic al-Mukhāʾ, English Moka) indicates that the population of these regions was, at least in part, Christian. The result of this campaign was impressive: 12,500 to 14,000 slain, 11,000 prisoners, and 290,000 animals plundered. The king then took up position at Makhāwān in order to prevent any Aksūmite landing. At the same time he sent an army commanded by a Jewish prince named Sharaḥʾil Yaqbul dhu-Yazʾan against the oasis of Nagrān (Arabic Najrān), which did not recognize the Ḥimyarite king's authority (**3.16**).[33]

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[27] Gajda 2009: 73–6.   [28] Gajda 2009: 76–81; Robin 2010b: 69–79.   [29] Robin 2012b: 281–2.

[30] For the many names given to Kālēb in different sources, see Robin 2012b: 288.

[31] *Martyrdom of Arethas* 27: 256–9; Robin 2010b: 69–79.

[32] Gajda 2009: 87–96, and 92, map 3, for an illustration of Joseph's campaigns.

[33] Robin 2008b. In much of this chapter we refer to the ancient site as Nagrān, when discussing it in the pre-Islamic (epigraphic) context, but as Najrān, when referring to the modern place name. Note that in Chapters 5 and 6 the site is called Najrān, a name more familiar to readers of modern translations of literary texts.

Nagrān's population of the time included pagans and Jews, but it appears that the Christians were already the dominant element there. These Christians claimed affiliation with two antagonistic christological orientations, whose backgrounds are discussed in greater detail in Ch. 6. Some belonged to the so-called 'Nestorian' interpretation of Christology, with links to Persia's Church of the East; Nagrān's 'Nestorian' community was likely founded somewhere around the mid-fifth century, probably under the reign of the Sasanian king Yazdegerd II (438–57).[34] Nagrān's other Christians, on the other hand, were converted through a Roman initiative grounded in the so-called Miaphysite (or Monophysite) interpretation of Christology, at odds with the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon (451). Despite this, and despite being the recipients of periodic imperial persecution, the Miaphysites had important connections to both the Roman and Persian empires, and the massacre of Christians at Nagrān would resonate throughout the Near East.[35]

The first conversions at Nagrān do not seem to predate the mid-fifth century. An early period of repression affected the community in the 470s when a Christian priest, Azqīr, was martyred following the recommendation of a rabbi that he be publically punished. According to Azqīr's hagiography, a Christian was ordered to cut off his head; when this man refused, a Jew completed the task.[36] The establishment of the first bishop at Nagrān itself occurred after 485. Syriac, Greek, and Arab sources emphasize the wealth and financial clout of the Nagrān Miaphysites.

In June and July 523 Sharaḥʾīl, who led Joseph's army, isolated Nagrān, where he met strong resistance, from the rest of Arabia. He was then met by Joseph who, according to letter 'C' of Simeon of Beth Arshām (see **6.46**), promised to spare the lives of the dissenters if they proclaimed their allegiance to him. This promise was not upheld, as a large number of Christians, all as it appears of the Miaphysite community, were executed—and most notably their leader, al-Ḥārith son of Kaʿb (Arethas, in Greek). Al-Ḥārith and his companions were declared saints by the anti-Chalcedonians; according to the Syriac and Greek accounts (**6.45–8**), these events took place in November 523. The persecution was also a topic of interest to Muslim historians, such as al-Ṭabarī (**8.7–9**).

At the time, dominant lineages at Nagrān were the banū Thuʿlubān and the banū Gadan^um, if epigraphic sources are to be followed literally (see **3.17**). In *The Martyrdom of Azqīr*, these are the *za-Sₔʾlₔbān* and the *za-Qēfān*, who would, according to Arab genealogists, form a branch of the dhū Jadan = Gadan^um.

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[34] *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 5, pp. 330–1).   [35] Gajda 2009: 97–102; Robin 2006: 328–9.
[36] *The Martyrdom of Azqīr* (ed. Conti Rossini, 1910), discussed in Robin 2012b: 80–2; see Bowersock 2013: 85; Beeston 1985.

After Nagrān: Aksūm and Rome

Alexandria's religious authorities warned the Roman emperor Justin I (r. 518–27), who, literary sources suggest, took the massacre of Christians at Nagrān as an excuse to extend his sphere of influence in Arabia.[37] As noted in the discussion following **6.48**, the actual prosecution of the war, however, was left to the Aksūmite king, Kālēb Ella Aṣbəḥa. Kālēb's army left Aksūm after the Pentecost of 525; he embarked on a fleet of 70 ships at Adulis and sailed across the Red Sea.[38] Joseph was killed whilst opposing the Abyssinian ruler's landing, and his death provoked the disarray and routing of the Ḥimayarite army (al-Ṭabarī, in **8.9**, offers a romanticized version of his demise).

The date of Joseph's defeat is a matter of contention. It occurred during the period between the Pentecost of 525 and February 531, but it is not possible to pinpoint a precise date. Joseph's death, mentioned in passing in two inscriptions (**3.18–19**) marked the definitive end of an independent Ḥimyar. The kingdom survived under differing degrees of Aksūmite dominion for approximately another 40 or 50 years.

The Aksūmites seized the capital Ẓafār, the cities of Ṣanʿāʾ and Marib, the 'two cities' of the Jawf (Sabaʾic *Hgrnhn*, Geʿez[39] *Hagaraynē*), and Nagrān (**3.18**). Jews were systematically slaughtered, a large number of churches were founded, and an ecclesiastical hierarchy was established. Yet Kālēb did not modify the political structure of the state. He kept the Ḥimyarite throne, on which he placed a Christian Ḥimyarite prince named Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ (the Esimiphaeus of Procopius: see **5.17** and **3.20**). He then returned to Africa, but left part of his army in Arabia in order to control the country and to guarantee the payment of an annual tribute.[40] The Roman emperor Justinian (r. 527–65) realized that this conquest of Ḥimyar by a Christian ally could open new economic and military possibilities in the war against Persia, which resumed in 527, and he dispatched an embassy to South Arabia and to Aksūm, probably between April and September 531 (see **5.17–18**). However, Kālēb quickly lost direct control of Arabia. The Ḥimyarite Christian he had placed on the throne was overthrown by the chief of his army in Arabia, a man named Abraha.[41] Although Abraha ruled with the support of this army (mentioned both in inscriptions and in Muslim Arabic sources), he introduced himself as a

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[37] For a detailed examination of the tensions between Jews and Christians in and around the Nagrān massacre, see essays in Beaucamp et al. (eds) 2010.

[38] *Martyrdom of Arethas* 29–31: 262–9.

[39] Geʿez is a Semitic language, now extinct, related to several modern languages in Ethiopia, and the alphabet in which the language is written. It is the liturgical language of the church in Aksūm. See Robin 2012b: 257.

[40] For views that he may have stayed longer, see Robin 2012b: 284.

[41] Proc. *BP* 1.20.3–7; Gajda 2009: 111–15.

Ḥimyarite king. It is in this guise that he ordered his Ḥimyarite inscriptions to be written in the Sabaʾic language, and adopted traditional royal titles, accepting, wholesale, Ḥimyar's political and cultural heritage, with the notable exception of his foreign policy, and his religious views.[42]

Abraha

The exact length of Abraha's reign—some 30 years between 535 and 565—is hard to pinpoint precisely, as dated inscriptions only offer detail on the period between 547 and 559. There are, however, two clues for the date of Abraha's death. Aksūmite power in South Arabia collapsed at the beginning of the 570s, on the basis of Roman sources, or *c.*575, according to the Arab-Islamic tradition, which attributes to Abraha two successors, his sons Yaksūm (called in one of his inscriptions 'Aksūm dhu-Maʿāhir, the son of the king') and Masrūq.[43] It is therefore likely that Abraha died sometime before 570.

The main sources for the reign of Abraha are six inscriptions, four of which were written by the ruler himself. The most detailed of the six (**3.21**) commemorates the crushing of a revolt of the tribe of Kinda, and a description of works on the Marib Dam, which had just been breached (547/8). Notably, the dam inscription follows the style of an earlier Ḥimyarite king, apparently for the purposes of legitimization.

In the autumn of 547 Abraha organized a diplomatic conference in which delegations from all regional powers participated. The delegates were ordered in three categories: those of the two overlords, the king of Aksūm and the 'king of the Romans', were called 'plenipotentiary ministers'. The delegate of the king of Persia was called an 'ambassador'. Finally, Arab vassal princes of the Roman and Persian empires—al-Ḥārith, leader of the Jafnids, and his brother Abū Karib, and the Naṣrid leader al-Mundhir—were represented by 'envoys'. It is remarkable that no delegation came from Arabia proper, either from Maʿadd or from Muḍar, suggesting that Abraha saw himself as their overlord. The reason why these delegations travelled to Marib is not known. It is possible that it was to discuss the division into spheres of influence in Arabia between Rome, Aksūm, and Persia, following the conflict which set the Romans against the Persians from 540 to 546 (**3.21**, and Ch. 5).

The king of Aksūm's pre-eminence, acknowledged by Abraha, is seen in the titles of Waʿzeb, Kālēb's son and successor, who must have been ruling more or less at the time of this conference. These titles still mention possessions in Arabia (**3.22**). Abraha, however, apparently enjoyed a great measure of

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[42] Gajda 2009: 111–46, and generally on this period Bowersock 2013.
[43] Photius, *Bib.* 64. See Hoyland 2014: 273–4. For a concise discussion of the Arab-Islamic tradition here, see Gajda 2009: 148–9.

independence, which he managed to make all great powers acknowledge, particularly Aksūm and Rome. Waʿzeb, incidentally, only speaks of military expeditions in Africa.

A second inscription of Abraha, dated to September 552, narrates military operations in Central Arabia. These are branded the 'fourth expedition'. Two columns of Arab auxiliaries, in charge of suppressing a revolt of the banū ʿAmr[um], inflicted important losses on the rebels during two battles, apparently fought in Central Arabia. King Abraha then went to Ḥalibān, some 300 km south-west of al-Riyādh. The tribe of Maʿadd swore allegiance and surrendered hostages to him, while the Naṣrid ʿAmr, son of al-Mundhir, gave his own son, previously the governor of Maʿadd (**3.23**).[44] Abraha's success at Ḥalibān struck his contemporaries, leaving echoes in pre-Islamic Arab poetry, particularly in the verses of Mukhabbal al-Saʿdī, of the Saʿd tribe of Tamīm.[45]

The banū ʿAmr[um] were first identified with the ʿĀmir b. Ṣaʿṣaʿa of Western Arabia. It is now surmised that they were the descendants of the Kindite prince Ḥujr 'Ākil al-Murār', whose father was called ʿAmr. Incidentally, in Ḥimyarite inscriptions, groups whose names are preceded by *banū* always point to a ruling lineage, and never to a tribe, which always has a proper name. This can support the fact that genealogies were not yet constituted in the way Arab-Islamic tradition compilers would later render official, and transmit.[46]

Abraha and 'the Elephant'

Long ago M. J. Kister pointed out that the Arab-Islamic tradition attributes to the year AD 552 (among a number of possible dates) a disastrous expedition of Abraha against Mecca.[47] This foray, discussed in Ch. 8 (**8.11–17**), was known under the name 'the Elephant', because the Ḥimyarite army was preceded by this animal. Kister suggested that the two campaigns, that of 'the Elephant', and that described in **3.23**, should be equated. The 'Elephant' campaign, also echoed in the Qurʾān 105 (**8.17**), is one of the founding myths of Qurayshi supremacy in Western Arabia at the dawn of the *hijra*.[48] The discovery of a new inscription of Abraha (**3.24**), probably carved a little after September 552, has shown that the two campaigns cannot be the same: in this new text Abraha

[44] Robin 2012a: 19–20, 30–1; Gajda 2009: 138.
[45] See Robin 2012a: 45–7; Gajda 2009: 140–2.
[46] Before Islam and in Arabia, strictly speaking, one finds no particular passion for genealogy. The authors of inscriptions and of graffito often give the name of their father, sometimes that of their grandfather (see for instance *CIH* 37, *Yhʿn Ḏbyn bn Ys¹mʿʾl bn S¹mhkrb mlk S¹mʿy*), but nothing more. It is only in Safaitic inscriptions from Syria and Jordan that more or less long chains of ancestors are recorded.
[47] Kister 1965.
[48] Robin 2015b: 36–48, with three engravings from the Najrān region representing an elephant with his mahout. Gajda 2009: 142–7; Robin 2012b: 285–6.

celebrates the re-establishment of Ḥimyarite authority over the whole of *Arabia Deserta*, and he lists five regions and tribes of Eastern and Northern Arabia, especially Yathrib (Medina), which paid allegiance to him.

The historicity of an expedition of Abraha against Mecca, and its resounding failure, does, however, appear plausible, because such an event provides an acceptable explanation for the primacy of Quraysh in the last decades of the sixth century, while this tribe, settled in an inhospitable region, was notoriously small in numbers and lived in poverty. If one is to believe the Arab-Islamic tradition, it is following its victory over Abraha that Quraysh was called 'the people of God' (*ahl Allāh*), and that its temple attracted many pilgrims.[49] The great fair of Quraysh, which was held in al-ʿUkāẓ, was established fifteen years after the expedition of 'the Elephant'. The *ḥums* cultural association, which bonded to the Mecca sanctuary members of the numerous tribes of Western Arabia, also postdates the expedition.[50]

The last chronological benchmark of Abraha's reign is the fragment of a superb inscription in three registers, which commemorates an expensive construction project. The costly materials involved apparently originated from the territory of tribes in the north-west of Yemen and were quarried by a workforce provided by these same tribes (**3.25**). This inscription incidentally mentions the date 559/60. It is likely that the text's author—whose name is lost—is King Abraha himself since, at this time, all inscriptions are royal (and this is the case of texts even in the last forty years before the writing of this document). The building whose construction is celebrated is probably the church that Abraha built in Ṣanʿāʾ, called al-Qalīs by the Arab-Islamic tradition, but one cannot dismiss that it might instead have been a reconstruction of the royal palace of Ghumdān. The splendour of al-Qalīs is celebrated by al-Azraqī (*Akhbār Makka*: Ch. 8, n. 34), who provides details on the wealth of materials used, and al-Ṭabarī also commented on the structure (see **8.10**).[51]

After Abraha's death (around 565?), his sons Yaksūm/Aksūm and Masrūq briefly succeeded him on Ḥimyar's throne. Their authority, however, was undermined by dissent. When the Arabian Aksūmite kingdom collapsed, towards 570 or 575, the Roman empire lost its main ally in the peninsula. This event marked the definitive failure both of Justinian's Arabian policy and of Roman attempts to control the Red Sea. A clear chronological link can be discerned between the outcome of events in Arabia and Justinian's policy towards the Jafnid family in Syria (Ch. 5). Justinian had enthroned al-Ḥārith in *c.*529 (**5.15**), and the latter was given authority over a large number of Arab tribes in Syria, immediately following the conquest of South Arabia by Aksūm. The arrest and exile of al-Ḥārith's son al-Mundhir occurred in 582, a few years after the collapse of Aksūmite domination in Arabia (**5.32**).

[49] Kister 1972: 75.   [50] Robin 2012b: 287.   [51] Robin 2015c.

Roman interventionism in Western Arabia is also echoed in the Arab-Islamic tradition. Quṣayy, the ancestor of Quraysh who, in the first half of the sixth century, united the Qurayshite clans and plausibly took control of Mecca, received help from 'Caesar (*Qayṣar*)', if one is to believe Ibn Qutayba. A few decades later, a certain ʿUthmān son of Ḥuwayrith obtained Roman approval to become king of Mecca. This tradition recalls that Abraha was assisted by Roman craftsmen, experts in marble stonecutting and mosaics, while building al-Qalīs (see **8.10**).[52]

Ḥimyar's Religion under Abraha

During the tenure of Abraha, Christianity was the official religion, as proven by three of his inscriptions beginning with an invocation to the Holy Trinity or to God and his Messiah:

> —With the power, the help, and the merci[2]fulness of Raḥmānān, of his [3] Messiah, and of the Spirit of Holiness (**3.21**);
> —With the power, the support, [2] and the help of Raḥmānān, [3] Lord of the Sky, [4] and of his Messiah[53];
> —With the power of Raḥmanān and of his Messiah (**3.23**).

Even if the epigraphic material is laconic and contains few clues on dogma—and hence on the actual religious beliefs of the king—it is obvious that the religious formulation of the inscriptions was chosen with care. These inscriptions were, in effect, public documents which were used as points of reference and models. Yet despite this sparsity of information in the inscriptions, two successive dogmatic orientations can be detected in Ḥimyar's Christianity, understood through the way of naming the second person in the Holy Trinity.

For the Ḥimyarite king installed on the throne by Kālēb around 530—a ruler for whom we have an inscription, **3.20**—religious invocations at the beginning and end of the text are as follows:

> —[In the na]me and with the safe[guarding of Raḥmānān, of his son Christ the Victor and of the Holy Spi]rit;
> — . . .] In the name of the Raḥmānān, of his Son Christ the Victor ..[. . .

Ḥimyar's official doctrine was, then, that of Aksūm's church. It is quite unlikely that the king, a fresh convert just baptized, would have had a say in matters of doctrine. The text's terminology emphasizes this dependence with respect to Aksūm. The name 'Christ' (Krīśtōś, *Krs³ts³*) is the transcription from Geʿez *Krīstōs* (obviously borrowed from the Greek *Christos*). The Holy Spirit is called *[Mn]fs¹ qds¹*, which transcribes Geʿez *Manfas qǝddūs*. As for the

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[52] Finster and Schmidt 1994; Robin 2012b: 295.   [53] Nebes 2004b.

adjective 'Victor', which does not appear in the Gospel, it is attested at Aksūm in one of Kālēb's own inscriptions:

> By the power of God and by the grace of Jesus-Christ, [3] Son of God, the Victor, in whom I believe (**3.13**)

Christ is described here, clearly, as 'Son' (of God).

Abraha's inscriptions, some twenty years later, show notably different characteristics. Abraha systematically named the second person of the Trinity 'his Messiah', that is, Raḥmānān's Messiah. This second person is called neither 'Son' nor 'Christ the Victor'. More generally, Abraha's inscription replaces Aksūmite borrowings with others taken from Syriac: Messiah (*ms¹ḥ, mshîḥô*), church (*b ʿt, bî ʿotô*), or priest (*qs¹s¹, qashîshô*). These changes probably heralded a new Christology and a change in ecclesiastical organization. In Kālēb's days, the Ḥimyarite church was narrowly controlled by that of Aksūm. After Abraha's rebellion, however, relations between both churches were most certainly severed.

Under Abraha, Ḥimyar's church, now separated from that of Aksūm, drew closer to Antioch and Syria. Ḥimyar became a refuge for several Roman bishops considered 'heretical', who adhered to the Julianist doctrine.[54] The evolution of Abraha's christological thought, however, warrants other explanations. The king had to compromise with a population whose elites had long been influenced by Judaism. It is remarkable that his christological beliefs were in agreement with those of Judeo-Christians—and that he used a terminology identical to the one found 75 years later in the Qur'ān.

Aksūmite inscriptions include several biblical quotes and references (**3.13, 3.18, 3.22**) from both the Old and the New Testaments; on the other hand, Ḥimyarite inscriptions, both Jewish and Christian, never do. This is particularly significant for texts of Abraha, a man with Aksūmite origins (**3.21, 3.23–4**), and suggests that the Bible was not yet translated into an Arabian language, whether either Sabaʾic or Arabic, in the sixth century.

Epigraphic sources disappear after 560. The last dated inscriptions commemorate the construction of an ostentatious monument, probably al-Qalīs as noted above (**3.25**), and a final round of restoration work on the Marib Dam (**3.26**). The use of ancient Ḥimyarite writing nevertheless survived for a century or two in the regions of Ṣaʿda and of Najrān, undoubtedly preserved by a group of scholars amongst whom al-Ḥasan al-Hamdānī (d. after 970/1, 360 AH) and Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī (d. *c.*1178, 573 AH) were the last representatives of this traditional school.

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[54] Van Rompay 2005: 252–4. Julianism (after Julian of Halicarnassus) was concerned with the corruptibility of Christ's human body, with Julian arguing against corruptibility, but opposed by the deposed Miaphysite patriarch of Antioch, Severus. See *DHGE* s.v. 'Gaianites' (M. Jugie).

Aksūm, Ḥimyar, and Abraha: The Texts

(Note: where texts make biblical references, these are indicated via footnotes, whose numbers are **bold** to avoid confusion with line numbers in the text.)

Campaigns of Kālēb
[**3.13**] *RIÉth* 191
God is power and strength, God is power *Cross* [2] in battles.[55]
With the power of God and with the grace of Jesus Christ, [3] son of God, the Victor, in whom I believe, He who gave me a kingdom [4] with power, with which I subjected my enemies and I trampled the heads of those who despise me, He who has looked [5] over me since my childhood and has placed me on the throne of my fathers, who has saved me. I have sought protection [6] near Him, Christ, so that I succeed in all my endeavours and that I live in The One who pleases [7] my soul. With the help of the Trinity, that of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, me, Kālēb El[8]la Aṣbəḥa, son of Tazenā, man of *Lzn*, king of Aksūm and Ḥa[mēr], of Raydān, [9] Sabaʾ, Salḥīn, and Ṭawdum, of Yamnat, Tihāmat, Ḥaḍra-mawt, and of all the A[10]rabs, of Bəgā and Nobā, of Kasū and Ṣəyāmo, of *Drbt* [. . .]*t* [11] and of the Land of Ethiopia {ʾ*tfy*}, servant of Christ who is not vanquished by the enemy. With the help of [G]od, [12] I waged war against the Agwēzāt and *Ḥst* . . . . . . , [13] I waged war by dividing my tribes {ʾ*ḥzb, aḥzāb*}, those who must fight the *Nqḥt Sbʿ.wm*, and I se[14]nt those who must wage war against the *Nqḥt* (ʾ)*gt*, and they defeated (?) the troops of the *Gn, Mṭn, S.t,* [15] and *z-ʿml*. And me, I waged war with the troops of my country and, with *Dkn,* [16] I defeated(?) the *ʾfr,* in conflict (?) with *Ḥr, Dkn, .ḥ, Nsn,* and *Br;* [17] they went by day and they went by night and fought . . . and . . . [18] *Grʿd*; they fought the .*ṭrn* and they fought the Agwēzāt, who believe [19] wrongly. I sent the Atagaw, the *Gṭl* and the . . . . to fig[ht] . . . [20] and the *Mʿṭ* and the *Gw.* I sent Falḥa and *Zbw* who . . . {to} [21] fight the *Ḥst.* As for me, I followed with my officers and with my tr[ibes] . . . [22] .. within the enclosure of the expedition's camp . . . . The troops attacked, [captured] [23] booty, by the power of God. From there, myself, while . . . [24] . . . and they captured their men ʾ*gdr* . . . [25] .. to the *Ḥst* and the Agwēzāt; and I ordered to bring the nobles of their country, [s][26]o that I impose my law; as for me, I sent a message and I established myself at . . . with . . . [27] There, nobles from their countries arrived with their gifts and I imposed my law . . . [t][28]en hundreds (*figures*) and . . . (*figures*). As for the cattle taken by *z-*ʾ*gws,* I ordered that [29] *z-Ṣly* and the nobles return them (*figures*), and I made *Ḥzgh* king over the Agwēzāt . . . [30] their king in the expedition. {The number} of slain of the Agwēzāt and the *Ḥst* was: men, in the hundreds (*numbers*), women [31] and children in the hundreds (*figures*); {the number of} captives, men, women, and children was: in the hun[32]dreds (*figures*); the total number of slain and captives was in the hundreds (*figures*); and the booty: cattle, in the hundreds [33] (*figures*), camels (*figures*). This, God, in whom I place my [trust], gave it to me. [34] . . . . . . He granted me a great name, so that I wage war on Ḥamēr. I sent Ḥa[35]yyān *Slbn*

[55] Ps. 24:8.

za-Samīr with my tribes. And I founded a sanctuary in Ḥamēr, at ʿq[36]nʾl, filled with zeal for the name of the Son of God in whom I believe; his *gbz*, [37] I built {it} and consecrated {it}, by the power of God. And God [38] revealed to me his holiness. I am sitting on this throne which . . . , and I placed {it} under the protection of [G][39]od, creator of heaven and earth. If anyone destroyed it, took {it} away, and smashed {it}, [40] the one who destroyed and removed, may God remove him with . . . and with a reverential fear {*sbs*, Greek *sebas*} . . .

The text, carved on a large stela, comes from Aksūm in Ethiopia. It is written in Geʿez, but in the South Arabian alphabet (it reads from right to left). Its author, King Kālēb, commemorates African campaigns and an expedition to the coastal regions of the kingdom of Ḥimyar in South Arabia. The mention of Ḥayyān (also known in the *Book of the Ḥimyarites*, 31a and 32b) leads to the suggestion we are dealing here with one of the first Aksūmite expeditions to Arabia which made Ḥimyar a tributary kingdom. If this inscription commemorates the expedition which resulted in the establishment of the Ḥimyarite king Marthadʾilān Yanūf (on the throne *c*.500) it could be dated to the first years of the sixth century.[56] It is a noteworthy curiosity that Aksūmite royal inscriptions of the sixth century discovered in Ethiopia are written in the Ḥimyarite alphabet, whereas those of Arabia use the Geʿez syllabary.

Campaigns of Maʿdīkarib to Kuthāʾ
[3.14] Maʾsal 2 = Ry 510
Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur king of Sabaʾ, of dhu-Raydān, of Ha[2]ḍramawt, and of Yamnat, and of the Arabs in the Upper-Country and on the Coast, [3] had this text carved and published at Maʾsal[um] Gumḥān {*sic*} [4] while returning from an expedition in the ʿIrāq of Kūtaʾ {ʿrq Ktʾ}, because had appealed to him [5] the Arabs in revolt while Mudhdhir[um] was waging against them [6] a war; he was campaigning with his communes Sabaʾ, Ḥimyar[um], Raḥba[7]tān, Ḥaḍramawt, and Yamna, with his Arabs Kiddat and Madh[8]ḥi[g][um] and with the banū Thaʿlabat and Mu(ḍa)r. He was campaigning [9] [in the mo]nth of dhu-qay[ẓā]n {June} six hundred and thirty-one.

King Maʿdīkarib commemorates an expedition against the best-known of the kings of al-Ḥīra, the famous al-Mundhir; the text is dated to June of 521 (Fig. 3.7). Since he mentions neither victory nor booty, one can surmise that his foray yielded few results. Maʿdīkarib reached a region called ʿrq Ktʾ. It is likely that Ktʾ was the city of Kuthāʾ between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. The meaning of ʿrq is more uncertain: perhaps Iraq, or a noun meaning 'canal'.

Maʿdīkarib's army was bolstered by elements from Muḍar, commanded by the banū Thaʿlabat. Since these are elsewhere called 'Arabs of the Romans' (5.6), this expedition could have been undertaken at the request of Emperor

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[56] Robin 2012b: 288–9; see also Marrassini 2014: 247–53.

Fig. 3.7. The military campaigns of the Kings Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur and Abraha in 521 and 552 (inscriptions **3.14** and **3.15**; **3.23** and **3.24**). Map drawn by Astrid Emery; amended by Carla Russo.

Justin I as retaliation against the capture of two Roman generals by al-Mundhir (cf. **5.15**). This text is carved next to **3.11** (Ry 509; see Plate 5).[57]

> Maʿdīkarib returns in 521
> [**3.15**] Ḥamḍa 1 = Ja 2484
> Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur king of [2] Sabaʾ, of dhu-Raydān, of Ḥaḍramawt, [3] and of Yamnat, and of their Arabs in the Upper-Country and on the Coast, has con[4]signed this announcement . . . . . . his armies [5] .. were on the march . . . . . in the month of dhu-khirāfān {August} of six hundred and thirty-one.

The inscription, dated to August 521, is carved on a rock located at the foot of the huge granite dome of Ḥamḍa, 200 km to the north of Najrān. Upon his return from ʿIrāq, King Maʿdīkarib passed through Maʾsal in June, then in August through Ḥamḍa, 560 km further south.[58] (See Fig. 3.7.)

> Sharaḥʾīl Yaqbul dhu-Yazʾan and Nagrān (Fig. 3.8)
> [**3.16**] Ja 1028
> May God, to whom belong Heaven and Earth, bless King Yūsuf Asʾar Yathʾar, king of all the communes, and may He bless the princes [2] Laḥayʿat Yarkham, Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ, Sharaḥʾīl Yaqbul, and Shuriḥbiʾīl Asʿad, sons of Shuriḥbiʾīl Yakmul, {of the lineage} of Yazʾan and Gadan[um]. They joi[3]ned their lord king Yūsuf Asʾar Yathʾar when he burnt the church and massacred the Abyssinians at

Fig. 3.8. Inscription of Sharaḥʾīl Yaqbul dhu-Yazʾan (**3.16**), commemorating the siege of Nagrān. Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

[57] Robin 1996a; Müller 2010: 95–6; Gajda 2009: 77–9; Avner at al. 2013.
[58] Müller 2010: 97.

Ẓafār, attacked Ashʿarān, Rakbān, Fara[4]sān, and Makhawān, set upon himself to fight and blockade Nagrān, and fortify the Maddabān chain; when he gathered (?) near him—after having sent them with an army—and when what the king succeeded [5] in seizing as booty during this campaign {amounted} to 12,500 slain, 11,000 prisoners, 290,[6]000 camels, cows, and sheep; wrote this inscription Prince Sharaḥʾīl Yaqbul dhu-Yazʾan, when he positioned himself against Nagrān [7] with the commune of dhu-Hamdān—village dwellers and nomads—a detachment of Azʾūnān and of the Arabs of Kiddat, Murād[um], and Madhḥig[um], while the princes, his brothers, {had} placed themselves with the king [8] along the sea {fearing} Abyssinia and were fortifying the Maddabān chain; as for all that he mentioned in this inscription in terms of massacre, booty, and encirclement, it was in a single cam[9]paign, such that he was far from his homes for thirteen months. May Raḥmānān bless their sons, Shuriḥbiʾīl Yakmul and Haʿān Asʿar, son of Laḥayʿat, [10] as well as Laḥayʿat Yarkham, son of Sumūyafaʿ, and Marthad-ʾilān Yamgud, son of Sharaḥʾīl, {of the lineage} of Yazʾan, in the month of dhu-madhraʾān {July} six hundred and thirty-three. May, with the protection of Heaven and of Earth and the capacities of men, this inscription {be protected} against any author of damage and degradation, and Raḥmānān The Very-High ag[12]ainst any author of degradation . . . . . . Was composed, written, and carried out in the name of Raḥmānān the narration of Tamīm dhu-Ḥadyat. Lord of the Jews, with the Praised One (*Mḥmd*).

This massive inscription, dated to July 523, is carved on a rock at the wells of Ḥimà, 90 km to the north-north-east of the Najrān oasis. Its author is Sharaḥʾīl Yaqbul dhu-Yazʾan, the scion of a powerful princely family of Ḥaḍramawt who converted to Judaism. He was in charge of retaking control of the oasis for King Yūsuf Asʿar Yathʾar. During this campaign Sharaḥʾīl Yaqbul had three inscriptions carved, one at Kawkab, dated June 523, and two at Ḥimà, dated to July of the same year.

The text, which contains a vague allusion to its author's religious beliefs, possesses clear traits of political propaganda. Sharaḥʾīl Yaqbul, appointed by a Jewish king to crush dissent in an oasis managed by Christians, avoids taking an overtly religious stance. The Holy Scriptures are not invoked to validate the king's actions, by contrast with the Christian Aksūmite, Kālēb. Instead, the general opts for intimidation, recalling, in an objective and factual manner, military operations mounted against the king's enemies. The only explicit indication of Judaism is the name 'Lord of the Jews' given by the general to God (l. 12).[59]

Graffiti in the vicinity of Najrān
[**3.17a–d**]
[**3.17a**] al-Gharaziyyāt A (Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens Expedition R 2826/7)[60]

[59] Jamme 1966: 39–55, figs 13–15, pls X–XIII; most recently, Robin 2008b: 87–9, fig. 4; Müller 2010: 100–2.
[60] Robin 2010b: 88, fig. 3.

Mālik Baddāʾ ² Bishr ʿAbd^um Thuʿlubān
[**3.17b**] al-Gharaziyyāt B (Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens Expedition R 2812)[61]
ʿAmr Saʿd Raʾs officer of ² Bishr son of ʿAbd^um dhu-Thuʿlubān
[**3.17c**] Ḥimà Well, Christian graffito[62]
Cross Marthad^um Saḥa²fiyān
[**3.17d**] Ḥimà region, graffito mentioning a Ḥimyarite Jewish prince (Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens Expedition R 47, unpublished)
Mālik^um son of Ṣabāḥ ² officer of Isaac {Yṣḥq} dhu-Gadan^um

The mountain range—located some 100 km to the north-north-east of Najrān, through which one travelled to go to Syria or to the Arab-Persian Gulf—contains tens of thousands of graffiti and rock drawings. On these are recorded the names of the region's princes, dhu-Thuʿlubān and dhu-Gadan^um. Some of the graffiti offer clues to an adherence to either Judaism or Christianity.

An Ethiopian victory, probably of Kālēb Ella Aṣbəḥa (Fig. 3.9)
[**3.18**] *RIÉth* 195
Fragment A
  1 . . .] . . . . .[. . .
  2 . . .] and he shall exalt you[63] [. . .
  3 . . .] I have [dev]astated the port called [. . .
  4 . . .] . . . with my tribes [. . .
  5 . . . a]s sayeth the psalm: 'Let he [arise and his enemies disperse]
  6 [and his adversaries fl]ee before him'[64] [. . .
  7 . . .], taking prisoners, and he looted [. . .
  8 . . .] and he chased (?) the tribes in fro[nt . . .
  9 . . .] I have . . . on a ship [. . .
  10 . . .] . . . his bay that has delivered to me G[od . . .
  11 . . .] . . . and a part of [my] t[ribes . . .
  12 . . . and a part of m]y tribes descended through the breach (?) . . .
  13 . . . and a par]t of my tribes descended [. . .

Fragment B

The slab is complete at the top and to the left, and broken to the right and at the bottom. The text, however, is fragmentary at the beginning, which implies the prior presence of a slab above it of same dimensions, from where Fragment A undoubtedly originated.

    . . . the fug]-
  1 itives wande[red . . . . Enga]-
  2 bēnāy and . . . [. . .
  3 . . . victor ..[. . .
  4 'I will give you th[is land . . .
  5 so that you dominate it' . . . [. . . [65]

[61] Robin 2010b: 88, fig. 4.   [62] Robin 2010b: 87, n. 155, fig. 2.
[63] Ps. 37:34.   [64] Ps. 68:1.   [65] Gen. 17:8 (cf. Gen. 15:7).
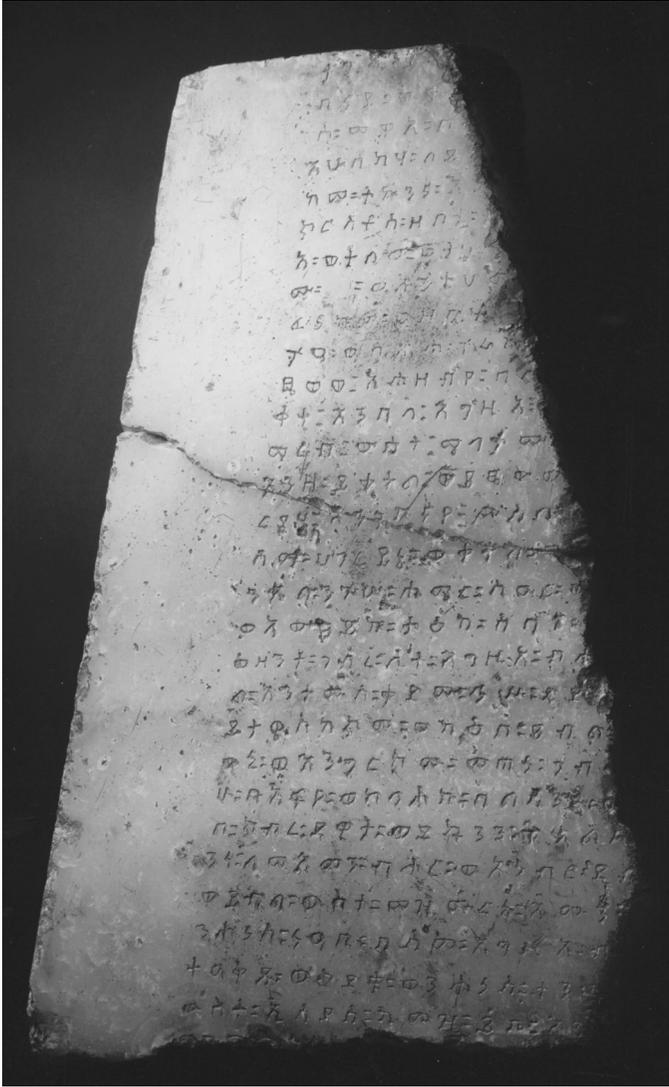
Fig. 3.9. The Geʿez inscription (**3.18**), probably of Kālēb Ella Aṣbəḥa. Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

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 6  Christ in whom I [ . . .
 7   . . . and he chased the fugitives [ . . . . . . their bro]-
 8  thers and their sisters [ . . .
 9  I have sent him and . . . [ . . . . . . . . . . Gʷərā]-
10  gʷəʿā and he reached Gʷərā(gʷə)[ʿā . . .
11  he captured my tribes at [ . . .
12   . . . .. except Go[d . . .
```

13 Mārab in their mēlāt[...
14 while he was killing and taking captives [...
15 ..... Engabēnāy with [...
16 whose name is Hagaraynē and he killed [... ... ... ʿAqa]-
17 nʾēl, the king of Ḥamēr, deposed and [...
18 and I burnt the palace of Sabaʾ [...
19 This, is what has done for me Go[d ...
20 .. ʿThou, look first for [his] justi[ce ...
21 will be added'.[66] Moreover sayeth [David in the psalm: ʿCome, lis-
22 ten to me, so that I say all that He did to my soul, while I was crying out to
23 Him with my mouth and cried out with my tongue'.[67] And ...
24 ... the glory of David, and he will judge, and there is nothing [...
25 ... for the believer of the world, and I shall place on [
26 and thus he sayeth in the psalm: ʿThe[y are on horses and chariots, and]
27 we are great by the name of Go[d, our god; they]
28 were trapped and have fallen, but we have [risen up'[68] ...
29 In Isaiah, as is said: ʿGo[d . . . .

These two fragments, parts of a large inscription written in vocalized Geʿez, were found at Marib, the ancient capital of the kingdom of Sabaʾ, and date to c.530.[69] The text is written from left to right. The inscription commemorates an Ethiopian victory and would have yielded a fairly detailed recollection of events; unfortunately, due to its multiple lacunae, only brief glimpses are available. Its author, whose name has disappeared, is most likely Kālēb Ella Aṣbəha, the conqueror of Ḥimyar.

Fragment A apparently records the crossing of the Red Sea; Fragment B hints at the death of Ḥimyar's king and the conquest of Yemen, or at least of Marib (Mārab) and of the Two Cities (Hagaraynē) of the Jawf (Nashshān and Nash-q^{um}). Several obscure words seem to refer to places or personal names.

The refortification of Qanīʾ
[3.19] CIH 621
Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ and his sons, Shuriḥbiʾīl Yakmul and Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur, son of Laḥayʿat Yarkham, ^{2} {of the lineage} of Kalʿān, dhu-Yazʾan, Gadan^{um}, Mṯl^n, S²rq^n, Ḥabb^{um}, Yṯ ^{n},^{3} Ys²r, Yrs³, Mkrb^m, ʿqht, Bs³ʾy^n, Yalghub, Ghaymān, Yaṣbur, ^{4} S²bḫ^m, Gdwy^n, Kasrān, Rakhyat, Girdān, Qbl^n, S²rgy, and banū Mlḥm, ^{5} {lords} of their communes Waḥāẓat, Alḥān, *Suflān, *Ḍayfatān, *Rathaḥ^{um}, Rakbān, Mṯlft^{6n}, Saʾ-kalān, and Śakrad, {also} chiefs and governors of Saybān dhu-Nṣf, have written this inscription on mo^{7}unt *Māwiyat, when they built the walls, the gate, the cisterns, and the access roads, ^{8} when they entrenched themselves there upon their return from Abyssinia, when the Abyssinians sent their expedi^{9}tion task force to the land of Ḥimyar^{um}, when they killed the king of Ḥimyar^{um} and his princes, Ḥimyarites and Raḥbatites. ^{10} In the month of dhu-ḥillatān {February} six hundred and forty.

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[66] Mt. 6:33.   [67] Ps. 66:16–17.
[68] Ps. 20:8–9.   [69] Robin 2012b: 284; see Marrassini 2014: 253–8.

The inscription, dated to February 530 or 531, is carved on a rock on the path leading to the summit of the acropolis at the port of Qanīʾ (modern Biʾr ʿAlī). It commemorates the strengthening of the acropolis' defences. The inscription's author is a Ḥimyarite prince from Western Yemen, no doubt a refugee at Aksūm who returned to Arabia with Aksūmite troops after the death of a king of Ḥimyar (certainly Yūsuf Asʾar Yathʾar, **3.16**). It is possible that he is Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ (Esimiphaeus), the prince whom the Aksūmites placed upon the throne (**3.20**).[70]

Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ constructs a church (?)

[**3.20**] Ist. 7608 bis + Wellcome A103664 (Robin 2008b)[71]

Ist1 [In the na]me and with the safe[guarding of Raḥmanān, of his Son Christ the Victor and of the Holy Spi]rit, Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ, king of Sa[baʾ, of dhu-Raydān, of Ḥaḍramawt, and of Yamnat, and of their Arabs of the Upper-Country]

Ist2 [and of the Coa]st [. . . . . . A]ḥsan and Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ sons of Shuriḥbiʾī[l . . . |

Ist3 . . . their lor]ds, the Negus of the Aksūmites, have built and foun[ded . . .

W1 . . .] . . . . [. . .

Ist4 . . . their a]rmies, a royal one and a princely one, which have completed .. [. . .

W2 . . .].. Raḥmanān and his s[on . . .

Ist5 . . .].. this king with strength and with their army in the company of the kin[g . . .

W3 . . .] this king, when their brother went [. . .

Ist6 . . .] beside (?) King Ella A<ṣ>bǝḥah, king of Abyssinia at [. . .

W4 . . .] Abyssinia from Ṣanʿāʾ, when he waged war on Ḥi[myar^um . . .

Ist7 . . .] kings for Ḥimyar^um and lieutenants for the Neguses of A[ksūm . . .

W5 . . .] and the tribes of their city Aksū[m . . .

Ist8 . . .] they submitted to the Aksūmites kings and when . . . [. . .

W6 . . .] and he submitted to them so as to become subjected (?)[. . .

Ist9 . . .] . . . . for the control of the sea and peace in Ḥ[imyar^um . . .

W7 . . .].. Sharḥ^um, Laḥayʿat dhu-Ḥaṣbaḥ[. . .

Ist10 . . . dhu]-Yazʾan, and Ḥaśśān and Shuriḥbʾil dhu-Maʿāfi[rān . . .

W8 . . .]ʾīl, Sharaḥʾīl, Nawf^um, and Barīl^um [. . .

Ist11 . . . be sub]jected to him Aswadān, Sumūyafaʿ dhu-ʿAbadān, [. . .

W9 . . . Shu]riḥbiʾīl son of Abīshamar dhu-Ruʿayn, ʿAmr^um, and [. . .

Ist12 . . . d]hu-Khalīl, Zurʿat dhu-Marḥab^um, Malik^um Ns¹[. . .

W10 . . .]ynn, ʿAmr^um, and his son Marthadʾil dhu-[. . .

Ist13 . . .]rm, Ḥarīth^um and Marthad^um dhu-Thaʿlabān, M(ḫ)[. . .

W11 . . .](b)m and Mawhabʾīlān dhu-Mawḍaʿ and their daughters [. . .

Ist14 . . . Ella Aṣbǝḥa]h, Negus of the Aksūmites, and when they entrusted and preserved [. . .

W12 . . .] . . . be it He grants rest or He deli[vers . . .

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[70] Müller 2010: 105–6.   [71] See too Ryckmans (J.) 1976; Beeston 1980.

Ist15 ...] the son {borne of a slave mother} of their father Shuriḥbiʾl Yakmul and ..[...

W13 ... Shu]riḥbiʾīl, Maʿdīkarib, and Sumūyafaʿ dhu-[...

Ist16 ...] in the name of Raḥmanān, of his son Christ the Victor [and of the Holy Spirit ...

W14 ...]... ... ... [...] .. Malik^um ... . [... ...] ... [...

The inscription, of which two fragments are known, commemorates a construction of a building—perhaps a church. Its author, Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ (Esimiphaeus), is the Ḥimyarite Christian whom the Aksūmites placed upon the throne of Ḥimyar. The inscription also speaks of recent events and mentions an entire series of princes and lords, probably won over to the new power. One might interpret the confidence and finality of the text as a reflection of the foundation of the new regime. If the Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ who wrote this text is to be equated with the author of the previous Qanīʾ inscription (**3.19**), the date of the text is later than February 530 or 531.[72]

The Marib Dam inscription of Abraha (Fig. 3.10)
[**3.21**] Sadd Maʾrib 5 = *CIH* 541

Face A (1–27)

With the power, assistance, and merciful²ness of Raḥmānān, of his Mess³iah, and of the Spirit of Holiness. I have written ⁴ this inscription, myself, Abraha, *ʿzlⁱ⁵y*, the Geʿez king, *Rmḥs³* ⁶ *Zbymn*, king of Sabaʾ, of dhu-Ra⁷ydān, of Ḥaḍramawt, and of Yamnat, ⁸ and of their Arabs in the Upper-Country and on the Coa⁹st. {Abraha} has written this inscription after ¹⁰ revolted and broke his oath Yazīd ¹¹ b. Kabshat, his governor {*ḫlft*}, whom he had ¹² appointed over Kiddat, while {this tribe} had no ¹³ governor. He rebelled and, with him, ¹⁴ the princes of Sabaʾ, the Saḥarids {*Asḥūrān*} Murrat, ¹⁵ Thumāmat, Ḥanash^um, and Marthad^um, as well as Ḥa¹⁶nīf^um dhu-Khalīl and the Yazʾanids {*Azʾūnān*}, princes ¹⁷ Maʿdīkarib b. Sumyafaʿ and Haʿān ¹⁸ and his brothers, banū Aslam. It is then that {Abraha} ¹⁹ sent Gurah dhu-*Zbnr* so that he re-establish the authority ²⁰ of the king in the Mashriqān, but {the insurgents} killed him and took by force ²¹ the fortress of Kadūr. Yazīd assembled those of Kiddat who ²² obeyed him, attacked Ḥaḍramawt, ²³ captured Māzin^um, the natural son of the Adhmūrite, and retur²⁴ned to ʿAbrān. The call for help reached {Abraha} who deci²⁵ded to gather his armies: Abyssinians ²⁶ and Ḥimyarites in the thousands in the month of dhu-qiyā²⁷zān {June} six hundred and fifty-seven.

Face B (28–59)

He decided to go down through ²⁹ the two passes of Sabaʾ and to travel ³⁰ in the direction of the north from Ṣirwāḥ to³¹wards Nabaṭ^um at ʿAb³²rān. When {Abraha} reached Naba³²ṭ^um, he sent his troo³⁴ps to Kadūr, {i.e. the detachments originating from} Alw, ³⁵ *Lmd*, and Ḥimyar^um, ³⁶ whose commanders {were} *Wtḥ* ³⁷ and ʿAwdah dhu-Gadan^um. ³⁸ Yazīd joined him at Na³⁹baṭ^um and once more

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[72] Robin 2008b: 96–100.

Fig. 3.10. Detail of the great inscription of Abraha (**3.21**). Photograph by Christian Julien Robin.

swore allegiance {'gave him his hand'} [40] just as was being sent out the tr[41]oop. Saba''s call for help [42] reached him after [43]were destroyed the dam, 'Awdān, [44] Khabash[um], and the water diverter [45] of Dhaʾfān in the month of dhu-madhra[46]ʾān {July} of {the year six hundred and fifty-}seven. After [47] this news reached him, [48] he sent messengers at the moment when [49] had submitted the Arabs who [50] had not gone back with Yazīd; [51] all then swore allegiance [52] and surrendered hostages to the messeng[53]ers, while the troops he had se[54]nt to Kadūr were besieging the princes [55] who had revolted. As for the kin[56]g, he sent a summon to the [57] communes to dam, [58] gather earth, build in hewn stone, er[59]ect, consolidate (?), construct in ornamental stones, [60] and

Face C (60–98)

cover in plaster, so as to repair the dam, ʿA[60]wdān, and the damage that had
{taken place} at Marib.[62] He summoned them in the month of dhu-ṣurābān
{October} {six hundred and fifty-}seven. After having sent o[64]ut the summons
and submitted the Ara[65]bs, he entered the city of Ma[67]rib and consecrated the
church [67] of Marib since there was there a priest, the abbot of his monastery {the
monastery of the church}. [68] From there, he went up to the dam; he dug until [69]
reaching the mountain and shaped the mountain to make [70] foundations of
ʿAwdān. While he had [71] begun to make the foundations of ʿAw[72]dān, there
was an outbreak of pla[73]gue in the communes and in the city. After noticing [74]
that the epidemic was taking a heavy toll on the communes, he gave them leave, [75]
{both} his Abyssinians {and} his Ḥimyarites. [76] After {Abraha} gave leave to the
communes, came forth [77] the princes who had entrenched themselves at Kadūr;
they then arrived beside the king with the troops that [79]{Abraha} had sent to
besiege them and they made allegiance [80] to the king. Then, the king returned to
the ci[81]ty of Marib from the dam, with the princes who we[82]re {members} of the
Council (?), composed of Aksūm dhu-Maʿāhi[83]r, the king's son, *Mrgzf* dhu-
Dharāniḥ, [84] ʿĀdil dhu-Faysh, dhu-(S²)*wlmⁿ*, dhu-Shaʿbān, [85] dhu-Ruʿa(y)n,
dhu-Hamdān, dhu-Kalāʿān, dhu-Mahdam, [86] dhu-Thāt, ʿUlays[um] dhu-Yazʾan,
dhu-Dhubyān, the kabī[87]r of Ḥaḍramawt, and dhu-*Qrnt*. Then came to him [87]
the plenipotentiary minister {*mḥs²kt*} of the Negus and came to him [89] the
plenipotentiary minister of the king of the Romans, the ambassador {*tnblt*} [90]
of the king of Persia, the envoy {*rs¹l*} of Mudhdhirān, the envo[91]y of Ḥarith[um] son
of Gabalat, and the envoy of Abīkarib [92] son of Gabalat.

   Then, after the epidem[93]ic simmered down thanks to Raḥmanān, came the
communes in compliance with [94] his previous summons, obeying [95] his last
convocation. Then came [96] the communes during the first week of dhu-diʾāwān
{January}. [97] When the communes had sent to him the required forces, he
re[98]paired what had been destroyed in ʿAwdān which Yaʿfur had entirely rebuilt

Face D (99–136)

with Sabaʾ and the princes w[99]ho were with the king [101] and his companions. He
[102] then renovated from the foundations dug in the moun[103]tain to the summit. It
is then that he [104] added in front of ʿAwdān Qi[105]shbān[um], which he had entirely
rebuilt with the co[106]mmunes—forty-five [107] cubits in length, thirty-[108]five cubits
in height and four[109]teen cubits in wid[110]th—in cut stone. He raised [111] the dam,
both the embankment and the revet[112]ment; he refurbished the great canal of [113]
Khabash[um] except for the first part and [114] the spillway of Maflag[um]. Here is [115]
what he spent since the day when he [116] left on his expedition, [117] the consecra-
tion of the church, ʿAwd[118]ān and the dam: fifty thousand [119] eight hundred and
six [120] {measures} of flour; twenty-si[121]x thousand {measures} of dates [122] in the
qnt Yadaʿʾīl; the me[123]at of three thousand [124] butchered animals and cows, and
in small [125] livestock, seven thousand [126] two hundred heads; [127] three hundred
camel {loads} [128] wine—*ḡrbb* and *fṣy*; [129] eleven thousand *ʾl*[130]*ḥlb* {goatskins?} of
date wine. He [131] completed [his work] in fifty-[132]eight days and came back [133]
after eleven months. [134] In the month of dhu-maʿūn {March} [135] six hundred and
fifty-[136]eight.

This famous inscription, dated to March 548 and carved on the four faces of a large pillar, was erected close to the Marib Dam (Plate 4). It commemorates a restoration of the dam, but also mentions the crushing of a revolt in Eastern Yemen involving the Arab tribe of Kinda and Sabaean and Ḥimyarite princes, as well as the consecration of a church at Marib and the organizing of the international diplomatic conference described above.[73] The latter stands as a vital record for Ḥimyar's engagement with the two superpowers to the north, as well as their Arab allies.[74]

   As noted above, Abraha seized the throne of Ḥimyar a little after 531. Yet he needed fifteen years to consolidate his control over Ḥimyar, and it is only at the beginning of 548 that his first inscriptions are dated.

King Waʿzeb, son of Kālēb Ella Aṣbəḥa, victorious
[**3.22**] RIÉth 192

Face A
By the glory of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit . . .[2] and to the creator of all and the author of all that is visible and invisible, whose[3] grace is sufficient, He who has satisfied me, as is written: ʿ. . . .. you have suffered,[4] Christ fulfils for you'.[75]
While I trusted that He would assist me,[5] I waged war against the *Wytl*, me, Waʿzeb, king of Aksūm, dhu-Ḥimyarum,[6] dhu-Rēdān, dhu-Sabaʾ, and dhu-*Sl(f)* {= Salḥīn ?}, and of dhu-Bəgā, dhu-Kāsu, and dhu-Ṣəyāmo and dhu-*Wytl*,[7] the man of *Ḥdfn*, son of Ella Aṣbəḥa, servant of Christ, whom the enemy does not[8] vanquish. With the favour of Raḥmanān, I waged war, when *Dḥr* did me wrong. Have waged war my[9] tribes {ʾhzb, ahzāb} on the *Wl* and the *Wḥss* and they disbanded and found refuge in the de[10][sert], and moreover were repeatedly made . . . . for whom God is not[11] {the one who} is commiserate (?) and is not . . . . . . by believing this, I waged[12] war where God has led. I heard that I would be victorious (?), I heard[13] that the four chiefs {whom} I had sent so that they help the *Sbl ʾly*[.],[14] who, me, had made me king, *Dḥr* had gone against them; with my tribes,[15] they had gone down towards them and had made them flee by God's might, and they had killed their nobles.[16] As for *Dḥr*, he acted wrongly and revolted. To finish (?), I arrived in the region of *D(m)w*[17] *Sll* where it separates (?) and there, I heard that God had judged *Dḥr*[18] and that he was dead before I arrived. As is written in Ezechiel the prophe[19]t: ʿI shall fight your enemies and will wage war on your adversaries.'[76]
It is also said in the psalm:[20] ʿMy God avengeth me and subdueth people who are under me.'[77]
[21] It is also said in the Book (?): ʿGod shall fight for you, and you, speak not ..'[78]
[22] ʿ. . . Passing by (?), I arrived in their country, by God's might; I found them sheltering[23] in their (?) refuge whose name is *Dgm*, where *Dḥr* had fortified *Tt* {or: the camp},[24] ʾkry and ʾmbs. I established myself in *Gd*, the refuge, and I took

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[73] Müller 2010: 110–17; Robin 2012b: 285; Gajda 2009: 130–5; see Marrassini 2014: 266–9.
[74] Cf. Gajda 2009: 135–6.   [75] I Pet. 5:10.
[76] Is. 1:24.   [77] Ps. 18:48.   [78] Ex. 14:14.

the camp [25] in its entirety and their/his (?) refuge which is called *Wtt*, as is written in the psalm: 'All [26] the tribes surrounded me, and in the Lord's name, I overwhelmed them,'[79] . . . . . .

[27] [I] then slew them. The following day, I sent an expedition in the country of the troops *Ḥdfn* and *Sg*[28]*rt*, *Ṣbḥ*, *Dmw*, and *ʾgw*. And God shattered them, as is written in the [29] psalm: 'Wage war against them, Lord, against those who wage war on me, seize the shield {*waltā*} and the spear {*kʷīnāt*} and rise [30] to my rescue.'[80]

'May they retreat and be covered in shame, those who propose evil against me, [31] may they be like the dust which is in front of the wind's face, may the Angel of God chase them.'[81]

[32] And it is also said {*yḏg>ybl*} in the psalm: 'I pursue my enemies and capture them.'[82]

And 'you shall girdle me with might [33] in battles and you cause to fall all those who stand against me, from under me, and you [34] hand me the backs of my enemies'.[83]

And it is also said: 'the right hand of God has made strong, [35] the right hand of god has exalted me'.[84]

And it is also said: 'In the shadows, the faithful . . . [36] . . . And he blessed Your holy name and . . . and the warrior praised It . . . '[85]

[37] The troops which I had sent have submitted and slain, captured, and seized booty, and they ret[urned] [38] safe and sound with God's might. I erected a throne in their country (?) . . . [39] . . . . . . And I returned safe and sound with my tribes with God's might. [40] I established myself at *Zwgš* {*or: z-Wgš*} and there had sought refuge, in the desert, those who had fought with me. They said: 'Those who [41] . . . our country have attacked us on the road.' For this reason, I sent on an expedition the troops [42] *Ḥr*, *Lwkn*, *Sgr*, and *Ṣbḥ*. They killed, captured, and seized booty, with the migh[43]t of God, and they returned safe and sound. And what has given to me God during his first ex[44]pedition and during the last were: captives, men (*figures*), women and children (*figures*), i.e. {in total} [45] (*figures*); slain, men (*figures*), women and children (*figures*) i.e. [46] {in total} (*figures*); the total by adding {*dammāri*} the prisoners was (*figures*); the booty was in cattle [47] (*figures*). Then all the clans of the *Wytl* and of the *ʾgš* came back with gifts. I decreed . . . [48] . . . and I decided for them that, with their asses, they would wage war like the *Sgrt* . . . and I ga[49]ve (them) as chief *Fgh* the *aggabǝnāwī*, the chief of the *Dmw* and . . . . . . [50] . . . . and he came back . . .

Face B

. . . . [2] . . . *Dḥr* . . . . [3] (he) waged war against . . . made for me God with his might, which He [4] rewarded me with . . . . This is the work of God who dies not and who ages not [5] who is and will be for the generations of generations and for the centuries of centuries, amen. If [6] there is . . . . God [7] and may he bless (?) {*yt > yētbārak*} in his house, in his offspring, in {his} condition and in {his} works, may he be paid back by [8] God,

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[79] Ps. 118:10.   [80] Ps. 35:1–2.   [81] Ps. 35:4–5.   [82] Ps. 18:37.
[83] Ps. 18:39–40.   [84] Ps. 118:15–16.   [85] Quotation not identified.

and may God's punishment not rest (?) upon him in this [9] . . . . . . world. This, I placed it under the protection of He who made me king, of God to whom praise belongs [10] and might, in the centuries of centuries, amen and amen.

This inscription was found at Aksūm, written in a mixed language (Geʿez, with forms borrowed from Sabaʾic, e.g. Raḥmānān, the name of God, or unique to this text) and in the Ḥimyarite alphabet. It is carved on a large stone slab covering the entire front face and the upper part of the back. It commemorates a victorious campaign of King Waʿzeb, son of Kālēb Ella Aṣbəḥa. In his titles, this king always mentions the territories conquered in Arabia by Kālēb.

   The exact date of this text is unknown, although it is likely not different from that of the previous text (**3.21**). Much depends on the chronology of Kālēb's death. According to Procopius, this king sent two expeditions in reprisals against Abraha, which both failed, and then made no further attempts.[86] It can thus be supposed that his reign lasted at least until 540.[87]

Abraha and *Arabia Deserta*
[**3.23**] Murayghān 1 = Ry 506
Cross With Raḥmanān's might and that of his Messiah, King Abrahā *Zybmn*, king of Sabaʾ, of dhū-Raydān, of Ḥaḍramawt, [2] and of Yamnat, and of their Arabs in the Upper-Country and on the Coast, inscribed this text when he raided [3] Maʿadd[um] for the fourth time, in the month of dhū-thābatān {= April}, when all the banū ʿAmr[um] revolted; [4] the king sent Abīgabr with Kiddat and ʿUla, and Bishr[um] son of Ḥiṣn[um] with [5] Saʿd[um] and Mu[rād[um]]; the two chiefs of the army began to battle against the banū ʿAmr[um], Kiddat, and ʿUla in the wādī dhu-Murākh, and Murād[um] and Saʿd[um] in a wādī [6] at the water hole of Turabān, and they slew, took prisoners, and seized booty in abundance; the king held an assembly at Ḥalibān and they pledged allegiance, [7] the rebels of Maʿadd[um] who surrendered hostages; following this, ʿAmr[um] son of Mudhdhirān submitted to {Abraha}, [8] he gave his son as a hostage while he {= ʿAmr[um]} had been set up as governor over Maʿadd[um]; {Abraha} returned from Ḥali[9][bā]n [with] Raḥmānān's might, in the month of dhu-ʿallān {= September} six hundred and sixty-two.

The inscription, dated to September 552, is carved on a rock towering above the wells of Murayghān (Plate 6) 230 km to the north of Najrān. In it King Abraha commemorates a victorious expedition aimed at reconquering *Arabia Deserta*, four years after the stabilization of his regime (**3.21**).[88] See Fig. 3.7 for this and for **3.24**.

Abraha victorious
[**3.24**] Murayghān 3
Cross King Abraha *Zybmn*, king of Sabaʾ, of dhu-Raydān, of Ḥaḍramōt, and of Yamnat, [2] and of their Arabs in the Upper-Country and on the Coast, has written

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[86] Proc. *BP* 1.20.5–7.   [87] Robin 2012b: 299–300; see Marrassini 2014: 259–66.
[88] Müller 2010: 118–19; Robin 2012a.

this inscription when he returned from the Country of Maʿaddᵘᵐ, ³ when he seized the Arabs of Maʿaddᵘᵐ taken at [Mu]dhdhirān, chased out ʿAmrᵘᵐ son of Mudhdhirān, and ⁴ seized all of the Arabs of Maʿaddᵘᵐ[, Ha]garᵘᵐ-and-Khaṭṭ, Ṭayyᵘᵐ, Yathrib, and Guzā(m).

Newly discovered, this inscription is carved in large letters on a rock, visible for some distance away, to the left of the entrance of the valley which leads to the wells of Murayghān (Plate 6). It is an undated victory bulletin, in which King Abraha publishes the list of regions which have just pledged allegiance to him. The text is certainly later than the narration of the expedition (**3.23**), and earlier than the accession of ʿAmr son of al-Mundhir (or son of Hind) on the throne of al-Ḥīra, in the summer of 554, after the death of al-Mundhir in battle with his Jafnid enemy al-Ḥārith (**5.23**, **6.12**).[89]

Abraha and al-Qalīs (?)
[**3.25**] *CIH* 325
1 ...] cut stones, blocks of alabaster and *ftẖ* [...
2 ...] its paving towards the great nave and they also redid [...
3 ...the peri]pheral wall except for its summit and they carried out all that was ordered...[...
4 ...] to a beam {*s¹km*} and they redid it from the foundations to the summit and [...
5 ...] .. the year six hundred and sixty-nine and they also [...
6 ...] and Hinwam four courses {*fls³t*} in height and four peripher[al walls...
7 ...from it]s foundations. They built it from its foundations and they completed there[...
8 ...] its... and three courses {*fls³t*} above it. They placed {against it} its *ḥṣm* of labakh wood [...
9 ... The Lan]d of Ḥagūrᵘᵐ and the border of ʿAkkᵘᵐ and all that was ordered in ornamental stone, cut stone {called} ḥabash[...

This large fragment of an inscription, carefully carved in relief on three registers, commemorates an ostentatious construction; its author is in all likelihood King Abraha. It is possible that the text describes the church of Ṣanʿāʾ, al-Qalīs. Dated to 559/60, it is the latest known dated Ḥimyarite text.[90]

The final maintenance of the Marib Dam
[**3.26**] Sadd Marʾib 6 = Ja 547 + 546 + 544 + 545
Rabībᵘᵐ and Afʿā {of the lineage} dhu-Mishʿārān and Asa²dᵘᵐ {of the lineage} dhu-Dhanamᵘᵐ, the commanders and the kabīrs ³ of the communes of dhu-Hamdān and of their encampment ⁴ *Trym*, while they were bringing earth on the Marib Dam ⁵ with their communes Ḥāshidᵘᵐ, Bakīlᵘᵐ, the A⁶rabs *Suflān, *Ṣaddān and *ẕrfⁿ ||⁷ In the name of Raḥmanān, lord of Heaven and Earth, ⁸ and with the help of their lord, King Abraha, king of Sabaʾ, ⁹ of dhu-Rēdān, of

⁸⁹ Robin and Ṭayrān 2012.   ⁹⁰ Müller 2010: 122–3.

Ḥaḍramōt, and of Yamnat, and of their Arabs in the Upper-Country [10] and on the Coast, *Rmḥs³*, in the name of Raḥmanān who rules, *Cross* ||[11] and with the help of their lords *ʿIbat, Nimrān [12] and Marthadʾīlān {of the lineage} dhu-Hamdān and Suʾrān [13]—May they grant them life of dignity [14] and satisfying for Raḥmanān. *Cross* ||[15] In the month of dhu-mah[16]latān {November} of the year [17] six hundred and sixty-eight. [18] Peace, peace.

The inscription is dated to November 558, and is incised on the face of a ravine, a few hundred metres up the slope from the Marib Dam. The inscription, carved in a rather clumsy way and in an extravagant style, commemorates the arrival of a tribal contingent of workers who participated in the last known maintenance of the dam.[91]

CONCLUSION

The corpus of inscriptions from the Arabian Peninsula and Ethiopia, only a number of which are discussed here, offer valuable perspectives on events known primarily from the view of distant authors writing in Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Syriac—or, in some cases, not known at all. New discoveries, such as **3.24**, continue to revise earlier opinions on the cultural, political, and religious history of Arabia.[92] This epigraphic material, in conjunction with the literary texts, also allows us to place the conquest of Arabia by Ḥimyar, the relationship between Ḥimyar and the Arabs of the Peninsula, and the later, 'local' conflict between Ḥimyar and Aksūm, within the broader landscape of the relationship between Rome and Persia, both of whom had long been interested in spreading their influence into the Peninsula, often as a means of gaining a competitive advantage over the other.

Chapter 4 now moves north, to examine the archaeological evidence for the Arab allies of the Romans and Persians—the Jafnids and the Naṣrids. Chapter 5 returns to some of the events and themes covered here in an analysis, from a literary perspective, of the role of Arabs and Arabia in the sixth-century wars between Rome and Persia. Then Chapter 6 offers a study of Arab Christianity, returning in part to the events at Nagrān, demonstrating, again, the importance of Ḥimyar and Aksūm for a broader understanding of the history of the late antique Near East.

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[91] Darles et al. 2013: 30–9.   [92] See now Robin 2014a, Robin 2012b.

4

The Archaeological Evidence for the Jafnids and the Naṣrids

Denis Genequand

INTRODUCTION

Since the nineteenth century, scholars have used archaeological evidence alongside the written sources to throw light on an 'Arab' presence in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire, and in the Sasanian realm.[1] For the early Roman empire, the archaeological evidence is, however, scarce, and we are dependent on literary sources which emphasize the position of 'nomadic' Arabs as outside of, or at the fringes of, the settled Roman world (Ch. 1). As demonstrated there, however, the relationship between Arabs and empires gained political and cultural complexity in late antiquity, and this development is mirrored, to some degree, in the archaeological record. This evidence has sometimes been used by archaeologists and historians to demonstrate the rise of an 'Arab' culture in the Near East.

Amongst others, one of the earliest examples is the famous tomb of Maraʾ al-Qays at al-Namāra, in the basalt steppe lands of southern Syria, some 70 km north-east of the Jabal al-ʿArab. The tomb, situated close to a small Roman fort, is identified by an inscription dated to AD 328 (7.3).[2] The monument itself has a square plan and seems to have been some sort of cubic structure covered by a pyramidal roof. It was ornamented by corner pilasters with roughly carved trapezoidal capitals, one of them with vine scroll decorations. If considered alone, the tomb belongs to the long series of funerary monuments, with various plans and shapes, known from southern Syria during the first to fourth centuries AD, and nothing would suggest that it should be attributed to

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[1] The author warmly thanks Isabelle Ruben for correcting the English text of this chapter.
[2] Dussaud and Macler 1903: 26–7; Bordreuil et al. 1997; Macdonald 2008c.
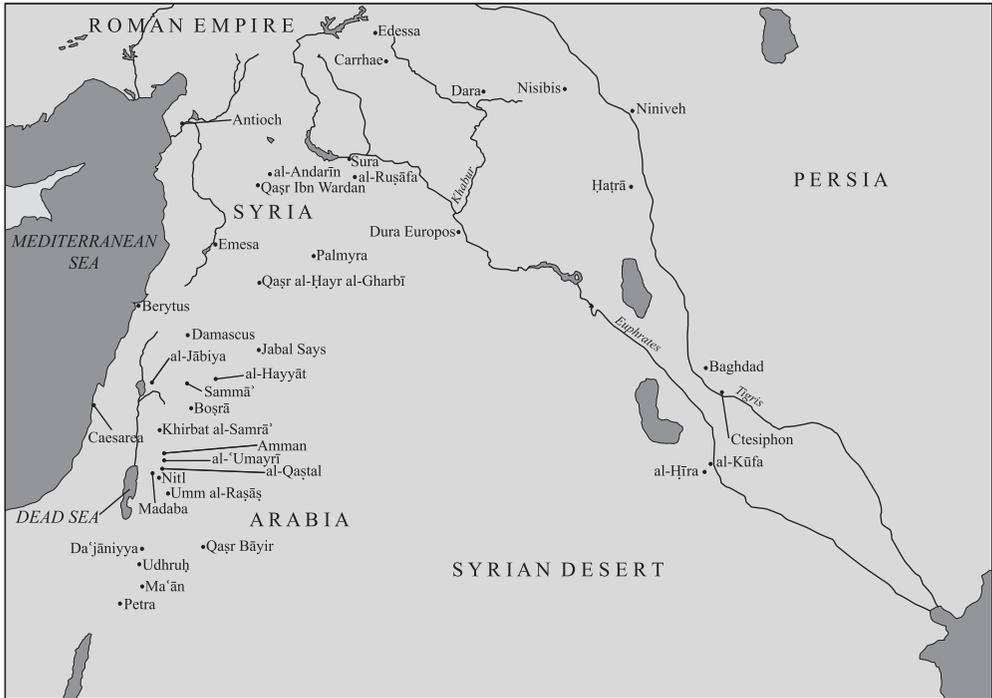
Fig. 4.1. Map of the Near East, showing sites discussed in this chapter, drawn by Aaron Styba.

any particular ethnic group in the area.[3] Its Roman provincial architecture only implies some sort of close link with the empire.

However, two groups—the Jafnid dynasty in the provinces of the eastern Roman empire, and the Naṣrids in Sasanian Persia—eventually gained enough prominence to be credited with a number of creations, especially in the field of architecture; these groups will be discussed in this chapter (Fig. 4.1).

THE JAFNIDS IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

History of Research

Since it is known from different sources that the Jafnids, and especially two of their leaders—al-Ḥārith b. Jabala (*c.*529–69) and al-Mundhir b. al-Ḥārith (569–81/2), both discussed extensively in the following chapters—were

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[3] On Roman funerary architecture in southern Syria: Sartre-Fauriat 2001.

responsible for a number of constructions, archaeologists and historians have, since the late nineteenth century, tried to identify these structures. For a long time, the key element for such identifications was a chapter compiled by the tenth-century Persian historian Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī in his *Taʾrīkh*, in which he provides a list of Jafnid rulers and, for each of them, an enumeration of their main constructions (**8.31a–f**). But this list is not without problems: it includes 32 rulers who are supposed to have reigned for about six centuries altogether, and thus it hardly seems reliable.[4] Nevertheless, a number of scholars have tried to identify some of these constructions; others still consider the source to be entirely reliable.[5] All the sites with identified place names mentioned in Ḥamza's list fall within the wide area that was under the control of the Jafnids. Nevertheless, with the exception of al-Ruṣāfa, none of these places has yet revealed a monument that can be securely demonstrated to have been ordered by a Jafnid phylarch. (We shall return to some of these sites and potential constructions later.) The oddities in the list of rulers, as well as the absence of archaeological evidence confirming the veracity of the construction list, make the text of Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī a rather unreliable source for the archaeologist.

Only a handful of places related to the Jafnids appear in other textual sources, amongst them al-Jābiya and Jalliq.[6] The first is identified on the Jawlān heights, but it has not been the subject of archaeological investigations and cannot be reasonably discussed. The identification of the second with a known archaeological site or with a modern place name is still a matter of debate.[7]

However, there are a few inscriptions related to Jafnid phylarchs which help with the clear identification of Jafnid constructions. Some of these were found *in situ* and leave no doubt as to their interpretation and that of the structure to which they are attached. The others were found in secondary or unclear positions, leaving many more possibilities for their interpretation. It should be stated here that the sites with an inscription are the only ones that can be properly considered as Jafnid constructions or Jafnid-related constructions; anything else is pure speculation.

A number of scholars have advanced the idea of the existence of a 'Ghassānid' material or visual culture, or of a dynastic architecture. This started quite early in the twentieth century, when trying to find an appropriate date and patronage for some of the so-called Umayyad 'desert castles', and is an ongoing debate. For instance, al-Mushattā or the Amman citadel were tentatively interpreted as 'Ghassānid' monuments,[8] and a whole monograph tries to demonstrate that Khirbat

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[4] Sartre 1982:182.   [5] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 312–41.
[6] On al-Jābiya: Shahîd 1971; Millar 2013a and below. On Jalliq: Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 105–15.
[7] The debate on the identification is summarized at length in Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 105–15; one possible identification is Kiswa, some 20 km south of Damascus.
[8] See Herzfeld 1921, who provided decisive indications to close the debate on the late antique or early Islamic attribution of these monuments.

al-Bayḍāʾ was also a 'Ghassānid' construction.[9] Recently, the sixth-century phase of Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt in Jordan followed the same scheme of interpretation, though the methodological bases for such an identification is questionable.[10]

Clearly, the debate on trying to identify Jafnid monuments or places is somewhat complicated by the introduction of too many sites for which there is not enough information for their attribution to one or the other of the ethnic or linguistic groups found in the Near Eastern provinces during late antiquity. If identifying an 'ethnic identity' is often difficult,[11] then what about tribes, fractions of tribes, local dynasties, or individual builders? Another caveat is on how to interpret the structure, affiliations, or territory of a given tribe, a problem that has been dealt with recently for the tribe of Ghassān, leading to a much more cautious view than that prevailing before.[12] Save for the few sites for which epigraphic finds allow an identification, research on Jafnid settlements or material culture will remain an eminently speculative exercise.

Structures Attested by Epigraphy

There are six inscriptions mentioning Jafnid phylarchs, three of which were found *in situ* and three in a secondary position. The former were found in the so-called *praetorium* in al-Ruṣāfa (Syria: see **4.7** and **6.29**), in the house of Flavius Seos in al-Ḥayyat (Syria: **4.1** and **4.3**), and on a church mosaic at Tall al-ʿUmayrī East (Jordan: **4.8** and **6.31**). The three others come from Jabal Says (Syria: **4.4** and **7.6**), al-Burj (near Ḍumayr, Syria: **4.2** and **6.32**), and Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (Syria: **4.6** and **6.23**). To this list, one should add another two inscriptions mentioning phylarchs that are very likely to be members of the Jafnid dynasty, though they are not clearly identified as such in the texts; one comes from a church mosaic found *in situ* in Nitl (Jordan: **4.5** and **6.30**) and the other was found in a secondary position in Sammāʾ (Syria: **6.24**). Of course, there are other sixth-century inscriptions mentioning minor tribal chiefs, also identified as phylarchs, or by people bearing Arabic names but not belonging to the Jafnid family and probably not even from the same tribe, for instance on the Ḥarrān inscription (**6.34, 7.7, 7.25**). These are witnesses of an Arab presence in many rural areas of the eastern provinces and will also be discussed below.

Inscriptions Found in Situ

The inscription at al-Ruṣāfa is in an isolated building of basilical plan in the northern part of the city.[13] It is an acclamation of al-Mundhir, the son of

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[9] Gaube 1974.   [10] Arce 2006 and 2008.
[11] For a methodological discussion, see Macdonald 1993, 1998, and 2009b.
[12] Robin 2015a.
[13] Sauvaget 1939a; Brands 1998; Fowden (E. K.) 1999 and 2000; Konrad 2015. For a more detailed description of the building, see **4.7**.

al-Ḥārith (**6.29**). Its unusual position in the apse of the structure makes it very likely that the building was commissioned by the phylarch himself. The traditional interpretation of the structure as a *praetorium* or audience hall by Sauvaget[14] has been questioned. Brands argues that it is a church,[15] while Fowden considers that both functions are not incompatible.[16] Despite the absence of liturgical installations in the sanctuary of the building, Fowden's interpretation is the most appealing. Whatever the case, the structure can be considered as a Jafnid construction, but without the inscription, the identification would have been more than difficult and it would have been considered only as an *extra muros* church.

At al-Ḥayyat, in the Ḥawrān, some 27 km north-north-east of Suwayda, the building inscription of a large aristocratic house indicates that it was built by Flavius Seos and his son Olbanos in 578, at the time of al-Mundhir *paneuphemos* and *patrikios*:[17] Newly republished by Maurice Sartre, this inscription can be read as follows:

> al-Ḥayyat
> [**4.1**] *Wadd.* 2110 = *IGLS* 16.628[18]
> Flavius Seos, son of Olbanos, procurator [*epitropos*] and his son Olbanos, constructed at their own cost the entire *aulè*[19] from the foundations, under the *paneuphemos* Alamoundaros, *patrikios*, in the year 473 of the province, in the 11th indiction.

Given the titles attributed to 'Alamoundaros', he must be identified as al-Mundhir. The text refers to the phylarch as a dating criterion, as in inscription B at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (**6.23**). Of course, the mere mention of the Jafnid phylarch by Flavius Seos, who describes himself as *epitropos*, implies some administrative, political, or possibly even familial link with the House of Jafna, but nothing more is known about this link. In any case, al-Mundhir is not involved in the construction, as Flavius Seos and son insist on the fact that they built it at their own expense. The house of Flavius Seos can be considered as a Jafnid-related building, but certainly not as a proper Jafnid monument.

The third inscription found *in situ* comes from a mosaic pavement in a church, recently uncovered at Tall al-ʿUmayrī, a few kilometres south of Amman. The church has a basilical plan and the inscription is located in the eastern part of the central nave, just in front of the raised sanctuary and apse.

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[14] Sauvaget 1939a; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 129–33; Konrad 2015.   [15] Brands 1998.
[16] Fowden (E.K.) 1999: 149–73; 2000.
[17] *IGLS* 16.628; *Wadd.* 2110; Butler 1919: 362–3; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 489–94. For the architecture of the house, see **4.3**. On al-Mundhir's titles see Ch. 6.
[18] The editor is grateful to Maurice Sartre for sharing his analysis of this inscription and for his assistance with the English translation.
[19] αὐλή: in this sense, the courtyard of the house, and the buildings surrounding it. See Sartre's commentary in *IGLS* 16.628, and the discussion under **4.3** below.

It praises the God of Saint Sergius, to whom the church was certainly dedicated, and lists a number of benefactors involved in the building of the church or in the laying of the mosaic.[20] The first of the benefactors is the Jafnid al-Mundhir, described as *comes* and bearing the title *megaloprepestatos* (*magnificentissimus*), indicating membership of the *illustres*. As clearly stated by the text, al-Mundhir is one of the benefactors, perhaps the most important, but not the only one, and he cannot be credited with the construction of the whole church as the text only refers to the laying of the mosaic. See (**6.31**) for a detailed discussion of this inscription.

Inscriptions Found in a Secondary Position

From amongst the inscriptions found in a secondary position, the Jabal Says text is slightly earlier and, contrary to the others that are in Greek, it is in Arabic. It was found engraved on an ashlar, close to the summit of the volcano, and can be considered as a graffito rather than a monumental inscription. It was written by the commander Ruqaym of the al-Aws tribe, who was sent to the military post of ʿUsays by the phylarch (*al-malik*) al-Ḥārith in 528/9.[21] The place name ʿUsays is also known from early Islamic sources and corresponds to the modern Jabal Says. Therefore, there was some sort of military installation there during the first half of the sixth century. Nevertheless, the exact position and nature of this installation remains unknown, as well as its origin. Archaeological survey and excavations in the 1960s and more recently have not been able to identify a late antique fortification and it may well have been a really small structure, quite in accordance with a graffito, and not a monumental construction. However, this text is the only material evidence of military presence and military installations under the control of the Jafnids. See **7.6** for a detailed discussion.

The second inscription in this category, found near Ḍumayr in the mid-nineteenth century, had for a long time been considered as *in situ* through misreading and a poor understanding of the early descriptions. It was found on the gateway of a ruined building beside a better-preserved tower in a place called al-Burj, some kilometres to the south-east of the modern town of Ḍumayr.[22] The inscription, on a large stone, probably a lintel, commemorates the erection of a building by al-Mundhir. As the last line was badly preserved, early commentators restored *t[on purgo]n* (the tower), a hypothesis fitting well with the presence of a tower near the structure in which the text was found and also with the place name (al-Burj, Arabic for 'tower'). A new reading of the

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[20] al-Shami 2010; Gatier 2015: 201–3; Bevan et al. 2015: 54–5.

[21] al-ʿUsh 1963; Grohmann 1971: 15–17; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 117–24; Robin and Gorea 2002; Macdonald 2009f. See also **4.4**.

[22] Vidua 1826: 31–2; Wetzstein 1863: 315–16; *Wadd.* 2562c; Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1909: 200; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 495–501, 524–6.

inscription by Pierre-Louis Gatier convincingly restored *to a[gion martyrio]n* in the last line, leaving no doubt about the construction it originates from: a church.[23] Whether it was found in its original place or not remains a somewhat open question. No description of the site alludes to a church, but rather to a small 'castle'—on the gateway of which the stone was found—and to a standing tower somehow attached to the castle.[24] The possibility that the structure was in fact a church, perhaps belonging to a monastery, as the presence of a tower would imply,[25] cannot be completely ruled out, but it is much more likely that the stone was reused, and originated from another building. It is worth noting that al-Burj is situated 2 km south of the so-called camp of Ḍumayr, recently demonstrated to be a late antique or early Islamic palace.[26] The association of the palace with an immediately adjacent church makes a sixth-century date more likely, and the latter may be a candidate for the original position of the inscription. In any case, it is unquestionable that the construction of the church referred to in the inscription was ordered by the Jafnid al-Mundhir. See **6.32** for further discussion.

Finally, the last inscription found in a secondary position comes from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī. It is a large stone, originally the lintel of the gateway of a monastery, found reused upside down as a threshold for an Umayyad palace.[27] The lintel bears five inscribed panels corresponding to four different texts painted in red, the order of which has always been a matter of discussion.[28] These are labelled from A to D and correspond to two dedications (A and B), a restoration (C), and an acclamation (D). A sixth panel, in the middle, has a cross painted in black on a red background. Following Jalabert and Mouterde's reading, the four texts should be understood as follows: Text A commemorates the building of the door of the monastery and, if it had been on its main gateway, in all likelihood the completion of the whole structure. It states that the building was a monastery, and that one of its officials, perhaps the archimandrite, was named Sergius. Text B was written at the time of an archimandrite whose name has disappeared and when the Jafnid al-Ḥārith was phylarch. Text C commemorates some restoration or building activities by John, another official. Text D is a series of acclamations to the same phylarch, al-Ḥārith.

The mention of the Jafnid al-Ḥārith in text B implies he at least provided some support either to the monastery or to the Miaphysite cause more generally, while his acclamation in text D certainly implies that he visited the monastery himself and reinforces the idea that he was one of its benefactors. The link

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[23] Gatier 2015: 203–4.
[24] See **4.2**; Wetzstein 1863: 315–16; Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1909: 200.
[25] On monasteries including a tower, see the discussion about Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, **4.6**.
[26] Lenoir 1999; Omeiri 2010; 2011.   [27] Schlumberger 1986: 10.
[28] Schlumberger 1939; Schlumberger 1986: 26–8; *IGLS* 5.2553; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 258–61; Genequand 2006: 69–70; Gatier 2015: 196–201.

between the Jafnids, monasteries, and Miaphysitism is discussed in detail in Ch. 6, and the Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī inscriptions further under **6.23**.

It should also be noted that the presence of an unspecified official named Sergius in text A gives some weight to the connection of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī with the monastery of Haliarum from the Miaphysite letter to Jacob Baradeus. This monastery, whose remains are still partially visible or were excavated,[29] was under the direction of a presbyter and archimandrite Sergius during the reign of the phylarch al-Mundhir, successor and son of al-Ḥārith.[30]

However, despite the clear association of the monastery in Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī with al-Ḥārith, it cannot be considered only as a Jafnid monument, but merely as a religious institution which received support from the phylarch. None of the texts indicates that al-Ḥārith founded the monastery, or ordered its construction.

Nitl and Sammāʾ

The site of Nitl, 10 km east of Madaba in Jordan, presents a different situation as two short inscriptions refer to people who may be part of the Jafnid dynasty or a larger family, but without any certainty. It is a three-church complex.[31] The middle church is dedicated to Saint Sergius and also has a sepulchral role as it includes an underground burial chamber accessible from the nave. The excavator dates it to the middle of the sixth century.[32] Two inscriptions in the nave mosaic refer to four people with Arabic names, one of whom is also a phylarch.[33] These are votive inscriptions in favour of two benefactors of the church and not epitaphs; they mention an 'Eretha son of Al-Aretha', as well as a 'Thaalaba the phylarchos' (see **6.30**). Both Arethas/al-Ḥārith and Thaalaba/ Thaʿlaba are recurring names in the Jafnid onomasticon and make their relation to the family possible, but not certain, as these are rather frequent Arabic names and thus may also be used for people from another family or tribe.[34] The Jafnid association with the church is likely, but not definitely proven. Were it the case, and given that the church has a prominent sepulchral role, it could be considered as a Jafnid monument, perhaps a sepulchral

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[29] On the archaeological remains, see **4.5**.
[30] Millar 2013a: 20 and Hoyland 2009a: 138; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 833.
[31] Piccirillo 2001 and **4.5**.   [32] Piccirillo 2001; Piccirillo 2002b: 217.
[33] Piccirillo 2001: 281–2; Shahîd 2001a; Gatier 2015: 212–14.
[34] Shahîd 2001a: 286 considers al-Ḥārith son of al-Ḥārith as an attestation of new persons of the Jafnid family (oddly enough, he refers to Piccirillo's dating in the mid-sixth century, but then discusses the monument and inscriptions as being from the first third of the seventh century). Piccirillo 2002b: 217 thinks that it probably refers to the most famous phylarch al-Ḥārith b. Jabala or one of his successors designated by the dynastic title and not by his personal name. Bevan et al. 2015 suggest that Eretha was the son of al-Ḥārith b. Jabala. Gatier 2015: 213–145 seriously considers a link with the Jafnids and also evokes the possibility of a son of al-Ḥārith b. Jabala, but remains very cautious without further evidence.

church for the family or a part of it. However, had there been no inscriptions, the case for a Jafnid or Jafnid-related construction would not have been considered. Artistically, the mosaic fits well with other contemporary works of the Madaba mosaic school. There is also nothing unusual about the plan of the church, except perhaps in being a single-nave building roofed by stone slabs sustained by transverse arches, a technique more frequently found in the Ḥawrān than in central Jordan. Nothing, other than its inscriptions, really differentiates the Nitl church from the numerous other churches of the area, whether in the episcopal city, in villages, or in monasteries.

At Sammāʾ, some 16 km to the northwest of Suwayda in southern Syria, an inscribed lintel found in a reused position implores the protection of the 'God of Saint George' for the most illustrious (*endoxotatos*) phylarch Abū Karib.[35] As is well demonstrated by Sartre, the name is most likely to correspond to Abū Karib, brother of al-Ḥārith and phylarch of Palestine. He was in this area of the Ḥawrān in 529 for military operations likely related to the Samaritan revolt (**5.16**), and the inhabitants of Sammāʾ could have written the invocation on one of the lintels of the village church dedicated to St George at that time.[36] The text sounds like a token of gratitude for one of the benefactors of the church, as at al-Burj and Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī. Therefore, most probably, the inscription is related to the Jafnids, but the church is not known archaeologically and is not demonstrated to have been entirely patronized by Abū Karib.

In relation to these texts, one should also cite here another sixth-century inscription mentioning a phylarch patronizing a construction, found at Ḥarrān, on the Lejā plateau 25 km north-east of Suwayda. It is a bilingual Greek–Arabic inscription and refers to the erection of a martyrion in 568 by the phylarch Sharaḥīl b. Ẓālim, certainly a local chief of an unknown tribe.[37] The monument itself, too, is unknown (see Plate 16). Though there is no link with the Jafnid family, this text is an echo of some of the inscriptions discussed before and another attestation of the importance of Arab tribal chiefs as benefactors for the building of churches. (For further discussion, see **6.34, 7.7**, and **7.25**.)

This list of Jafnid-related inscriptions leads to several conclusions. First of all, there are in fact only two, perhaps three, buildings which can be considered as proper Jafnid constructions: the so-called *praetorium* at al-Ruṣāfa, the church at al-Burj, and perhaps the church of St Sergius at Nitl, if we accept the hypothesis of a sepulchral church for part of the family. For all the other structures, the Jafnid phylarchs appear only as benefactors, not as primarily responsible for a construction, nor as being acknowledged for their regional power. It is important to point out that the largesse of the Jafnid phylarchs is not a strong enough argument to consider these monuments as reflecting any

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[35] Sartre 1993: 150–3.   [36] Sartre 1993: 152–3.
[37] Littmann 1911: 193–5; Sartre 1982: 177; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 325–31.

kind of dynastic architecture. They can only reflect a certain policy in terms of building subsidies or religious support and affirmation. Epigraphic mention of a phylarch does not necessarily mean that he built the monument referred to in the inscription, as exemplified by the case of the house of Flavius Seos in al-Ḥayyat.

If we consider the eight Jafnid or Jafnid-related inscriptions, another conclusion is that, in our present state of knowledge, the Jafnids did not build many palaces, contrary to the idea often reflected by later Arabic sources. Rather, they were mainly involved in supporting the construction of Christian religious monuments: four or five churches (al-Burj, al-ʿUmayrī, Nitl, Sammāʾ, and perhaps the so-called *praetorium* at al-Ruṣāfa) and one monastery (Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī).[38] The structures referred to in the final two texts are an unknown and undated military installation at Jabal Says, and a private house in al-Ḥayyat.

Structures Attested by Textual Sources

As mentioned above, the main textual source for Jafnid monuments is the chapter devoted to their dynasty by the tenth-century Persian historian Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī in his *Taʾrīkh*, with all the uncertainties about its reliability (see **8.31a–f**).[39] In most cases, a king is simply attributed a number of place names where he is said to have built something.

For instance, Ḥamza claimed that Jabala b. al-Ḥārith built al-Qanāṭir, Adraj (Udhruḥ?), and al-Qasṭal during his reign (**8.31b**).[40] These are all known place names, but a clear identification remains difficult. Al-Qanāṭir could be related to at least two places with that modern name: one refers to a number of agricultural structures, including two dams, in the Wādī al-Qanāṭir, that form part of the larger Umayyad settlement at Umm al-Walīd in central Jordan;[41] the other is a long aqueduct in southern Syria and northern Jordan, known as al-Qanāṭir or Qanāṭir Firʿawn, and dated to the Roman period.[42] The dates of these structures are either earlier or later than the sixth century and thus do not fit with the attribution given by Ḥamza. These are also modern place names and there is absolutely no certainty about their name by the tenth century or earlier. Adraj/Udhruḥ is easier to identify, certainly corresponding to the site of the same name in southern Jordan, where a Tetrarchic legionary fortress later evolved into a late antique city.[43] The place kept its importance

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[38] On the role and function of churches for the Arab tribes, see Fowden (E. K.) 2013.
[39] Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī 1844: 114–22.
[40] Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī 1844: 117.   [41] Genequand 2008.
[42] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 326–7; Döring 2008; Blanc and Gazagne 2010: 338–42.
[43] Killick 1983; Kennedy and Falahat 2008.

for some time in the early Islamic period, and was the place of the arbitration between Muʿāwiya and ʿAlī in 658.[44] It is a very large site, of which only a small part was excavated, and might well have been a place where the Jafnids supported some construction activities. Al-Qasṭal is a rather frequent place name. There are two famous archaeological sites with that name: one in central Jordan, some kilometres east of Madaba, is an Umayyad palace,[45] and another in the steppe lands of central Syria, a late Roman site, including most likely a monastery and perhaps a residence.[46] Though the latter would be a better fit to look for some support from the Jafnids, there are no other elements pointing to such a link.

There are many place names that have not been identified with their modern equivalent, such as the place called al-Sadīr, where ʿAmr b. al-Ḥārith b. Māriya resided, or the other places that he built: Qaṣr al-Faḍā, Ṣafāt al-ʿAjalāt, and Qaṣr Manār (**8.31d**).[47] We may only guess that Qaṣr al-Faḍā and Qaṣr Manār were some sort of wealthy residences or palaces due to the appearance of the term *qaṣr* in their names.

Similarly, according to Ḥamza, al-Ḥārith b. Jabala resided in al-Balqāʾ and built there al-Ḥufayr (or al-Ḥafīr?) and a stronghold between Daʿjān, Qaṣr Ubayr, and Maʿān (**8.31c**).[48] The Balqāʾ refers to the wider district of Amman in modern Jordan, but al-Ḥufayr is not a known archaeological site.[49] The unidentified stronghold can be more or less comfortably situated in southern Jordan, since the three place names mentioned around it are all well known. Daʿjān corresponds to the Roman fort Daʿjāniyya on the *Via Nova Traiana*.[50] Qaṣr Ubayr is the early Islamic name of modern Qaṣr Bāyir, a traditional watering place in the desert and the location of an Umayyad aristocratic settlement attributed to al-Walīd b. Yazīd.[51] Maʿān corresponds to the late antique (*Kastron Ammatha*) and early Islamic site to the north-east of the modern town with the same name.[52] There is no shortage of archaeological sites in the triangle defined by these three places, including from late antiquity, but none allows any identification with al-Ḥārith b. Jabala's stronghold.

More consistent with what is known from the epigraphic record, which links the Jafnids and Christian sites, Ḥamza wrote that the king ʿAmr b. Jafna built several monasteries, amongst which Dayr Ḥālī, Dayr Ayyūb, and Dayr Hunād are cited (**8.31a**).[53] Although none of them can be securely identified with any archaeological ruins of a monastery, they nevertheless confirm the

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[44] Schick 1995: 468–9.   [45] Carlier and Morin 1987.

[46] Genequand and Rousset forthcoming, with previous references.

[47] Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī 1844: 118.   [48] Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī 1844: 117.

[49] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 328 proposes an identification with Wādī al-Ḥafīr, a tributary of Wādī al-Mūjib at the extreme south of the Balqāʾ area.

[50] Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1905: 8–13; Kennedy 2004: 169–72; Godwin 2006.

[51] Genequand 2012: 366, 405.   [52] Genequand 2003.

[53] Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī 1844: 117.

importance given to the religious sphere by the Jafnids as benefactors (Ch. 6). This sounds like an echo of sorts of the inscriptions from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī and, to a lesser extent, from al-Burj, al-ʿUmayrī, and Nitl.

Moving back to places that are more securely identified, one of the kings, al-Ayham b. Jabala b. al-Ḥārith, is said to have been the lord of Palmyra (Tadmur) and a few other places (**8.31f**).[54] Though it is not specified if he built any monument(s) there, this shows a clear extension to the north and north-east of the area where the Jafnids are known to have been active, as most identified place names in Ḥamza's list concentrate in modern Jordan. Even farther to the north-east, al-Nuʿmān b. al-Ḥārith restored the cisterns of al-Ruṣāfa, which were apparently destroyed by a Naṣrid king (**8.31e**).[55] This mention is the only one in Ḥamza's work of a site that is also known through epigraphy (the so-called *praetorium* of al-Mundhir) and is echoed by a similar statement in the Yāqūt's thirteenth-century *Muʿjam al-buldān*.[56] The city of al-Ruṣāfa/*Sergiopolis* does indeed include three large subterranean cisterns in its south-western quadrant. On the other hand, Procopius attributes part of the water system of the city to Justinian.[57] The cisterns were studied by Brinker, who is more prone to see the hands of the Roman authorities in their construction, and attributes the two smaller ones to the seventh century.[58] In any case, the identity of al-Nuʿmān b. al-Ḥārith is not clear and, regarding the largest cistern, none of the arguments in favour of either a Jafnid leader or the Roman emperor are really convincing. This sounds rather like an endless discussion for which neither archaeology nor textual sources can provide a definitive answer without some further discoveries. Of course, al-Ruṣāfa may well have been the place for other Jafnid investments or financial support, especially as it was the very place of the martyrdom of St Sergius and the main place for his cult and pilgrimage in the Near East (see Ch. 6) but without more direct evidence, such as an inscription, it remains extremely difficult to attribute an archaeological structure like a cistern to a particular person.

Amongst other sources, a Syriac letter, first published by Shahîd, refers to a place called Gabitha, that is al-Jābiya in Arabic (on this letter, see Ch. 6).[59] The first reading of the text led to part of it being understood as a reference to a principal camp or base belonging to Jabala, father of the phylarch al-Ḥārith, thus being the first and main base of the Jafnids in the eastern provinces.

Al-Jābiya, on the Jawlān Heights, is a well-identified archaeological site, but it has never been studied archaeologically in any detail. For a number of scholars, this deceptive state of research was not an obstacle and al-Jābiya

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[54] Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī 1844: 121.   [55] Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī 1844: 120.
[56] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam* 3.47.   [57] Proc. *Aed.* 2.9.7.
[58] Brinker 1991: 135–43 on the date of the two small cisterns; for an opposite view, see Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 122–9.
[59] Shahîd 1971; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 96–104; and most recently Millar 2013a.

became the perfect example of a semi-nomadic princely seat and the very location of a hypothetical Jafnid court, leading to all sorts of hypotheses regarding its form and role. Nevertheless, recently Millar has convincingly argued that the main reference to al-Jābiya in the Syriac manuscript probably does not refer to any camp or base belonging to Jabala or the Jafnids, but merely to a monastery and its church.[60]

A number of sites somehow related to the Jafnids are also mentioned in pre-Islamic and later Arabic poetry (cf. **8.39**), but any clear links with archaeological remains are difficult to draw and these mentions often belong to the category of literary *topoi*.[61]

Other Structures and Sites

Looking at the many examples already pointed out above, it is clearly extremely difficult to identify a monument as having been commissioned by a Jafnid or one of their relatives if there is no epigraphic evidence. Nevertheless, several sites have been recurrently attributed to them. The palace of al-Qasṭal in Jordan, despite a similar place name in Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī's list, is demonstrated to be Umayyad and has no evidence of an earlier phase.[62] Gaube claimed that Khirbat al-Bayḍāʾ, in the basaltic steppe lands of southern Syria, was a 'Ghassānid' construction.[63] However, the monument has many architectural and decorative features that are likely to be Umayyad. Surface pottery points rather to an early Islamic date, including a good percentage of buff painted ware among the diagnostic sherds. Some years ago, Gaube came back to his dating and admitted that an Umayyad date is also possible.[64] According to the general trends shared by Umayyad aristocratic settlements and without excavations providing good dating evidence pointing to late antiquity, it is safer to consider Khirbat al-Bayḍāʾ as an early Islamic monument. When looking for Jafnid palaces, two names appear in the recent scholarly literature: Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt[65] in Jordan, and Ḍumayr in southern Syria.[66] For Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt neither an inscription, nor a literary text, nor evident archaeological remains links the site with the Jafnid dynasty; it may have been commissioned by any other tribal leader, local notable, or even a Roman official. The so-called camp at Ḍumayr, shown now to be late antique or early Islamic, is another candidate for a Jafnid construction, not the least because the al-Burj inscription was found in its vicinity and that its size and

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[60] Millar 2013a: 27–31.   [61] See for instance Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 145–6.
[62] For a Jafnid attribution, Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 327, 389; for the well-established Umayyad date: Carlier and Morin 1987.
[63] Gaube 1974.   [64] Gaube 2004.
[65] Arce 2006, 2008.   [66] Lenoir 1999; Omeiri 2010, 2011.

shape indicate a princely foundation. We shall come back to it below; suffice it to notice here that a late antique date is more likely for at least part of the structure. But the evidence at hand for the moment is still insufficient for any further discussion based on solid information.

Discussion

As we have seen, decisively attributing a monument to a precise faction of any tribal group is a very difficult task. The few surviving examples of monuments patronized by or related to the Jafnids show that, in terms of architecture and in the current state of research, there is no Jafnid 'dynastic architecture' defined by shared common elements.[67] Depending on which region these monuments were built in, they seem to conform to regional late Roman styles. One should add that, from an artistic point of view, if considering architectural decoration and sculpture, one reaches a similar conclusion: there is apparently no proper Jafnid 'style' or visual culture that can be differentiated from late Roman eastern provincial art. In most, if not all cases, other monuments, without inscription(s), cannot be attributed on firm grounds to the Jafnids, even after a precise analysis of their context and function.

Indeed, for many buildings situated on the steppe land fringes of the Near Eastern provinces of the empire, there are other possible patrons, amongst which one should not dismiss the role of Roman officials such as governors, *duces*, and other bearers of high duties in the imperial administration. For instance, the *comes* Magnus (*PLRE* 3b: 805) is a very good example of such an official, with local origins in al-Ḥuwwārīn (*Euareia*), who could also have been the patron of religious monuments or aristocratic residences in the region where the Jafnids were active.[68] Another example is a certain Thomas who patronized the *kastron* and a bath in al-Andarīn.[69]

From the discussion above, it is thus clear that we should not look for a Jafnid visual or material culture, or for a specific dynastic architecture. This is in part due to the poor state of knowledge of entire sections of the archaeology of the sixth century, but also to what has been for a very long time a misconception of what the Ghassānid/Jafnid presence was in the Near Eastern provinces.[70] As Chs 5 and 6 show, the Jafnids possessed a political and military power that was officially conferred by the Roman empire, and apparently recognized by other tribes, but they were neither at the heart of an independent principality, nor at the head of a whole tribe that had newly arrived and

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[67] This has also been developed in Genequand 2006.
[68] Feissel 1985. The *comes* Magnus was also responsible for arresting al-Mundhir.
[69] *IGLS* 4.1682, 1685; Strube et al. 2003.
[70] On this, see especially Robin 2008a, 2012b, and 2015a.

settled in Syria. Their power or leadership was that of a family over a number of other Arab tribes, which were either sedentary, nomadic, or, as was often the case, likely had both a nomadic and a sedentary component. Although they are not explicitly mentioned by Roman sources, it was these tribes that were probably occupying the lands under Jafnid leadership. The Jafnids also attained a position of cultural-political leadership in the provinces of *Arabia*, *Phoenice Libanensis*, *Syria Secunda*, and *Euphratesia*, via their support of the Miaphysites, and apparently some of the monasteries of *Arabia*. Given their political preponderance, it is normal to find monuments directly related to the Jafnids, but a majority of the buildings that we would be tempted to attribute to them could in fact belong to other tribes or groups, and to their leaders.

All this means that looking for a 'Jafnid architecture' is looking the wrong way. It does not mean that other monuments patronized by Jafnid phylarchs will not be discovered in the future—the church in al-ʿUmayrī is a good and recent example—nor that they do not exist. But it means that what should be looked for are monuments that would reflect the interaction between Roman power and the Arab tribes in the steppe lands of the Near Eastern provinces, or between the tribes themselves. It also means that the settlements of these tribes are what should be properly identified and understood, especially regarding their origins. This would in turn certainly help to understand the reasons behind the extraordinary extension of settlement pattern witnessed in many areas in the steppe during the sixth century.[71] It could perhaps also explain the growth of such large contemporary settlements as al-Andarīn, Khanāṣir, and Zabad in Syria, or Umm al-Jimāl and Umm al-Raṣāṣ in Jordan.

Another point that needs to be addressed briefly is the relation between Jafnid and Umayyad structures, as three of the Jafnid-related inscriptions were found on archaeological sites that also include a later Umayyad aristocratic residence. However, the relation between the structures from the two periods seems quite different at each of the three sites and we know many more Umayyad aristocratic settlements for which there is no indication whatever of an earlier Jafnid presence.

At al-Ruṣāfa, both Jafnid and Umayyad structures are clearly differentiated. These structures, the building of al-Mundhir to the north of the city and Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik's residence to the south, are completely independent. Given the importance of the sanctuary devoted to St Sergius for the Christian Arab tribes, the Jafnids and Umayyads could very possibly have made similar political use of the place.[72] This point is reinforced by the structural link,

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[71] On this extension of settlement, see amongst others Gatier 1994, 2005; Geyer and Rousset 2001, 2011.

[72] See Fowden (E. K.) 1999 and Genequand 2012: 391–2 for the importance of places creating the practical conditions of an itinerant form of kingship and facilitating the contact between Umayyad power and Syrian tribes.

within the city, between Basilica A devoted to St Sergius and the Umayyad congregational mosque built during the reign of Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik.[73]

Jabal Says has a graffito mentioning the phylarch al-Ḥārith and was one of the residences of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik. For the sixth century, it is only known that a commander was sent there to an undefined military outpost. In the present state of knowledge, the relation between the Jafnid and the Umayyad elements is extremely tenuous. Here also, the link is probably a political and diplomatic role. Due to its geographical situation and environmental conditions, Jabal Says has always been an important landmark as well as a watering and meeting point for pastoralist tribes in this particular area of southern Syria. It is a natural place for control or contact with the tribes.

At Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, there seems to be no direct connection between the mention of the Jafnid phylarch al-Ḥārith on the monastery's lintel and the presence, a century and half later, of a palace patronized by the Umayyad caliph Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik.

The examples just described are only three out of at least 38 Umayyad aristocratic settlements known archaeologically in Greater Syria, not really a very high proportion. To these, one should possibly add al-Jābiya, known by textual sources to have been somehow related to both Jafnid and Umayyad dynasties, but we have seen above that it certainly had less importance in the sixth century than previously thought and for the time being absolutely nothing is known about Umayyad-period al-Jābiya. Other sites, such as Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Sharqī, Khirbat al-Minya, al-Mushattā, or Qaṣr Burquʿ, where Shahîd claims a 'Ghassanid' stage before the Umayyad constructions, reflect pure speculation unsupported by archaeological evidence.[74]

It is obvious that the Umayyads had to rely heavily on the tribes of Greater Syria.[75] It is also highly probable that the way they dealt with these tribes was not fundamentally different from the way in which the Jafnids interacted with the peoples under their control. Nevertheless, the scale involved was certainly different. The former were at the head of an empire and had all the power in their hands (political, military, economic . . .), while the latter had a mainly military role and to a lesser degree some political functions; they never really replaced provincial governors or *duces*. Another point is that after *c.*582 the Jafnids lost much of their leadership. With very few exceptions, the early Islamic structures used as examples to imply that the Umayyads were simply reusing specific places and acting like the Jafnids[76] are all dated to the first half of the eighth century. This means that they were built a century to a century and half later, thus leaving a long gap not really indicative of a continuous

[73] Sack 1996; Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 80–7, 174–83.
[74] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 388–92.
[75] Genequand 2012: 389–92.   [76] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 375–94.

political and diplomatic system. Therefore, the 'considerable Ghassanid substrate' on Umayyad sites postulated by Shahîd and often referred to by archaeologists seems to be a myth, based on an over-interpretation of the epigraphic evidence and too wide an acceptance of the textual sources.[77] With very few exceptions, the archaeological evidence does not support it.

If there is continuity between some Jafnid-related sites and Umayyad aristocratic settlements in the Syrian steppe, for instance in Jabal Says or in al-Ruṣāfa, it is certainly more due to geographical location that is a natural or well-established point of contact that facilitated interaction between the main tribes and the authorities, than to the perpetuation of a common political system.

A GAZETTEER OF JAFNID OR JAFNID-RELATED BUILDINGS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

[4.2] Al-Burj (Ḍumayr)

The site of al-Burj is close to the modern town of Ḍumayr (ancient *Thelsee*) and has often been associated with it, as have a few other archaeological structures in its vicinity, especially the so-called camp of Ḍumayr, thought for a long time to be a Roman military fortress. The camp and al-Burj are situated to the east of the town and are 2 km apart. Since at least the 1970s, al-Burj has been incorporated within the perimeter of a large Syrian military compound and has not been investigated recently by archaeologists. The only available descriptions date from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and there are many uncertainties about the site.[78]

Both Wetzstein and Brünnow and von Domaszewski describe the ruined structure in al-Burj as being a small castle (*Schlösschen*), which includes a standing rounded tower largely built of reused stones. Wetzstein states very clearly that the inscription attributing the construction of a church to al-Mundhir was in the gateway of the castle, and not in the tower. It is likely that the gateway was better preserved at that time than the rest of structure. According to the size of the inscribed stone, it was certainly the lintel of a church and it seems to have been (re-)used in a similar position, as it was found above the gateway of the castle.

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[77] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 391.
[78] For a recent discussion on al-Burj and the original position of the inscription, see Gatier 2015: 203–5; Vidua 1826: 31–2; Wetzstein 1863: 315–16; Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1909: 200.

The rounded tower was massive, being 8 m high with a diameter of 10 m. It included an internal room, also with a circular plan, 3.70 m in diameter. Ancient descriptions compare it to the corner towers of the nearby camp. It is not known how it was related to the small castle and one should not exclude the possibility of the integration of an earlier structure.

Based on these old descriptions, it seems difficult to interpret the remains in al-Burj—the small castle and tower—as those of a church; it seems more likely that the small castle is an Islamic construction, though its precise date is unknown. However, without any further fieldwork, one should leave the possibility open for another hypothesis, that of a small monastery within a lightly fortified compound which includes a tower.[79] A church would have easily found its place in such a context.

On the other hand, if there is no church in al-Burj, then the inscription was moved there from elsewhere and the nearest known church is the one situated by the south-western corner of the camp, 2 km to the north.[80] Of course, this is only a suggestion, but it is logical then to say a few words about this latter structure. The so-called camp of Ḍumayr, or Khirbat al-Māṭarūn, has for a long time been considered as a perfect example of a Roman military fort.[81] Surface investigations by Lenoir in the 1990s led him to convincingly interpret it as a palace and postulate a late antique (Jafnid) or early Islamic (Umayyad) date.[82] More recently, the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of Syria undertook excavations under the direction of Omeiri.[83] Though not published in detail, these excavations confirm the palace hypothesis and have shown that the structure underwent several phases of construction or reconstruction, with very different building materials. One interpretation could be that the structure was in fact originally a Roman fort, which was heavily modified during transformation into a palace at a later date.

Personal observations on the pottery retrieved in the palace during the Syrian excavations, though its exact provenance and stratigraphical position is not entirely clear, point rather to a late antique structure, the occupation of which certainly continued, perhaps on a smaller scale, in the Umayyad period. This view is supported by the presence of a church just beside the palace, in a position reminiscent, for instance, of that of the church and palace at Qaṣr Ibn Wardān.[84] But one should remain very cautious until more information on the recent excavations is obtained and should take this late antique date as a likelihood, given the data presently at hand, and not as a definite conclusion. Anyway, if the construction or transformation into a palace took place in the

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[79] See **4.6.**   [80] Musil 1928b: 110–12; Lenoir 1999.
[81] Brünnow and von Domaszewski 1909: 187–99.   [82] Lenoir 1999.
[83] Omeiri 2010, 2011.   [84] De Maffei 1995.

sixth century, then the so-called camp of Ḍumayr might be a good candidate for a Jafnid palatial structure.

[4.3] Al-Ḥayyat

Al-Ḥayyat is one of the many Roman and late Roman villages in the Ḥawrān of southern Syria, some 10 km to the north of Shahbā, 25 km north-east of Suwayda. Like most of these villages that are solidly built in basalt ashlars, it was still very well preserved in the nineteenth century when it was resettled by Circassians. A Roman temple and a number of ancient and late antique houses are still partly standing in the ancient core of the modern village.

The house (an αὐλή: see **4.1**), built by Flavius Seos and his son Olbanos in 578, is a very fine example of a private house organized around a central courtyard, a classical model for rich residences in southern Syria (Fig. 4.2). Two sets of plans of the structure were produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, respectively by Bankes and by Butler.[85] Though published only recently, the earlier one is much more precise, and less interpretative.

0 ———— 20 m
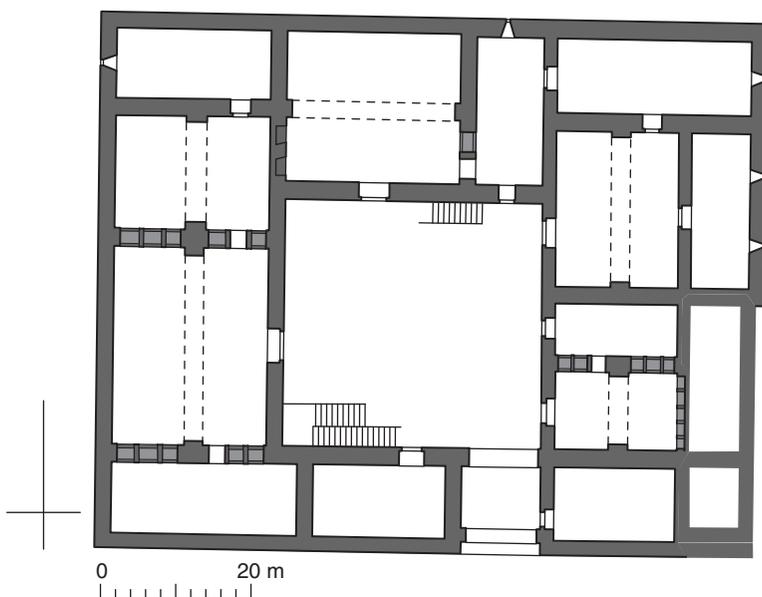
Fig. 4.2. Plan of the House of Flavius Seos in al-Ḥayyat. Drawing by Marion Berti, after Sartre-Fauriat 2004 (W. J. Bankes).

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[85] Sartre-Fauriat 2004: 201–2, pl. V L 4, V E 12, and V E 15; Butler 1919: 362–3, pl. 322.

The house has a rectangular plan and measures externally 27 × 21.6 m. It has a ground floor and an upper storey, with some of the upper rooms situated at an intermediate level. Both storeys include four wings around the central square courtyard and have roughly the same plan. The major difference between the two storeys relates to their respective functions. Many of the ground-floor rooms are associated with mangers built within the walls and were therefore stables. The house has a vertical subdivision, traditional in the Ḥawrān, with a ground floor devoted to stockbreeding and storage and a residential upper floor. Indeed, the two inscriptions commemorating its construction are on the upper floor, above and beside the doors of the northern and western wings.

There are stairways in the courtyard, abutted to the northern and southern facades. In all likelihood the remains of a portico in the same courtyard, which appear on the plan drawn by Butler, are later additions done after the visits of Bankes in 1816 and 1818.[86] Decoration is sparse in the structure and mostly limited to some carved mouldings, but a certain level of prosperity is attested by its large size and by some details such as a system of water supply to the upper floor.[87]

There are no indications, either in the architecture or in the inscriptions, that the building had any representative or official role. The inscriptions describe it as an αὐλή, a term frequently used in the Ḥawrān in the late Roman period to describe a residential structure with a courtyard.[88] As clearly shown by its plan, the structure built by Flavius Seos and his son Olbanos should be interpreted only as the residence of a wealthy owner in a rural environment.

[4.4] Jabal Says

The Jabal Says is an ancient volcano in the basaltic steppe lands of southern Syria, about 100 km east of Damascus (Figs 4.3, 4.4). It gives its name to an extended archaeological site built on both sides of a seasonal watercourse on the south-eastern side of the volcano.

To the east of the volcano, a large depression, a *khabra*, collecting winter rainwater and forming a seasonal lake lasting into the dry season, made the place an important meeting and watering point for nomadic groups and shepherds. The graffito referring to a military post and to the phylarch al-Ḥārith was found engraved on an ashlar at the top of the volcano (Plate 14). But the stone does not seem to be attached to any well-defined building, and the graffito may actually refer to any kind of a wide range of military

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[86] Sartre-Fauriat 2004: 201.   [87] Villeneuve 1985: 99.
[88] Sartre-Fauriat 2004: 201 and n. 57 for further examples.

Fig. 4.3. View of Jabal Says, with the volcano in the background, the late antique to early Islamic settlement at its foot and the ruins of the Umayyad palace to the right. Photograph by Denis Genequand.

Fig. 4.4. View from the crater of Jabal Says, with the late antique structures to the centre right of the photo; in the foreground, centre and left, are the early Islamic structures, with the Umayyad palace in the background. Photograph by Greg Fisher.

structures, from a simple watch position for a single man, to a real fort with a garrison.

A majority of the archaeological remains at the Jabal Says belongs to a large Umayyad aristocratic settlement attributed to the caliph al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik.[89] This settlement was excavated during three seasons in the 1960s and was only recently published in detail.[90] It comprises a palace, a bath, several mosques, a number of smaller residences and houses, and some water harvesting structures. Part of the settlement continued to be occupied during the early ʿAbbāsid period.

Excavations also showed that a part of the settlement, on the slope of the volcano on the left side of the watercourse, was built and settled in the late Roman period, most likely during the sixth and seventh centuries, though the absolute chronology is not entirely clear due to the excavation methods.[91] It forms what could be defined as a hamlet or small village and includes a few large houses or groups of houses with rather irregular plans.

It also includes a small chapel. The latter is a single nave building with a semicircular apse on the eastern side. The interpretation of this cluster of constructions remains unclear. It could have been simply a hamlet for a number of people living there permanently or on a more temporary basis, but part of it or the whole cluster could also have been a monastery with its chapel, an interpretation apparently favoured by Brisch and later by Bloch.[92] This second hypothesis is seductive given the geographical location of the place, but still difficult to confirm given the available archaeological data.

Since the graffito is very vague about the nature of the military post at the Jabal Says, it is difficult to know if it refers to a built structure that has yet to be discovered or if it could be equated with the few late Roman houses and chapel on the south-eastern slope of the volcano, or even simply to some sort of observation post on the top of the volcano.

[4.5] Nitl

Nitl is a modern village situated on the top of a ridge 10 km east of Madaba. The site was occupied in the late Iron Age and during the Roman period. A tower and a number of walls in the modern village belong to the latter. The sixth century saw the construction of an ecclesiastical complex, but it is not

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[89] al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam* 1.152; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam* 1.271–2; al-ʿUsh 1963.
[90] Sauvaget 1939b; Brisch 1963, 1965; Bloch 2008, 2011; Schmidt 2012.
[91] It is important to note here that the dates and interpretations ('Ghassānid' settlement, pre-Umayyad settlement, etc.) provided by Schmidt 2012 should be taken very cautiously, as they are often not supported by the archaeological data he is presenting. For a clearer view on this material, see Bloch 2011.
[92] Cited by Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 187; Bloch 2008: 311.
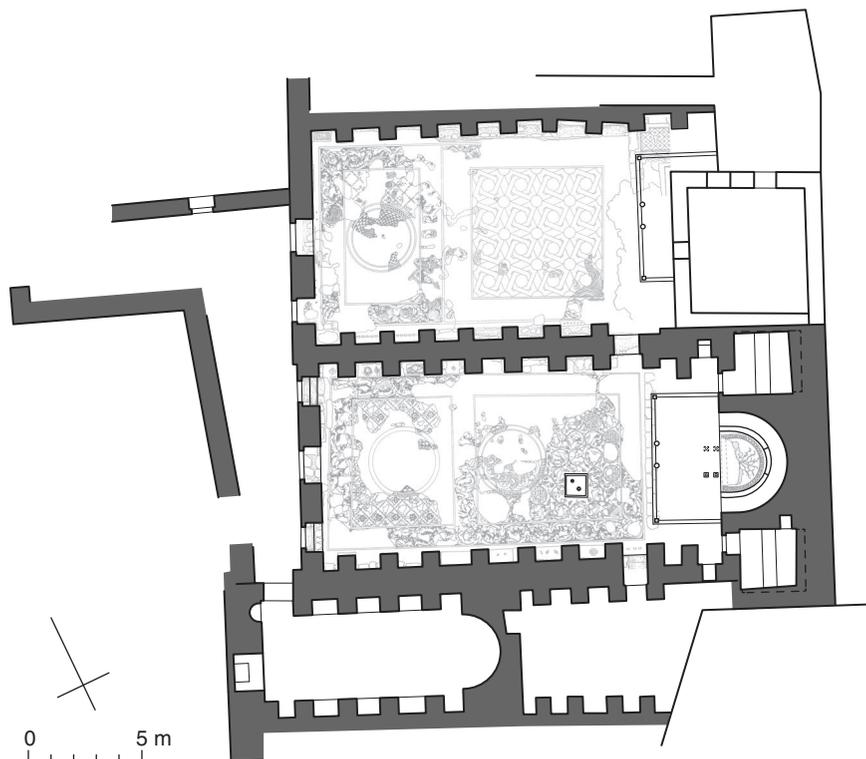
Fig. 4.5. Plan of the ecclesiastical complex in Nitl. Drawing by Marion Berti, after Piccirillo 2001 and Shahîd 2001a.

clear whether it was part of a village or hamlet, or whether it stood alone on the ruins of the previous periods.[93]

The ecclesiastical complex comprises two parallel churches with a single nave, two annexes to the north and south of each church, a chapel to the south-west, and a narthex and courtyard to the west (Fig. 4.5).[94] The two churches were planned and built together and witnessed modifications afterwards.

The North Church

The north church was only partially excavated. It has a rectangular nave whose northern and southern walls incorporate nine pilasters which supported arches. These were bearing a roof made entirely of large stone slabs. Two

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[93] Piccirillo 2001; Piccirillo 2002b: 209–17; Hamarneh and Manacorda 1996; Hamarneh et al. 1997; Hamarneh et al. 1999; Hamarneh 2006a.
[94] No complete and detailed plan of the complex was published. Fig. 4.5 was drawn relying on the different plans and photographs published in Piccirillo 2001 and Shahîd 2001a.

doors, in the western wall, gave access to the church. The floor of the nave is covered by a poorly preserved mosaic divided into two independent panels.

The eastern part of the church was not excavated as it lies beneath a modern shop. It is likely to have a rather wide and raised *presbyterium* terminated by an apse and no lateral service rooms. A side door, in the eastern part of the northern wall, opens into an external vaulted annexe (a *diakonikon*) with a rectangular plan and a geometric mosaic on the floor.

The South Church

Like its northern counterpart, the south church is a single-nave building with a similar roofing of stone slabs sustained by nine arches supported by pilasters (Plate 8). The latter are in line with those of the north church. There are three doors in the western facade, only one of which, with a rolling stone, was used till the end of the occupation. Another two doors, respectively in the northern and southern walls, allowed passage from one church to the other and provided access to the southern annexe.

The eastern part of the church includes a raised *presbyterium*, whose central part is delineated by a chancel screen and terminated by an apse. Remains of negatives for an altar were preserved in the apse and in front of it. The *presbyterium* also includes two lateral service rooms, on either side of the apse, both of which had an upper storey.

All the floors of the church were covered by figurative and geometric mosaics, including some inscriptions. One is an invocation to the salvation of the phylarch Thaalaba (Thaʿlaba) and is located in the centre of the nave, just in front of the raised *presbyterium*. Another two, also in the central eastern part of the nave, refer to St Sergius, leaving no doubt as to whom the church was dedicated. A fourth one, situated between two pilasters along the western part of the northern wall, is a votive invocation for 'Eretha son of Al-Aretha' (al-Ḥārith; Plate 7). The mosaics are discussed in more detail in Ch. 6.

One of the main features of the south church is the existence of a hypogean tomb. In the south-eastern quadrant of the nave, a stone trap door opens into an underground tomb with a vertical shaft, a central corridor, and two side burial chambers. Scattered human remains were found in the two chambers, along with two ceramic bowls used as incense burners, deposited in the central corridor. These two bowls belong to the Umayyad period, proof that this tomb was in use for a rather long time. The square stone trap door was inserted in the floor of the nave and it was taken into consideration when the mosaic was laid, showing that the underground tomb was not a later refurbishment of the church. Therefore, the south church was intentionally built with a sepulchral function and it may have a direct connection with the phylarch Thaʿlaba, who is mentioned in the inscription panel closest to the trap door. A sepulchral function for a church, or at least for a part of it, is

attested by a number of other examples in the province of Arabia, such as in the ecclesiastical complex of St Stephen or in the church of St Paul, both in Umm al-Raṣāṣ,[95] or in various churches on Mount Nebo,[96] to mention but a few in the same region.

Another specific piece of liturgical furniture in the south church which needs to be mentioned here is the presence of a masonry element inserted between two pilasters on the north wall, close to the *presbyterium*. It can possibly be interpreted as a seat or throne for the main benefactor.

There is an annexe (*diakonikon*) to the south of the church, which is accessible by a side door from the nave. It is a rectangular room also bordered by pilasters supporting the roofing system.

Chapel, Narthex, and Courtyard

The ecclesiastical complex is completed by a chapel, aligned to the west of the southern annexe. This structure was probably simply another room during the first phase, which was later transformed into a chapel by the addition of an apse to the east. Like the churches and the southern annexe, stone slabs supported by arches and pilasters roofed it. At its western end, a reliquary was set into a raised and plastered platform inserted into a recess of the wall.

The whole complex was entered from the west, where a trapezoidal-shaped corridor is common to the two churches and the chapel and is interpreted as a narthex. The latter is preceded by a paved courtyard at a lower level and separated from it by a balustrade. Its floor also had a mosaic pavement.

Conclusion

The ecclesiastical complex was obviously an important group of monuments, and one would wish to know more about its context within the late antique settlement of Nitl. Was it built as a double village church, or was it intended instead as a private church complex for the benefactors and as a commemorative structure, as implied by the presence of the hypogean tomb, which is likely to have been that of the phylarch Thaʿlaba? The second hypothesis is seductive, but still difficult to confirm without more information about the nature of the whole settlement in the sixth century.

In terms of importance and status, the monument seems closer to other ecclesiastical complexes from the same province, such as that of St Stephen in Umm al-Raṣāṣ or the memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo, than to the many village churches that have been excavated since the 1930s. Architecturally, the

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[95] St Stephen (several tombs and hypogea in different point of the complex): Piccirillo and Alliata 1994: 76–8, 82, 87–9, 95–6. Church of St Paul: Piccirillo 2002a.
[96] Sanmorì 1998.

complex also presents some characteristics not widely distributed on the Jordanian plateau. This is especially the case for the single nave churches and their roofing system. Except for chapels and for the churches of small monasteries or *lauras*, the basilical plan with a central and wider nave and two narrower side naves is dominant in the area. Although there are a number of late Roman buildings, including annexes of churches, covered by stone slabs on the central Jordanian plateau, this is not a choice often found for large churches, which seem to favour the triangular truss and tiles. In fact, churches with a single nave and transverse arches supported by narrow pilasters are mostly found in the Ḥawrān, the basaltic area of southern Syria and north-eastern Jordan, where prominent examples exist at Umm al-Jimāl, Umm al-Quṭṭayn, and Khirbat al-Samrāʾ.[97]

[4.6] Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī

Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī is situated on the edge of the al-Daww plain, halfway between Homs and Palmyra, on one of the roads linking the ancient caravan city to Damascus. Daniel Schlumberger, who first thought it was a Roman fort, excavated it between 1936 and 1938. Excavations revealed a lavishly decorated palace built during the reign of the Umayyad caliph Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik.[98] A bath is built beside the palace and the site also comprises a number of other structures, mostly devoted to irrigation and agriculture (dams, aqueducts, reservoir, water mill, agricultural enclosure, and a 'khan' or horse stables).

Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī has long been identified with Heliaramia in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*[99] and with Haliarum in a letter from Miaphysite archimandrites to Jacob Baradeus and to the bishops related to him, the so called 'Letter of the Archimandrites' against the Tritheist heresy.[100] These identifications are based only on a general homonymy. The geographical location of the site fits roughly with the very sketchy data from the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, but the identification with Heliaramia still needs confirmation as there are no Roman remains that definitely originate from the site. The identification with Haliarum of the 'Letter of the Archimandrites' is, though, reinforced by the existence in Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī of a monastery, discussed below and attested by epigraphy, from which one official bore the same name as in the letter (Sergius). Given the general theological allegiance to the Miaphysite church of the Qalamūn area and regions eastwards, as opposed to the more northern areas of *Syria Secunda*, the geographical location of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī makes it a good candidate for a Miaphysite monastery.

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[97] Restle 1989: 373–7; Michel 2001: 23–4, 166–82 (Umm al-Jimāl), 189–92 (Umm al-Quṭṭayn), 192–206 (Khirbat al-Samrāʾ).
[98] Schlumberger 1939, 1986; Genequand 2006, 2012: 161–74.
[99] Dussaud 1927: 264.   [100] See Ch. 6.

Fig. 4.6. Plan of the late Roman tower and Umayyad palace at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, from Schlumberger 1986, pl. 22. Used with permission of the Institut Français du Proche-Orient (Ifpo).

The palace is a square structure with sides measuring 71 m (Fig. 4.6). It is decorated, both inside and out, with stuccoes, carved stone sculptures, and frescoes.

An enclosure wall reinforced at the corners, along the sides, and on both sides of the gateway by semicircular tower buttresses delimits the building. There is one exception at the north-western corner, where the construction includes a pre-existing rectangular tower. Following the usual layout of Umayyad palaces, the interior is organized on two storeys around a central courtyard with a portico. On the ground floor, rooms are brought together in six individual apartments. The plan of the upper storey is similar, but also includes a reception hall over the entrance. The structure is built of alternating materials: mud brick, backed brick, and wood over a substantial stone base.

To the west of the palace, Schlumberger excavated some further remains, which he interpreted as service buildings for the palace. These have been recently demonstrated to be earlier and they correspond in fact to a structure that was largely destroyed when the Umayyad palace was built and that may have belonged, together with the pre-existing tower, to the monastery mentioned in the inscription. A complete reinterpretation of documentation dating back to the 1930s was published elsewhere;[101] the present contribution will only summarize it and concentrate on the description of the structures.

The Building to the West

The remains of the building to the west of the palace consist of mud-brick over a base made of a coarse masonry of boulders and earthen mortar (Fig. 4.7).
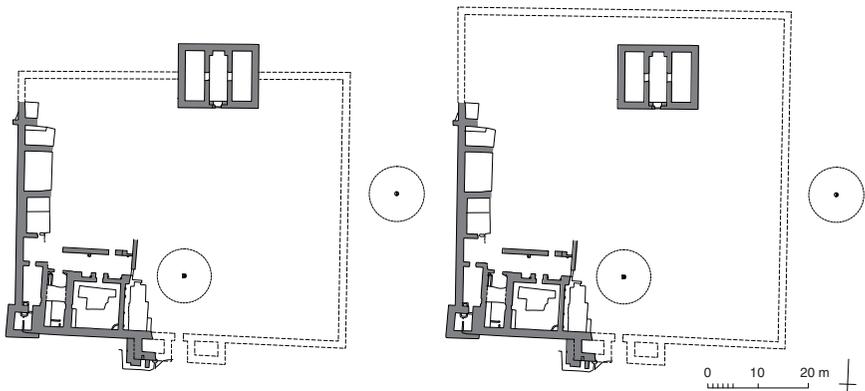
Fig. 4.7. Two possible reconstructions of the plan of the monastery including the tower at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī. Drawing by Marion Berti.

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[101] Genequand 2006: 69–77.

This is a normal and rather frequent building technique in steppe areas of central and northern Syria. The plan of the building is well defined by a wall slightly larger than the others.[102] This wall forms a square angle in the south-western quadrant and incorporates protruding elements at the corner and along the southern side. At the corner, it takes the form of a square internal tower-like structure only slightly projecting to the outside. Along the southern side, the element is entirely projecting outside and may also be seen as a rectangular tower-like structure. In plan and from outside, all this gives the impression of a regularly planned enclosure wall. Inside, there are a series of rectangular rooms of different sizes built against the enclosure wall. There is no regular organization and it evokes more an organic development than a regularly planned construction.

Given the plan of the excavated remains, it is clear that they belong to a square or rectangular monument characterized by a lightly reinforced enclosure wall with internal and protruding tower-like elements at the corners and along the sides, and of which only the south-western quadrant subsists and was excavated.

About half of it or more would have been destroyed when the palace was built during the reign of the Umayyad caliph Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik. The rest, partially levelled, was left because it was hidden at the back of the palace.

Due to the lack of more extensive excavations and the Umayyad destructions, it is difficult to know if the whole monument was built over, or if there was some empty space in the middle or along some parts of the enclosure wall. The relief visible on the aerial photograph taken before the excavations suggests the second possibility and also suggests that the enclosure wall was higher than the rest of the constructions.[103]

The Tower

The tower is incorporated into the north-western corner of the palace (see Plate 10). It is a massive structure still preserved up to 16.60 m with three storeys above the ground floor. It was built of large ashlar blocks. Its plan is rectangular (12.8 × 16 m) and the ground floor is subdivided into three long rooms. It has one door on the ground floor, over which a small machicolation is placed on the third storey. Two moulded cornices appear outside at the base and top of the same storey. Their mouldings and the presence of several medallions with carved crosses in the original stonework lead to a late Roman date being attributed to the structure. This kind of decoration prevents an entirely military function from being attributed to the tower and forces one to look in another direction.

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[102] Schlumberger 1986: 13; pls 22, 50a, and 53b–c.
[103] Schlumberger 1986: pl. 50a.

The Monastery

The inscription mentioned above, alongside the acclamation to the Jafnid al-Ḥārith, refers to a monastery. It was written on a lintel, reused as the threshold of the main gateway of the Umayyad palace. Together with the building to the west and the tower, it completes all the necessary elements needed to reconstruct a sixth-century monastery at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī. By comparison with other late Roman forts, the enclosure wall of the building excavated to the west of the palace is very thin, and seems insufficient to be interpreted as a real rampart with a defensive purpose. On the other hand, there are plenty of monasteries in the Near Eastern provinces that are completely enclosed by a lightly fortified wall. Many of these also include a tower, which can be either a free-standing structure inside a yard area of the monument or incorporated somehow into the enclosure wall. If we consider that the projecting tower-like element on the southern side of the monument was roughly situated in the middle of the side, being either an intermediate tower or one of a pair of towers flanking a gateway, then we may reconstruct an enclosure wall at least 55 m long. Depending on the square or rectangular plan of the whole structure, the three-storey tower may have been incorporated respectively in the centre of the northern side or inside it, in part of the yard.[104] The western subterranean cistern of the Umayyad palace, shown by Schlumberger to be earlier, was certainly also part of this structure.

Monasteries with a regular square or rectangular plan and an enclosure wall are well attested, not to speak of those that were reusing a Roman or late Roman fort. In many cases, the reasons for irregular plans are geographical constraints, such as in the cliffs of the Judean desert, or the mountainous areas of the limestone massif of northern Syria. Such a problem did not exist in Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī's flat landscape. Fortress-like walls, gateways, and possibly towers are a characteristic of the *coenobia*, as opposed to the *laura*-type of monastery.[105] An imperial edict even states that monasteries shall be surrounded by strong walls[106] and, as an example, Justinian is said to have ordered a defensive wall to be built around the monastery of Samuel, modern Nabī Samwīl, north of Jerusalem.[107] The best example of a fortified monastery is certainly the monastery of St Catherine in Sinai, built by Justinian;[108] that of Martyrius, in the Judean desert, offers another good example.[109] Other monasteries with a regular enclosure wall include the one in ʿAvdat/*Oboda* in

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[104] It is worth noting that on the aerial photographs published in Schlumberger 1986: pl. 50a, 53b, and 53c, there is not much relief beyond the tower to the north and that it is more likely that the building stopped there.

[105] Hirschfeld 1992; Hirschfeld 1999: 167.   [106] Hirschfeld 1999: 167, with references.

[107] Proc. *Aed.* 5.9.15; Magen and Dadon 2003: 128–9.

[108] Forsyth and Weitzman 1973.   [109] Magen 1993.

the Negev[110] and St Aaron's monastery on Jabal Hārūn near Petra.[111] In the Ḥawrān, monasteries are often set around a central courtyard and present an enclosure wall to the outside.[112] In the same area, several late Roman forts were transformed into monasteries, simply reusing the standing ramparts and rooms, and adding a church somewhere in the non-built areas. This is the case in Dayr al-Kahf and Qaṣr al-Baiʿj.[113] Closer to Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, in the Qalamūn area, although few monasteries have been investigated, the later structure of Dayr Mār Īlīan still follows this layout, that is an enclosed site with a tower and a courtyard in the centre.[114]

Towers are an element frequently found in monasteries, from northern Syria to Palestine. They are multifunctional and can serve as living quarters, stores, watchtowers or even refuges. With a few exceptions, such as the tower at Umm al-Raṣāṣ,[115] they were not intended for recluses in the sixth century. But this may have been the case earlier, as they often appear to predate the rest of the structure, or on an occasional basis, such as for the ascetic training of novice recruits. In northern Syria, the best-published example is the tower at Dayr Dihīs, with a ground floor and three storeys, the ground floor and the first storey being stores and the upper ones being dwelling rooms.[116] In the Ḥawrān, towers are also frequently associated with an enclosed monastery, such as Dayr al-Naṣrānī, where the identification is confirmed by an inscription.[117] In Palestine, towers are found in many monasteries of the so-called Judean Desert east of Jerusalem, where they are also reported by textual sources.[118] Good examples are found in Khirbat al-Dayr[119] and in the monastery of Scholarius.[120] They are often smaller in height than the Syrian ones. At Khirbat al-Dayr, a well-studied monastery, Hirschfeld attributes a residential function to them, and he also discusses their symbolic value in announcing the monastic presence and establishing ownership of the land.[121]

[4.7] Al-Ruṣāfa

Al-Ruṣāfa/*Sergiopolis* was originally a late Roman fort built along the road linking Palmyra and Sura in the Euphrates valley, the northern section of the so-called *Strata Diocletiana*. As a military fort, it was the place of the martyrdom of St Sergius, hence its later development as a pilgrimage place, eventually

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[110] Figueras 1995: 431–4.   [111] Fiema 2003b.
[112] Restle 1971; 1989, 381; Villeneuve 1985: 118–21.
[113] Kennedy 2004: 72–9, 92–4 (with previous references).
[114] Loosley and Finneran 2005.   [115] Piccirillo 1989: 301–3.
[116] Biscop 1997: 27–31, with other examples; see also Tate 1992: 49–51.
[117] Restle 1989: 381.   [118] Hirschfeld 1992: 171–6.
[119] Hirschfeld 1999: 81–4.   [120] Patrich 1995: 157–8.   [121] Hirschfeld 1999: 167–8.

becoming a city and finally a metropolis.[122] The ramparts of the city were rebuilt in the sixth century on the order of Justinian, encircling a quadrangular area of about 540 × 380 m. There are several churches inside the city, one of them, Basilica A, being the most developed and housing the relics of St Sergius. In the south-western quadrant of the city are three large and impressive subterranean cisterns built in stone and baked brick and covered by vaults. As noted above, medieval sources attribute one of them to a Jafnid ruler, though this cannot be demonstrated.

The very well-preserved structure attributed to al-Mundhir (Plate 11) is situated outside the city, some 150 m to the northeast of the north gate, in an area also occupied by a late Roman necropolis (late third to fourth century) (Fig. 4.8).[123]

The building measures 16.5 × 19.6 m and has a cross-in-square plan, with three naves and three bays and a central apse to the east. This plan could typically be that of a church. A rectangular courtyard of roughly the same size is attached to the south of the structure.

The central nave and the central bay are wider, defining a regular transept with a cross plan. Pilasters supporting arches subdivide the inside into nine independent spaces, five with a square plan (four at the corners and one in the
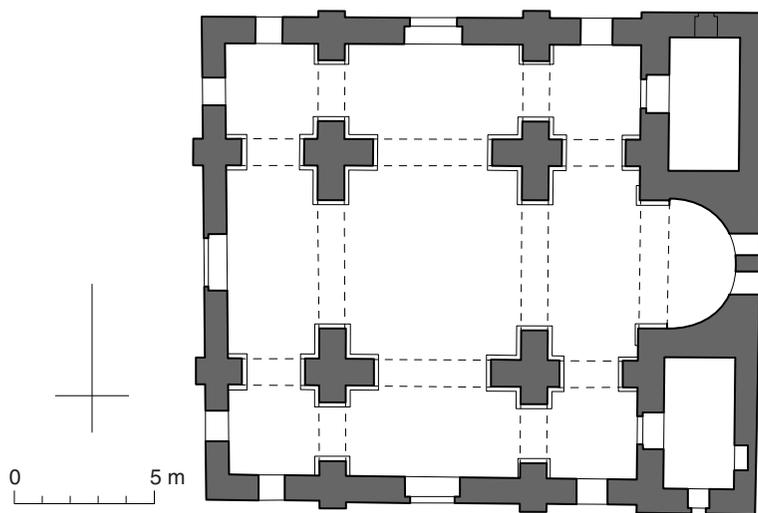
Fig. 4.8. Plan of al-Mundhir's building in al-Ruṣāfa/*Sergiopolis*. Drawing by Marion Berti, after Fowden 1999.

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[122] On the history and archaeology of al-Ruṣāfa, see the *Resafa* series published by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (six volumes published, I to VI) and Fowden (E. K.) 1999.

[123] Sauvaget 1939a; Brands 1998; Fowden (E. K.) 1999, 2000; Konrad 2015.

centre) and four with a rectangular plan; the square ones in the corners are covered by pendentive domes, the rectangular ones by barrel vaults, while the larger central space was perhaps covered by a pyramidal wooden roof, now completely destroyed. There are three doors allowing the building to be entered into the central nave or bay from the north, south, and west side. Each of these sides also includes two windows.

A semicircular apse terminates the central nave (Plate 12). It opens at the extremity of the nave by a triumphal arch. A cornice with mouldings and carved decorations marks the upper part of the semicircular wall and the separation from the half-dome covering the apse. There are two narrow windows just below the cornice. The cornice includes, from top to bottom, some regular mouldings, a large torus with a fine low relief carved decoration—a row of sea monsters facing each other in pairs—and a flat band with simplified acanthus scrolls. The acclamation to al-Mundhir is engraved on the flat bandeau in between the two windows (see Fig. 6.5).

There are two rectangular rooms on each side of the apse. Both are in line with the side aisles, though slightly larger, but are completely separated from them by walls and only accessible through rather small doors.

The plan of the eastern part of the building clearly follows that of a church tripartite sanctuary, with a *presbyterium* terminated by an apse and two side rooms or *pastophorias*. The main problem with this interpretation is that there are apparently no other liturgical installations in front of the apse, such as a raised *presbyterium*, a chancel screen, or traces of an altar table.

Apart from the apse, the inside decoration of the building is sparse and mostly concentrated on pilasters: mouldings on their bases and Corinthian capitals of the split-leaf type on top of them.

According to its plan, this building was first interpreted as a church, until 1939, when Sauvaget proposed a ground-breaking interpretation as an audience hall or *praetorium* for the phylarch al-Mundhir.[124] This interpretation was almost universally accepted by scholars until the 1990s, when two independent studies reassessed it. With a number of good arguments, Brands initially again proposed that it is a church, rejecting the idea of an audience hall.[125] E. K. Fowden took a different point of view and saw the structure as a church, but which also had a role as an audience hall, the sacred and secular power being closely interrelated.[126] She considers the church as having been built at the very place of the martyrdom of the saint, outside the late Roman fort. In the opinion of the present author, there are too many architectural parallels pointing to the church interpretation to escape it and the latter view, that of Fowden, is certainly the most convincing for interpreting the structure. On the other hand, Ulbert and Konrad, who excavated in and around the

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[124] Sauvaget 1939a.   [125] Brands 1998.
[126] Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 149–73; Fowden 2000.

building, still consider it as a monument representing power, arguing that there is no direct connection between the fourth-century necropolis and the building and that it somewhat reflects the evolution of the *principia* in late Roman military forts. According to them, the structure built by al-Mundhir would therefore belong to the category of the *principia cum praetorio*.[127]

The cisterns of the city, whose attribution to either the Romans or the Jafnids has been briefly discussed above, occupy a large area in the south-western quadrant of the city.[128] The three of them are subterranean and covered by vaults and are built of stone and baked brick. Their main feature is their very large size, the largest one, to the south, having a volume of over 15,000 m^3, and the other two together of 5,400 m^3. They were fed by a canal branching from a diversion dam situated on a temporary watercourse to the south-west of the city.

[4.8] Al-Umayrī East

Al-ʿUmayrī or Tall al-ʿUmayrī is the modern name of one of the many late Roman villages and hamlets that were settled on the Jordanian plateau, 11 km south of Amman. This is the most recent archaeological discovery that is directly related to the Jafnids. The archaeological site comprises three mounds—west, north-east, and south-east. The west mound is mainly known for its Bronze Age occupation, while the other two relate to the Hellenistic, Roman, late Roman, and early Islamic periods. Recent rescue excavations resulting from the widening of the adjacent airport highway on the north-east mound revealed a sixth-century church and a number of structures abutting it (Plate 9; Figs 4.9, 4.10).[129]

The church is a rectangular building, with internal dimensions of 14.5 × 8.55 m. It has a rather classical basilical plan, with a wider central nave, two side aisles, and an apsed *presbyterium* to the east.

The chevet is rectilinear and the main entrance is in the centre of the western side. The central nave is separated from the side aisles by two rows of pilasters and columns defining two bays. The *presbyterium* is characterized by a raised platform delineated by a chancel screen and a semicircular apse encompassing the whole structure. Two side rooms flank the *presbyterium* at the end of the aisles and form a tripartite sanctuary. The church originally had a second entrance, to the east, at the end of the northern side room.

The church was built in the sixth century and underwent a number of later modifications, reconstructions, and additions, especially in the *presbyterium* area and in the side naves. It was occupied until the eighth century, but was

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[127] Konrad 2015.   [128] Brinker 1991.   [129] al-Shami 2010.
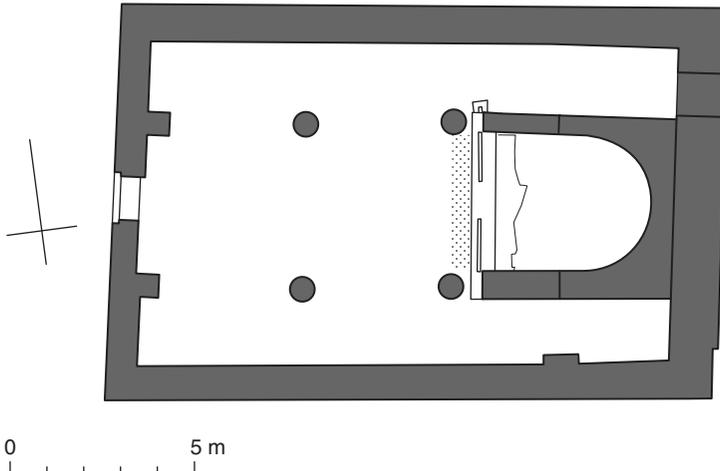
Fig. 4.9. Plan of the church at Tall al-ʿUmayrī East. Drawing by Marion Berti, after al-Shami 2010.

Fig. 4.10. View of the church at Tall al-ʿUmayrī East, February 2013. Photograph by Greg Fisher.

more likely used as a domestic structure for some time before its final abandonment.

All the floors of the church—in the nave, side aisles, and *presbyterium*—were covered by mosaic pavements, of which large surfaces survive. They were mostly composed of geometrical interlaces and rounded or polygonal

medallions with birds and other animal figures. (For the mosaics, see Ch. 6.) A long, rectangular panel, just in front of the raised platform of the *presbyterium*, covers the whole width of the central nave and gives a list of the benefactors of the church, most likely the people who were involved in its building or perhaps only in the laying of the mosaic pavement. As noted above, the first of the benefactors is the Jafnid al-Mundhir.

The structures surrounding the church are still poorly understood and it is difficult, with the documentation currently at hand, to know if the religious monument is more likely to be a village church or a monastery church. The site is still insufficiently excavated and published to provide a definitive answer to this important question. However, the village church seems more likely. Indeed, in the nave's mosaic inscription, the list of benefactors refers to a priest and a deacon and to members of the local laity, but has no reference to any kind of monastic official. This tends to support the village church hypothesis.[130]

Sammā' and Ḥarrān

Both Sammā' and Ḥarrān are situated in the Ḥawrān of southern Syria, respectively 16 km north-west and 25 km north-east of Suwayda. Like so many other sites in southern Syria, these are Roman and late Roman villages that were progressively resettled and built up from the nineteenth century onwards. The inscriptions found on the two sites were not *in situ* and nothing is known about the two churches from which they came.

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE NAṢRIDS

In contrast to the Jafnids, the archaeology of the Naṣrid kingdom has attracted less interest and the political circumstances in Iraq, especially since the early 1990s, have not facilitated archaeological research. There is, of course, a great deal of literature based on the textual sources, but archaeological excavations have so far been conducted only in al-Ḥīra itself and on a few Christian sites in its surroundings, and on a very reduced scale on some pre-Islamic aristocratic residences that may also be relevant to the debate.

[4.9] Al-Ḥīra

Al-Ḥīra was the seat of the Naṣrid leaders, effectively the proper capital of the 'kingdom'.[131] It is an extensive archaeological site which spreads to the south-

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[130] See Bevan et al. 2015.   [131] See Robin 2008a: 193.

east of the modern city of al-Najāf and is some 10 km to the west of early Islamic al-Kūfa. It is near the Euphrates, surrounded by fertile lands, on flat ground, and bordered by an ancient canal which is about 5 km long. It is likely that the occupation started at a rather modest level in the second or third century AD.[132] By the sixth century it was a fairly large settlement, and maintained a significant occupation until the ninth century, when it was definitely abandoned in favour of another thriving city, al-Kūfa, which was newly founded after the Islamic conquest.

The Arabic name al-Ḥīra derives from the Syriac ḥīrtā, meaning the camp, an etymology that may reflect the origins of the settlement as a pastoralist campsite. A number of details are given by later Arabic or Syriac sources about the history of the town. These sources also provide information about the residences and palaces of the Naṣrid kings and, in few instances, about monasteries founded by Christian princesses (for the perspective of Muslim authors, see Ch. 8). According to al-Ṭabarī, it was at al-Ḥīra that ʿAmr b. ʿAdī, the first Naṣrid ruler, became established in the late third to early fourth century, although there is no contemporary corroboration in Graeco-Roman or Syriac sources (see the Editor's Introduction and Ch. 1).[133] By the first half of the fifth century, there were Christian monuments and the place had a bishop.[134] More monasteries in and around al-Ḥīra are attested for the sixth century, including the famous *Dayr Hind al-Kubrā* and *Dayr Hind al-Ṣughrā*, named respectively after Hind the Elder, wife of the Naṣrid leader al-Mundhir (8.28, 8.44), and Hind the Younger (6.42–3). For the later period, it is also known that Hārūn al-Rashīd resided twice in al-Ḥīra, in 796–7 and 802–3.[135]

The richest information about the structure of al-Ḥīra comes from Muslim sources referring to the conquest of the town.[136] It is clear that al-Ḥīra had no rampart, a fact which led to a rapid capitulation to the army led by Khālid b. al-Walīd in 633. The town is described as being composed of independent structures called *quṣūr*, meaning lightly fortified residences, which were separated by empty lands or gardens; a number of these *quṣūr* are known by their names: Qaṣr al-Abyaḍ, Qaṣr al-ʿAdasiyyīn, Qaṣr Banī Māzin, and Qaṣr Ibn Buqayla.

The site of al-Ḥīra attracted the attention of researchers and archaeologists from the late nineteenth century.[137] It was first described in some detail by Musil.[138] In 1931 and 1932 Talbot Rice conducted two seasons of excavations

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[132] On the history of al-Ḥīra: Musil 1927: 103–4, n. 57; *EI*² s.v. 'Al-Ḥīra' (I. Shahîd); see now Toral-Niehoff 2014.

[133] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.822.   [134] *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 5, p. 310); Fisher 2011a: 66.

[135] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 3.646, 678.

[136] al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb futūḥ al-buldān* 244; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.2016; see also Musil 1927: 287–91.

[137] First mention of the ruins: Meissner 1899.   [138] Musil 1927: 103–7, 287.

in al-Ḥīra on behalf of Oxford University,[139] and the site was briefly surveyed again in the 1990s by a French team led by Lecomte.[140] There have also been some rescue excavations over the last few years.[141]

Nowadays the site of al-Ḥīra is anything but impressive. It is encircled by one of the large rubbish dumps of modern al-Najāf and a power station. It covers an area of approximately 25 km² and is composed of many small mounds separated by empty land, each of these mounds corresponding to one or several monuments built in mud-brick. The nature of the site fits well with the early Islamic textual descriptions referring to a town mostly composed of a number of *quṣūr* that were either residential compounds or fortresses. According to archaeological reports, the site seems to have developed over time to the north-east, in the direction of the future al-Kūfa, from which it is separated by an open area only 2 km wide. Instead of building new constructions on top of the previous ones, as is the case in the many large archaeological mounds in the area, this site witnessed a horizontal growth, new constructions being built beside and farther away from the ancient ones.

In the early 1930s Talbot Rice identified 13 main mounds, though there is a far greater number of smaller ones. His excavations were concentrated in the north-eastern part of the site and concerned three different mounds and revealed two churches (buildings V and XI) and one large residential structure (building I). A number of smaller soundings were also done, aligned in two directions from building I, revealing small, single-storeyed houses, several of which included fine carved stucco decorations.[142]

The two churches have roughly the same rectangular plan, with a rectilinear chevet. Both are elongated basilical buildings with three vaulted naves separated by rows of columns and a tripartite sanctuary with either a cross-shaped (church no. XI—Fig. 4.11) or a rectangular (V) *presbyterium* flanked by two side rooms or chapels.

In the middle of the central nave of both structures there is a raised platform, surrounded on three sides by a bench in the case of church no. XI, a kind of throne similar to the so-called *bema* of the North Syrian churches. Walls were built with mud-brick, while pillars, columns, and floors were made of baked brick. The inside decoration was sparse and consisted of some painting with crosses and a number of stucco panels also representing crosses.

The construction of the two churches is attributed to the sixth century by Talbot Rice and both of them seem to have continued to function and undergone modifications well into the eighth century. The plan of these two churches is consistent with what is known of church architecture elsewhere in Lower Mesopotamia, for instance in Ctesiphon[143] or in Quṣayr North.[144]

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[139] Talbot Rice 1932a, 1932b, 1934.   [140] Lecomte 2002; Rousset 1994, 2001.
[141] al-Kaʿbī 2012.   [142] Talbot Rice 1932a: 279.
[143] Talbot Rice 1932a: 279.   [144] Finster and Schmidt 1976: 27–39; Okada 1991.
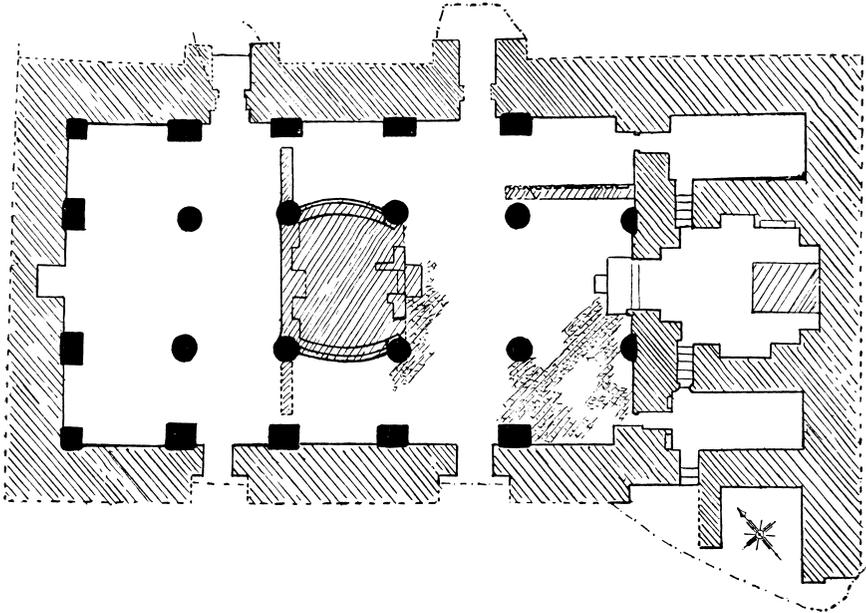
Fig. 4.11. Plan of church XI, excavated at al-Ḥīra by the Oxford expedition in 1931. From Talbot Rice 1932a, fig. 1. © Antiquity Publications Ltd.

Building I is a partly fortified residential structure, which is likely to fall into the category of the *quṣūr* referred to in the textual sources. It has a trapezoidal plan and is surrounded by an outer wall (Fig. 4.12).

The latter is quite wide, reinforced at the corners and built of baked brick. The structure itself is mainly built of mud-brick and had two storeys with similar plans. Semicircular buttresses reinforce its northern wall and its internal plan comprises 13 rectangular rooms organized around a central courtyard. Two rooms in a central position, respectively to the west and east of the courtyard, are completely open on their inner facades and are likely to have been *īwāns*.[145] Since there is no access to the lower storey through the walls, it is supposed that it was some sort of cellar or basement only accessible through openings in the floors of the upper storey. Some of the rooms are lavishly decorated with stucco, mostly in the form of vertical door-jamb panels and cornices.

Most of the pottery retrieved from the building and the stucco decorations date from the early Islamic period. Nevertheless, Talbot Rice recognized three different construction phases. The first is the outer wall, the second corresponds to all the main walls of the inner structure, and the last to all the later

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[145] An *īwān* is a vaulted hall, walled on three sides and entirely open on one end; this is a typical Sasanian architectural form that was rapidly adopted by Islamic architecture.
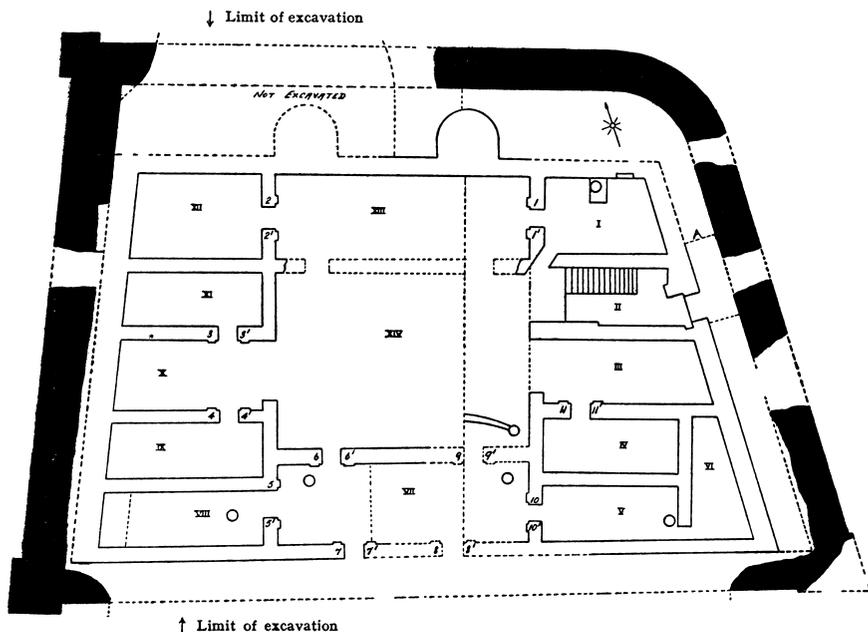
Fig. 4.12. Plan of the residence excavated at al-Ḥīra by the Oxford expedition in 1931. From Talbot Rice 1932a, fig. 5. © Antiquity Publications Ltd.

additions, rebuilding activities, or filling of the basement rooms. He dates the first two to the Sasanian period and the third to the early Islamic period, but none of the arguments for an early date for phases one and two are really decisive.[146]

The French survey in al-Ḥīra in 1990 was short, and interrupted for security reasons.[147] Not much was added to the knowledge of the structure of the site and its monuments, apart from the identification of an extended industrial area. Surface collection of pottery and glass sherds added some information relating to chronology and to the local pottery and glass industry.[148] Most of this material is of Islamic date and belongs to the late seventh to ninth centuries.

Rescue excavations took place between 2007 and 2011 in several locations in al-Ḥīra, but these have only been published in preliminary form. Several buildings were partly or completely excavated, one of which is tentatively interpreted as a monastery.[149] Most of them display a strong Christian character: a number of stucco, stone carved, or metal crosses were found, as

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[146] Talbot Rice 1932a: 285–6; the date is discussed based on the size of the baked bricks and shape of the semicircular buttresses.

[147] Lecomte 2002.   [148] Rousset 1994, 2001.   [149] al-Kaʿbī 2012: 61–2.

well as a Christian Kufic inscription.[150] Published dating evidence points again
to the seventh to eighth/ninth centuries.

Our archaeological knowledge of Naṣrid al-Ḥīra is still very limited. Al-
though the architecture of the two sixth-century churches is quite clear, we
have the plan of only one residential building, whose construction date is not
well defined. Of course, the plan of the latter and the general structure of the
site seem to support the literary evidence. Al-Ḥīra was not a densely built town
organized around a network of streets, but a rather loose settlement, which
witnessed a progressive and organic development and was composed of
disconnected, isolated buildings, either simple houses, more elaborate resi-
dences, or religious monuments. Further archaeological work is needed to
confirm this impression, to get a proper plan of the settlement, and to refine
the chronology, especially of the fourth- to sixth-century phases.

[4.10] Al-Khawarnaq

A number of palaces near al-Ḥīra are attributed to the Naṣrids, such as al-
Sadīr.[151] Perhaps the best known is al-Khawarnaq, celebrated by later Arabic
literature and poetry as one of the wonders of the world (**8.24**). According to
the Arab-Islamic tradition, it was built at the instigation of the Sasanian
Yazdegerd I by the Naṣrid al-Nuʿmān (b. Imruʾ al-Qays) in the first decades
of the fifth century; it was still settled and in fact enlarged in the early ʿAbbāsid
period, although there is no clear attestation of a link between this fact and the
stays of Hārūn al-Rashīd in the city.[152]

The archaeological evidence regarding the palace of al-Khawarnaq is scanty.
It apparently lies to the east of al-Ḥīra, a few kilometres outside the settlement.
Massignon, in 1907–8, was not even sure that he had correctly found the
site.[153] Musil identified the site more confidently and published a rough plan
of the structure, the accuracy of which is difficult to assess.[154] It measures
some 50 × 80 m and is apparently composed of two parts with rectangular
plans; the northern part seems to include a wide hall terminated by an apse.
Without further archaeological work, it is almost impossible to connect the
plan of this ruin with the literary evidence.

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[150] al-Kaʿbī 2012: 63–6.
[151] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.2042; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam* 3.201–2.
[152] *EI²* s.v. 'Al-Khawarnaḳ' (L. Massignon); al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.850–1; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam*
2.401–3.
[153] Massignon 1910–12, vol. 1: 36–7; vol. 2: 136.   [154] Musil 1927: 105–6, fig. 34.

Other Archaeological Remains in the Naṣrid Realm

The debate on attributing archaeological remains other than al-Ḥīra and the surrounding palaces to the Naṣrids has never been very significant, largely due to the rather poor state of late antique or Sasanian archaeology in Iraq.

Amongst the few archaeological remains that are contemporary and perhaps somehow related to al-Ḥīra, one should mention the monastic site of ʿAyn Shayʿa, situated about 20 km to the north-west of the town.[155] Although it has not been possible to identify it as such, it may be one of the many monasteries known from textual sources in the area. The monastery is enclosed by a rectangular enclosure wall and includes a church with a plan very similar to those of al-Ḥīra, and a few surrounding buildings. Most of the dating evidence points to the eighth and ninth centuries, but an earlier origin is probable.

In Quṣayr North, near Ukhayḍir, Finster and Schmidt studied two Sasanian churches; these also have very similar plans to the ones of al-Ḥīra.[156] By comparing all these churches, Okada has postulated an architectural development that is specific to south-western Iraq and which may also have some close connection with churches of the Arab-Persian Gulf.[157]

The current state of knowledge is not better when turning to secular buildings or monuments. The textual sources attest the existence of residences or castles belonging to Arab leaders in the sixth century. Finster and Schmidt have convincingly argued this most recently,[158] but good archaeological evidence, not assumptions and hypotheses, is still lacking. There are, in the steppe lands of south-western Iraq, a number of sites recognized only from aerial photographs or superficial surveys that present many of the characteristics of the Umayyad aristocratic settlements of Greater Syria, but they are not otherwise dated. Further archaeological research may perhaps reveal that some of them were pre-Islamic 'desert castles' belonging to the Naṣrid realm.

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[155] Fujii et al. 1989: 35–61; Okada 1992.   [156] Finster and Schmidt 1976: 27–39.
[157] Okada 1991; 1992.   [158] Finster and Schmidt 2005: 347–8.

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Arabs in the Conflict between Rome and Persia, AD 491–630

Peter Edwell, with contributions from Greg Fisher,
Geoffrey Greatrex, Conor Whately, and Philip Wood

INTRODUCTION

This chapter details the involvement of Arabs in the struggle between Rome and Persia, from approximately 491 to 630. Within the context of this rivalry prior to the sixth century, Arabs had appeared primarily as opportunistic adventurers like Amorkesos, as informal militia for individual campaigns, as recruits into Roman army units, and as *hypospondoi* (*foederati*), non-Romans recruited for military service in exchange for benefits, such as subsidies (Ch. 1). During the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh, however, the intensity of the Roman–Persian conflict changed, affecting the position of the peoples peripheral to it, including Arabs, who became more important to the defence of territory in Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine—areas increasingly difficult for both powers to organize directly, given internal pressures and those on other frontiers. Such difficulties were partly due to a broadening of imperial interests, reflected, for example, with the reconquest of Vandal Africa and Ostrogothic Italy initiated by Justinian, and greater Roman interest in the Arabian Peninsula during the time of Anastasius. Persia was threatened by the Rome–Aksūm–Ḥimyar axis which emerged in the first part of the sixth century, and the Sasanian leadership was also interested in extending its influence into Arabia.

In the sixth and seventh centuries Mesopotamia and Armenia remained the focus for the war between Rome and Persia, while the kingdoms of Iberia and Lazica in the Transcaucasus and on the eastern shores of the Black Sea emerged as more important theatres of conflict than in the past. In northern Mesopotamia Arab troops under the seasoned leadership of the Jafnid al-Ḥārith and the Naṣrid al-Mundhir played a significant role. While the increased contribution to the conflict played by the Arabs provides one

reason for their increased prominence in the primary sources, it is also apparent that the Jafnid and Naṣrid leaders were using the ongoing wars to consolidate their political positions and accumulate wealth. Here there is an implicit comparison with the western empire, where the elites of the Goths, Franks, and others had emerged politically and militarily powerful as a result, in part, of their alliances with (and wars against) the Romans.[1] In Syria and southern Mesopotamia Arab leaders often made incursions into each other's territory for both punitive and material purposes. Al-Mundhir regularly threatened wealthy Syrian cities such as Apamea, while his Jafnid counterparts targeted the Naṣrid base of al-Ḥīra on a number of occasions. By 547/8 Jafnids and Naṣrids were sending diplomatic missions to King Abraha of Ḥimyar (**3.21**) and by the early 570s the Jafnid leader al-Mundhir, son of al-Ḥārith, was demanding gold from the Roman emperor Justin II to hire mercenaries for his campaigns (**5.29**). Attempts by Rome and Persia to define what their Arab allies could (and could not) do appeared in the peace treaty agreed in 561/2, and finally both the Jafnid and Naṣrid leaders were toppled in 581/2 and *c.*602, respectively. This dissolution of the Arab alliances of both powers affected the nature of conflict in the seventh century, and was of some importance in the wars between Khusrau II Parvez (590–628) and Rome in the seventh.

The discussion presented here offers a chronological narrative of the period between 491 and 630, interspersed with excerpts from Graeco-Roman and Syriac literary primary sources. These illustrate the many opportunities, and difficulties, presented to Arabs through involvement in the wider strategic concerns of Rome, Persia, Ḥimyar, and Aksūm.

491–518: ANASTASIUS AND KAVADH

The background to the outbreak of war between Rome and Persia in the early years of the sixth century during the reigns of Anastasius (491–518) and Kavadh (488–531) is complex. The Persian Church of the East, which had looked to the church in the Roman empire for theological inspiration, increasingly distanced itself during the fifth century. This was especially the case after the Council of Chalcedon (451), and was related to the growing popularity of the Miaphysite position in the Roman eastern provinces, compared with the general embracing of a theology related to 'Nestorianism' in Persia.[2] The distance that developed between the Roman and Persian churches

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[1] For the western context see for example Heather 2012; Halsall 2007; Pohl, Wood, and Reimitz 2001; Pohl and Reimitz 1998.

[2] See Ch. 6.

Fig. 5.1. The late antique Near East, indicating locations discussed in this chapter.
Map drawn by Aaron Styba.

reduced some of the concern of Sasanian rulers that the loyalty of their
Christian subjects might be suspect.

More importantly, Rome and Persia had faced serious challenges on their
own western and eastern frontiers, respectively. The Sasanians experienced the
growing threat of the Hephthalites in Central and South Asia, and fought
many battles against them that were not always successful. The low points
came in *c*.476 when Kavadh, son of Peroz and his ultimate successor, was
given as a hostage to the Hephthalites, and then in 484, when Peroz was killed
fighting against them.[3] During much of the fifth century the Romans con-
fronted the Goths, Huns, and Vandals, which resulted in the loss of the
western provinces, represented figuratively in the forced abdication of the
last western emperor, Romulus Augustulus, in 476. Symbolic of a period of
greater cooperation and lesser conflict was an agreement by the Romans to
contribute funds to assist the Sasanians in defending the Caucasus passes
against migrating tribal groups, capable of causing problems for both empires.

Following the death of Peroz, turmoil had ensued in Persia due to a struggle
between the nobility and Peroz's dynastic successors. The Roman emperor

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[3] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 11; Dignas and Winter 2007: 97–8.

Zeno took advantage of this by withholding funds for the defence of the Caucasus passes, which contributed to growing friction between the two powers.[4] In 484/5, during Zeno's reign, tensions between Rome and Persia flared near Nisibis, where Arab raids, triggered by drought, proved difficult to contain. Barṣauma, the bishop of Nisibis (*c*.458–*c*.494) in a letter to Mar Acacius, the *catholicos* at Seleucia-Ctesiphon—in which he explains why he has not attended a synod which Acacius had arranged—details the problems which the region was facing. The letter is preserved in the *Synodicon Orientale*, a collection of the acts of the Church of the East from 410 to 775.

> Arab raids around Nisibis
> [**5.1**] Barṣauma, *Letter 2* = *Syn. Or.* pp. 526–7, excerpts (trans. after Chabot, modified)
> For two successive years we have been afflicted by a shortage of rain and a lack of necessary commodities. The mob of the tribes from the south has assembled, and because of the multitude of people and their animals, they have destroyed the villages of the countryside and of the mountain. They have dared to pillage and capture animals and people, even in the land of the Romans. A large army of Romans assembled and came to the frontier, along with their subject Ṭayyāyē. They demanded satisfaction for what the Ṭouʿayē,[5] the subjects of the Persians, had done in their territory. The great and illustrious *marzban* Qardag Nakōragan [the governor of Nisibis] contained them through his wisdom and benevolence. He made an agreement with them to assemble the Ṭouʿayē and to take from them the plunder and captives if the Roman Ṭayyāyē would bring the cattle and the people which at various times they had taken from Beth Garmai, Adiabene, and Nineveh, so that the one could be returned to the Romans, the other to the Persians, and they would fix the frontiers by a treaty, so that such evils should not happen again. But God knows when the things that we have talked about will end! Because of this, the King of Kings ordered the king of the Ṭayyāyē, the *marzban* of Beth Aramaye, to come here [to Nisibis]. The chief of the Romans, and with all of their soldiers and Ṭayyāyē, are on the frontier. We, for the sake of a great deal of peace and as a sign of great friendship, at the beginning of the month of Ab [August], persuaded the [Roman] *dux* to come to Nisibis, to see the *marzban*. And he was received by him with great honour. But while they were together to eat, drink, and rejoice, the Ṭouʿayē had the audacity to go out, with four hundred horsemen, and fall upon the lower villages of the Romans. When this we learned, there was great disquiet on both the Roman and Persian sides. The *dux* and his officers were angry with us, because they believed that this had been done in treachery by making them come into Nisibis, to cause damage to the Romans.

Barṣauma's letter reveals in a stark light the problems posed by Arab plundering and captive-taking, and recalls the dramatic notices given by Isaac of Antioch (Ch. 1).[6] There are numerous examples of the damage done by such attacks, which often took place against the background of the Roman–Persian

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[4] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 18.   [5] See **6.39**.   [6] See now Lenski 2011.

wars. Targeting civilians, villages, livestock, and movable goods, they also terrorized monks, nuns, and pilgrims, becoming a recurring theme in classicizing (**5.10**) and hagiographical literature (**6.3**). The raids of Amorkesos (**1.27**), while less interested in plunder, also broadly fall into this category of frontier raiding, but in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, the political ramifications of Arab raiding became more pronounced as friction between Rome and Persia mounted. Indeed, Barṣauma's letter shows how Arab raids jeopardized the peace between the two states, and clearly indicates that while the Arabs were nominally under control of Roman and Persian officers, neither, in fact, had complete command over their allies, who had succumbed to the pressures caused by the drought. It is worth noting that a drought in 536 (below) also seems to have triggered similar events, and later Muslim accounts also discuss the importance of climate-related events in forcing the movement of Arabs in the pre-Islamic period, creating conflict between themselves and their neighbours in the process (**8.1–3**). The semi-autonomy of Arab militias, while occasionally held in check (**5.9**), would be a constant problem throughout the sixth century.[7]

In 488 Kavadh I emerged from the power struggle which had followed the death of Peroz. Kavadh fatefully supported Mazdakism, a dualist religiopolitical movement to which the Zoroastrian clergy and nobility were strongly opposed.[8] Kavadh was deposed in 497, and took refuge with the Hephthalites, who had earlier held him as a hostage following the death of Peroz.[9] The Hephthalites supported Kavadh's return to Persia in 499, when he regained the throne and ruled until 531.[10] An important element of Kavadh's restoration of Sasanian dynastic power was competition with Rome, and he soon turned his mind to the task.[11] Even before his deposition, Kavadh had threatened both Zeno and Anastasius with war, due to the refusals by both emperors to pay for the defence of the Caucasus passes.[12] For Anastasius, who came to power in 491 following the death of Zeno, the first decade of his reign saw problems with a revolt of the Isaurians in Asia Minor and attacks by Arab groups in Syria, Arabia, and Palestine. In 491/2 there is some evidence of a raid into *Phoenice Libanensis*, probably by the Arab allies of the Persians.[13] There were more serious attacks c.498–502 by three different Arab groups.

[7] See Lenski 2011: 245; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 48; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 114–19; Isaac 2000: 242, 'the nomads were easy to encourage, but hard to control'; Blockley 1992: 85; Segal 1984: 109; Gero 1981; Trimingham 1979: 151–2.

[8] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 20; al-Ṭabarī 1.885–7; Wiesehöfer 2009; Wiesehöfer 1996: 208–10.

[9] Daryaee 2013: 26–8.   [10] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 23–4; Proc. *BP* 1.6.10–11.

[11] Payne 2013.   [12] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 18–19.   [13] Shahîd 1989b: 120.

Arab raids at the turn of the sixth century

[**5.2**] Theophanes, *Chron.* AM 5990/p. 141 (trans. Mango and Scott, pp. 216–17)

In this year there was an invasion of the so-called tent-dwelling Arabs into Euphratesia. Eugenios [*PLRE* 2: 417], an earnest man in both word and deed, who commanded the army in those parts, met them at Bithrapsa in the first region of Syria and defeated them in battle. The vanquished [Arabs] who were tributaries of the Persians, were of the tribe of the phylarch Naaman. At that time Romanus was commander of the army in Palestine, an excellent man. Both by good planning and generalship, he captured in battle Ogaros, the son of Arethas (the latter being known as the son of Thalabene), together with a great mass of prisoners. Before the battle Romanus had worsted and put to flight another tent-dweller, Gabalas by name, who had overrun Palestine before Romanus' arrival. At that time also the island of Iotabe, which lies in the gulf of the Red Sea and was subject to the Roman emperor, paying considerable tribute, but which in the meantime had been seized by the tent-dwelling Arabs, was set free by Romanus after fierce battles, and given back to the Roman traders to inhabit under their own laws, to import goods from the Indies and to bring the assessed tax to the emperor.

[**5.3**] Evagrius, *HE* 3.36 (trans. Whitby, p. 181)

The Scenite Arabs also, though not to their own profit, made a raid against the Roman realm and ravaged the property of Mesopotamia and both Phoenicias and the Palestines. After suffering harshly at the hands of those in command in each place, they subsequently kept the peace, after collectively making agreements with the Romans.

Theophanes the Confessor completed the chronicle of his friend George Syncellos, a Palestinian monk who held high rank in ecclesiastical circles, and whose career was still active in the early part of the ninth century. Theophanes himself died in 818, after being confined to bed with kidney disease.[14] The *Chronicle*, which embraces secular and church matters in the Eusebian tradition, and dates according to the foundation of the world (*annus mundi*, or a.m.), provides, in the words of the editors of the standard English edition, 'the most ambitious effort of Byzantine historiography with a view to offering a systematic account of the human past'.[15]

The source history for the *Chronicle* is complex,[16] and the exact source for the detailed account of Arab incursions into the Roman empire quoted above is uncertain; many ascribe it to Eustathius of Epiphania, a chronicler whose work covered the period up to 502. Theophanes describes a series of raids, the

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[14] Two biographies by St Theodore the Studite and Methodius offer portraits of Theophanes' life. They are discussed by Mango and Scott in the introduction to their translation (xliii–lxiv) and by Hoyland (with full references) in the introduction to the translation of Theophilus of Edessa's *Chronicle*, pp. 7–10.

[15] Mango and Scott (lii).

[16] Mango and Scott, lxxxiii–lxxxii; Hoyland (n. 14) and Howard-Johnston 2010: 269–73 provide an updated view.

first conducted by the Persian ally 'Naaman'. This suggests the name 'al-Nuʿmān', which appears as the given name for various Roman- and Persian-allied Arab leaders, as well as those connected with the kingdom of Ḥimyar.[17] The raid penetrated deep into Roman territory; the location of Bithrapsa, however, is unclear, and indeed the whole passage is riddled with uncertainties. The leader captured by Romanus, Ogaros (Ḥujr?), may perhaps have ruled over the Muḍar tribe, or that of Kinda, in north-western Arabia. The reference to Thalabene can be variously interpreted: some see in it a link to the Jafnid dynasty—a newly published graffito from southern Israel refers to a Thaʿlaba, who might be connected with Ghassān and the Jafnids—while others associate it rather with the banu Thaʿlaba(t) the leadership of Muḍar, allies of the kingdom of Ḥimyar, who may also have been under Roman influence at some point (cf. **3.12**). The 'Thaʿlabite' Arabs appear again in Ps.-Joshua the Stylite as Roman allies (below), and in June 521 the banu Thaʿlaba(t) and Muḍar appear on inscription Ry 510 as participants in an expedition into the Persian empire, directed by the Ḥimyarite king Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur (**3.14**). Gabalas is the Greek form of the Arabic name Jabala, who is generally supposed to be the father of al-Ḥārith, the future Jafnid phylarch. The island of Iotabe lies at the mouth of the Red Sea; as discussed earlier (**1.27**) it had been ceded to an Arab chief, Amorkesos (Imruʾ al-Qays), by Leo in 473 and was of considerable commercial value, as Theophanes notes.[18]

Another version, quoted here, is found in the Chalcedonian-oriented *Ecclesiastical History* of Evagrius, a lawyer born in Epiphania (Hama) in 535, who worked for Gregory, Patriarch of Antioch (570–92).[19] In **5.3** Evagrius offers an abridged version of the notice given in Theophanes, although it is possible that he has confused the account with that of an earlier raid of *c*.491.[20] From both notices, it does however seem clear that there were significant developments afoot beyond the southern frontiers of the empire around the turn of the sixth century. New tribes were moving into the Syrian steppe region, possibly challenging those who were already there (cf. **8.29**).[21] The extract provides the first reference to the Jafnids in the Roman orbit, via Gabalas (Jabala), a development that is attested also in the Arabic sources.

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[17] Theophanes' bald statement of political allegiance does not allow for the attachment of this Naaman to any individual tribe or family dynasty, and the appearance of variances on this name in different manuscripts of the *Chronicle* (*Naamalou* and *Naamatou*) reinforce the difficulties faced by historians in identifying the Arab individuals who appear in the sources discussed in this chapter. See Elton 2014: 243–4.

[18] Avner et al. 2013; Olinder 1927; Elton 2014; Shahîd 1989b: 125–6; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 3–12; Robin 1996a: 696–8; Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 61–4; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 51; Haarer 2006: 32–4, Robin 2008a: 177–8; Blockley 1992: 87. See the discussion in the translation (Trombley and Watt), 69 n. 327.

[19] For a biography, and discussion of sources, see Treadgold 2010: 299–308; Allen 1981; and in the translation of Whitby, xiii–lxiii.

[20] See comments in the translation of Whitby, 181 n. 138.   [21] Elton 2014.

Meanwhile, the disturbances along the frontier continued, bringing an intriguing result:

> Anastasius makes a treaty with Arethas (al-Ḥārith)
> [**5.4**] Theophanes, *Chron.* AM 5994/p. 144 (trans. Mango and Scott, p. 222)
> In this year Anastasios made a treaty with Arethas (known as the son of Thalabene), the father of Badicharimos [Maʿdīkarib] and Ogaros [Ḥujr], after which all of Palestine, Arabia, and Phoenice enjoyed much peace and calm.

This extract is closely linked to the notices given by Theophanes and Evagrius above, but much hinges on who this Arethas (al-Ḥārith) is.[22] It is tempting to connect him with the individual mentioned by Nonnosus (**5.18**) agreeing to a treaty with Anastasius, and also, too, with an Arethas (possibly of Kinda) killed by al-Mundhir, the Naṣrid leader (**5.14**). The links between these three are uncertain, however[23]—indeed, it has been suggested that the Arethas mentioned here is a wholly separate figure, a chief of Muḍar from the banu Thaʿlaba(t). It has also been suggested that the text should be emended here, so that it refers to a peace treaty with both al-Ḥārith of Kinda and al-Ḥārith the Jafnid (the father of Jabala and grandfather of the later phylarch al-Ḥārith). Arabic sources (**8.29**, and cf. **8.5**) refer to an agreement concluded around this time, whereby the Jafnids took over from the Salīḥids as the primary defenders of the steppe zone of the frontier, but much about what precisely Theophanes is referring to remains unclear.[24]

Following his restoration to the throne, Kavadh sent a request to Anastasius for a loan due to his financial obligations to the Hephthalites.[25] On Anastasius' rejection of the request, Kavadh invaded Roman Armenia and Mesopotamia in the summer of 502 at the head of an army that included Armenian and Arab allies. Kavadh's Arab allies, in particular, were to be of crucial importance to the Mesopotamian campaign against Anastasius' forces. The first engagement took place in Armenia and saw the capital captured, followed by the capitulation of Martyropolis.[26] Further south in Mesopotamia, Amida was attacked in 502, with the assistance of the Arab leader al-Nuʿmān.[27] A desperate Roman defence of Amida staved off the Persian siege for three months, but Kavadh was eventually successful. A vivid account of the siege, which rivals Ammianus Marcellinus' account of the investment of Amida in 359, survives in the *Chronicle* of Ps.-Zachariah of Mytilene.[28] During the siege of Amida, Kavadh sent al-Nuʿmān and his army to attack the countryside around

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[22] Millar 2010b.   [23] Elton 2014: 244.
[24] Fisher 2011a: 88; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 51–2; Haarer 2006: 34–7.
[25] Proc. *BP* 1.7.1–2; Theoph. *Chron.* AM 5995/p. 144; Greatrex 1998b: 51–2, 76.
[26] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 48; Proc. *BP* 1.7.3; Ps-Zach. *Chron.* 7.3.
[27] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 50, 53.
[28] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 7.3–4. Cf. Ammianus 19.1–8; see Greatrex 1998b: 83–94.

Carrhae (Harran) and Edessa, an assignment which he carried out to great effect.

Our main source for many of these events is the *Chronicle* of Ps.-Joshua the Stylite. The anonymous Syriac text, preserved in the eighth-century *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, is written from the perspective of an individual from Edessa, and addressed to an abbot named Sergius. (The name Joshua, which has become attached to this text, appears in the manuscript, but the actual author is unknown.) It is also known by the title *An Historical Narrative of the Period of Distress which Occurred in Edessa, Amida, and all Mesopotamia*, and describes the natural and man-made disasters—principally the war—which afflicted those communities. The text 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.[29]

> Al-Nuʿmān and the siege of Amida
> [**5.5**] Ps.-Josh. Styl. *Chron.* 51–3, excerpts (trans. Trombley and Watt, pp. 55–8)
> As Kawad was unable to get the better of the city [Amida], he despatched Nuʿman, king of the Tayyaye, with his whole army to go south to the territory of the Harranites . . . on the twenty-sixth of this month [November 502], 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.

This raid had followed a Persian defeat of the Roman cavalry near Tall Beshmai, adjacent to the foothills of the Tur Abdin.[30] The movable goods and other plunder taken by al-Nuʿmān and his force would have proven useful in funding operations, and it is likely that the large number of captives taken would be sold as slaves. The proceeds would also have helped bolster al-Nuʿmān's reputation as a successful warrior who could provide generously for his followers. The repeated mention by Ps.-Joshua of plunder and booty and the central role it played in Arab raiding recalls the letter of Barṣauma, and also is echoed by others, including Cyril of Scythopolis (**5.7**), Ps.-Zachariah (**5.10**), John Malalas (**5.11**), Theophanes (**5.12**), and Procopius (**5.15**). It is clear that this form of raiding was also a highly effective extension of the wider conflict, which terrorized and demoralized civilian populations.

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[29] For a full discussion of authorship, sources, and historiographical outlook, see the comprehensive introduction in the translation by Trombley and Watt (xi–lii).
[30] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 51.

Kavadh withdrew to Nisibis for the winter, at which time Anastasius mobilized an army of 12,000 men under the *magister militum per Orientem* Areobindus[31] and 40,000 men under the command of Patricius and Hypatius (both as *magister militum praesentalis*) to protect the Mesopotamian cities.[32] This army was deployed in May 503 in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to recapture Amida, and to threaten Kavadh at Nisibis.[33] In July 503 al-Nu'mān advanced to the Khabur river with the aim of threatening Roman holdings further westward, but his campaign was to end in failure, and the loss of his life.

Conflict in the summer of 503: the death of al-Nu'mān
[**5.6**] Ps.-Josh. Styl. *Chron.* 57–8 (trans. Trombley and Watt, pp. 68–72)
The Persian Tayyaye advanced to the (river) Khabur, but Timostratus, the *dux* of Callinicum,[34] went out against them [and defeated them]. The Roman Tayyaye, who are called Tha'labites, went towards Hirta, (the residence) of Nu'man, 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. The entire (enemy) army of Persians, Huns, Qadishaye, and Armenians assembled again in August and advanced as far as Opadna. Patricius' men heard (of this) and made to go against them, but while the Romans were still on the march and had not yet drawn up in battle formation, the Persians met the vanguard and hit them. When those who had been struck retreated, the rest of the Roman army saw that the vanguard had been hit. Fear took hold of them and they did not stand to fight, but Patricius was the first to turn tail and his entire army followed, crossing the River Euphrates and seeking safety in the city of Samosata. In this battle Nu'man, king of the Persian Tayyaye, was wounded, while one of the Roman officers, whose name was Peter, fled to the fortress of Ashparin. When the Persians surrounded the fortress, its inhabitants were frightened of them and handed him over to them. The Persians took him away captive and killed the soldiers who were with him, but they did not harm the inhabitants of the fortress in any way.

Kawad, king of the Persians, (now) considered coming out against Areobindus at Edessa. The Tayy king Nu'man was also urging him on because of what had happened to his caravan, but a tribal chief from Nu'man'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 Nu'man 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,

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[31] *PLRE* 2: 143 (Areobindus I).
[32] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 54. *PLRE* 2: 577 (Hypatius 6); *PLRE* 2: 840 ((Patricius 14).
[33] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 54; Ps-Zach. *Chron.* 7.45; Theoph. *Chron.* AM 5997/p. 147.
[34] *PLRE* 2: 1119.

and died. However, not even this sign restrained the audacity of Kawad from his evil intent. Instead, he installed a king in place of Nuʿman and went off (again) to war.

In August 503 Kavadh had gathered together an army comprised of Persians, Armenians, Huns, and Qadishaye (from the environs of Singara in northern Iraq), which set out to attack Opadna, approximately 100 km south of Amida. Patricius and Hypatius were soundly defeated and retreated to Samosata,[35] although some successes were scored by Rome's Arab allies, the 'Thaʿlabites'. The name recalls the notices of Theophanes (above) and it is possible that their participation here was a consequence of the raiding and treaties that took place between 497 and 502/3.

An important theme of Ps.-Joshua's depiction of the Persian Arab allies is their paganism and their arrogance, and God's ability to defeat those who attack his servants. After the Thaʿlabite raid, al-Nuʿmān, as Ps.-Joshua states, urged Kavadh to strike at Edessa. In the previous century, Syriac authors writing in Edessa had propagated a story that Christ had promised an early king of Edessa, Abgar 'the Black', that the city would never be conquered. In this episode, Edessa's faith in Christ's promise was vindicated in al-Nuʿmān's death, as the Arab leader's blasphemy received a just reward.[36] The appearance of a Christian Arab magnate from al-Nuʿmān's 'city' is especially noteworthy: Ps.-Joshua uses him as a vehicle for showing al-Nuʿmān's arrogance and demonstrating Edessa's fame, but it is important that it was credible to demonstrate that al-Nuʿmān's entourage included Christians. Al-Nuʿmān's death did not deter Kavadh who, as Ps.-Joshua indicates, continued to prosecute the war. It is not clear whom Kavadh placed at the head of his Arab allies, who appear intermittently in the following pages of Ps.-Joshua's account. Indeed, the episode underscores the fact that the leaders of the Persian Arab allies were, in general, eminently replaceable—a characteristic of frontier allies, and a weakness which would have dire consequences for both Jafnid and Naṣrid leaders towards the end of the sixth century.[37]

Kavadh later struck westwards and attempted to capture the fortress of Constantia while his Arab allies were ordered to attack Sarug (Batnae) on the Euphrates river.[38] This was an important part of a strategy aimed at

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[35] Cf. Theoph. *Chron.* AM 5997/pp. 146–7.

[36] On the promise of Abgar see Drijvers 1991; Mirkovic 2006; Wood 2010a: ch. 4; Brock 2004.

[37] Trombley and Watt, p. 72 n. 341 suggest (based on Rothstein's chronology of the kings of al-Ḥīra) that the new leader was Abu Jaʿfur b. Alqama, but this cannot be verified by contemporary sources. The emergence of al-Mundhir (Alamoundaras) in *c.*504 as the leader of Persia's Arab allies suggests, however, that the tenure of any replacement for al-Nuʿmān was short. See also Robin 2008a: 184.

[38] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 59–60.

isolating the major cities of Mesopotamia and Osroëne. On failing to capture Constantia, Kavadh continued on to the more crucial objective of Edessa (Ps.-Joshua, invoking once more the memory of Christ's promise to Abgar of the invulnerability of the city, notes a fear in some elements in the army about this goal because of the death of al-Nuʿmān).[39] Areobindus, in charge of the defence of the city, attempted to negotiate with the Persians, but Kavadh's demand of 10,000 pounds of gold was more than he could raise.[40] An initial siege got underway on 17 September, but on realizing that the city would be difficult to capture, Kavadh withdrew and camped at a nearby village. Areobindus now offered 2,000 pounds in gold to Kavadh, but later repudiated the offer.[41] Furious at the snub, Kavadh ordered a full-scale attack on the city on 24 September. The Arab force by this time had joined the rest of Kavadh's army and participated in the siege as spearmen.[42] Kavadh suffered some significant losses and soon withdrew from Edessa. He camped at the Euphrates while the Arabs crossed the river and devastated the countryside.[43]

At some point following the Persian capture of Amida in 503, an attack was undertaken by a new Persian Arab leader:

> Attacks of al-Mundhir
> [**5.7**] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of John the Hesychast* 13 (trans. Price, pp. 230–1)
> At this time Alamundarus the son of Sikika, who had attained the dignity of being king over the Saracens subject to Persia, invaded Arabia and Palestine in great fury against the Romans, carrying off everything as plunder, taking countless Romans into captivity, and after the capture of Amida perpetrating many lawless acts. So with a multitude of barbarians swarming over the desert and those entrusted as phylarchs with guarding the desert warning the monasteries to secure themselves against the incursion of the barbarians, the fathers of the Great Laura told the venerable father to abandon his sojourn in Roubâ and return to the laura to live in solitude in his own cell.

Cyril, born perhaps around 525, lived in Scythopolis, the capital of the province of *Palaestina II* and a centre for monastic activity. Cyril spent his entire life as a monk in the area, and does not seem to have gone further than Jerusalem. He offers a precious 'inside' perspective on the lives of the monks, whose biographies he wrote (see Ch. 6).[44]

Cyril's 'Alamundarus the son of Sikika' is the Naṣrid leader al-Mundhir. Sikika (or Saqiqa/Zekike), known also from Theophanes (**5.12**), notices in Michael the Syrian (**5.23**), and the *Chronicle of 1234*,[45] was perhaps a paternal

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[39] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 59.   [40] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 59.
[41] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 61.   [42] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 62.   [43] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 63.
[44] For Cyril's life, see the introduction in Price's translation (xxxviii–xl).
[45] *1234* p. 192.

grandmother.[46] Al-Mundhir's raids would devastate areas of the Roman East, and the ineffectiveness of even multiple phylarchs against him (as here) would result in Justinian's sponsorship of the Jafnid al-Ḥārith as a counterweight (**5.15**).[47] It is difficult to place this event in the precise chronological scheme offered by Ps.-Joshua the Stylite, although Shahîd dates it to late 503 or early 504;[48] Lenski places it later, in 509.[49]

   With winter approaching and Roman reinforcements on the way, Kavadh withdrew from Osroëne, unsuccessfully attacking Callinicum during the retreat in December 503.[50] Reinforcements were sent by Anastasius under the command of the *magister officiorum* Celer, who joined Areobindus in command of the war. In the winter of 503/4 he reorganized the Roman resistance to Kavadh's invasions. This was principally directed at retaking Amida and, on Celer's orders, Patricius began a siege of the city during the winter.[51] In March 504 Celer assembled an army at Rhesaina while, at the same time, Kavadh ordered a force of 10,000 men to deal with Patricius' siege of Amida.[52] With 6,000 cavalry Timostratus, the *dux* of Callinicum, attacked the large animal herd accompanying Kavadh's army that had been left grazing near Singara. Timostratus rejoined the force at Rhesaina, and the entire army made its way to Amida to assist Patricius in the siege. Celer called a halt to the siege in May and June over concerns that it could not yet be prosecuted favourably; meanwhile, in June, Kavadh suffered some setbacks with the desertion of Constantine, a Roman official, who had earlier defected to Kavadh, to the Romans.[53] He initially took refuge with Rome's Arab allies who sent him on to Edessa. More significantly, and at the same time, a Persian Arab ally, ʿAdid, also defected to the Romans.[54] Celer ordered the resumption of the siege of Amida in July, making little headway before marching part of his army to the Euphrates and into Persian territory where he undertook raids on farmlands and captured some small forts.[55] Kavadh now ordered negotiations with the Romans and, with winter approaching, Celer eventually agreed.[56] The truce continued throughout the long period of treaty negotiations, which were not finalized until November 506.[57] Before and during the treaty negotiations, both the Romans and Persians faced challenges stemming from the activities of their Arab allies:

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[46] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6021/p. 178; Proc. *BP* 1.17.1. See the discussion about al-Mundhir's lineage in Robin 2008a: 184–5.

[47] Cf. Isaac 2000: 243; Lenski 2011: 246.   [48] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 17–18.

[49] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 17–18; Lenski 2011: 245; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 71.

[50] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 64, and the notes in the translation in Trombley and Watt; Greatrex 1998b: 99–106 for a detailed discussion of the events of 503. Greatrex 1998b: 99–106.

[51] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 66.   [52] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 69.

[53] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 74.   [54] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 75.

[55] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 79; Marc. Comes, *Chron.* s.a. 504.

[56] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 80–1.   [57] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 5997–8/pp. 147–9.

Arab raids in 504/5

[**5.8**] Ps.-Josh. Styl. *Chron.* 79 (trans. Trombley and Watt, pp. 96–97)

The Roman Tayyaye also crossed the Tigris in front of them [the main Roman force], plundering, capturing, and destroying all they could find in Persian territory. Since I know that you carefully examine everything, your holiness [i.e. Sergius, the abbot] will well understand that this war was the cause of much enrichment for the Tayyaye of both sides, and that they did as they pleased in both empires.

[**5.9**] Ps.-Josh. Styl. *Chron.* 88 (trans. Trombley and Watt, p. 108)

The Persian Tayyaye did not desist or stop fighting, but crossed over into Roman territory without the Persians, and took two villages into captivity. When the Persian *marzban* in Nisibis learned of this, he apprehended their chiefs and killed them. The Roman Tayyaye also made an unauthorized crossing into Persian territory, and took a hamlet into captivity. When this was made known to the *magistros*, as he had gone down at the end of this year to Apameia, he sent word to Timostratus, *dux* of Callinicum, (to deal with it). He apprehended five of their chiefs, killing two by the sword and hanging up three on gibbets.

The events described by Ps.-Joshua anticipate the freedom of action enjoyed by the Jafnid and Naṣrid leaders in the mid-sixth century, which would prompt their explicit inclusion in the treaty of 561/2 (**5.24**) and would include provisos against this sort of cross-border raiding. Such attacks were profitable for participants, but they could also threaten negotiations (cf. **5.1**). The Roman and Persian response to these transgressions in 505 (**5.9**) was predictably harsh and swift. Shahîd notes that the Arab allies of both sides observed the final treaty of 506 and remained quiet for the rest of Anastasius' reign.[58]

The Romans commenced a much-needed upgrading of their defences in Mesopotamia and Osroëne while the treaty negotiations continued through 505 and 506. While a number of fortresses and fortified cities including Edessa and Constantia had their defences improved, it was the construction of the huge fortress at Dara that represented the most important development. Ps.-Joshua the Stylite claimed that Anastasius ordered the construction of Dara due to enemy attacks on Roman soldiers as they marched through the ʿArab, the territory nearby, while Ps.-Zachariah noted that the culprits were the 'bands of Persians and Ṭayyāyē'.[59] The fortress was constructed at a strategic location on the northern Mesopotamian plain only 25 km west of Nisibis and approximately 100 km south of Amida.[60] It filled a gap in the Roman defensive network in Mesopotamia, and made prospective Persian invasions more difficult to prosecute. The sources[61] emphasize Anastasius'

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[58] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 17.

[59] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 90; Ps.-Zach. *Chron.* 7.6b, trans. Phenix and Horn, pp. 247–8.

[60] Marc. Comes, *Chron.* s.a. 518.

[61] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 90; Ps.-Zach. *Chron.* 7.6a; Marc. Comes, *Chron.* s.a. 518; Joh. Lyd. *De Mag.* 3.47.

commitment to Dara's construction and note that it was done very quickly, although Procopius downplays Anastasius' achievement, in contrast to that of Justinian.[62] The Persians were clearly uneasy about the construction of Dara and made raids from Nisibis in an attempt to halt it.[63] The construction of the fortress did not ultimately jeopardize the treaty and, in November 506, it was formally adopted. The surrender of Amida and the return of hostages were its main terms. The construction of Dara continued apace and the walls were completed in 507/8.[64]

The rest of Anastasius' reign saw the strengthening of defences at various sites in northern Syria, Mesopotamia, and Armenia.[65] It is also to the last five years of Anastasius' reign that the upgrading and addition of walls at Ruṣāfa belongs. Ruṣāfa had long been the site of the cult of St Sergius, who was reputed to have been martyred there during the Diocletianic persecutions. The cult (Ch. 6) became increasingly popular among the Arabs, and the site, lying on the steppe some 70 km south of Sura on the Euphrates, afforded Roman emperors the opportunity to increase their visibility in a landscape in which the Arabs came to play an important role.[66] To that end, Ruṣāfa was upgraded from 514 to 518, and briefly renamed Anastasiopolis before being renamed Sergiopolis. The upgraded site played an important role at times in the relationship between Rome and Persia, and in Roman relations with the Arabs throughout the sixth century (see **4.7** and Ch. 6).

518–27: JUSTIN I AT WAR WITH KAVADH

Notices of raiding by al-Mundhir, the Naṣrid leader, feature widely throughout Justin's tenure as Roman emperor (518–27). To the north there were disputes between Rome and Persia over Iberia and Lazica on the south-eastern shores of the Black Sea, but in 524/5 the aging Kavadh recognized that internal enemies who might derail succession plans for his son Khusrau were more of a concern than the ongoing enmity with the Romans.[67] Kavadh therefore approached Justin to adopt Khusrau as a means of securing his succession.[68] Despite an initially favourable response by Justin, negotiations over the adoption through imperial envoys broke down.[69] The result was conflict over the following four years, part of which was fought through the Arab alliances in the south, where al-Mundhir demonstrated his skill at raiding and terrorizing.

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[62] Proc. *BP* 1.10.13–18; Proc. *Aed.* 2.1.4.3–26.   [63] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 90.
[64] Croke and Crow 1983: 148–59; Gregory 1994–7: vol. 3, C6; Greatrex 1998b, 115–16.
[65] Proc. *Aed.* 3.5.4–9.   [66] Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 64ff.
[67] Braund 1994: 276–7.   [68] Mal. *Chron.* 17.10/p. 415.
[69] Proc. *BP* 1.11.1–30; Greatrex 1998b: 134–8.

The raids of al-Mundhir

[**5.10**] Ps.-Zachariah, *Chron.* 8.5a (trans. Phenix and Horn, pp. 297–8)

Kavadh, the king of the Persians, was asking constantly and pressing the demand for a tribute [of] five hundred *centenaria* of gold that should be delivered to him by the emperor of the Romans for the expense of the Persian army guarding the gates facing the Huns. For this reason, he would send his own Ṭayyayê into Roman territory from time to time, to plunder and take captives; *accordingly Mundhir the Ṭayy went up and took captives in the whole territory of the* limes, *being the area of the Balikh and Khabur rivers.*[70] Mundhir, the king of the Ṭayyayê, went up once or twice to Emesa, Apamea, and the country of Antioch, and he led away many and brought down with him four hundred virgins who were suddenly carried into captivity from the assembly of the apostle Thomas in Emesa, whom he sacrificed in one day for the worship of ʿUzzai.

The *Chronicle* of Ps.-Zachariah offers an amalgamation of different works. In 568/9 the principal part of the work, a Syriac version of the lost Greek text of Zachariah of Mytilene (from Gaza, born towards the end of the 460s), was augmented by a wide-ranging collection of other material. This addition to the work of Zachariah was made by Ps.-Zachariah, possibly a monk from Amida in Mesopotamia, and a contemporary of John of Ephesus. This important text, which offers precious insight into the events which took place at Najrān (**6.45–8**), and informed later texts, such as the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian, has now been newly translated with a comprehensive introduction and notes.[71]

The dating of the incursions of al-Mundhir noted at the start (in general terms) is uncertain. The *Chronicle of 724* refers to a raid in 518/19,[72] while this one appears rather to fall in the mid-520s, at a time when tension between Rome and Persia was escalating over the collapse in negotiations over the adoption of Kavadh's son Khusrau, and the demand for funds, although the latter was by no means Kavadh's first: he had made similar requests to Anastasius already in the 490s, but with no more success. There is no reason to suppose that the Romans were under any obligation to contribute the money demanded, although it is clear that they did on occasion.[73] The reference to Emesa is uncertain: Ps.-Zachariah may refer rather to a less well-known place called Amis, which lay between Chalcis and Antioch. Although the figure of 400 virgins is almost certainly an exaggeration, Procopius (**5.22**) also suggests that al-Mundhir did make human sacrifices to Aphrodite a goddess commonly identified with ʿUzzai.

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[70] From Mich. Syr. *Chron*. 9.16, as noted in the translation of Ps.-Zach. (297 n. 66).
[71] See the translation of Phenix and Horn, edited by Greatrex; see too Greatrex 2009.
[72] *Chron. 724*, p. 143; see notes in the translation by Greatrex et al., p. 297 n. 66.
[73] E.g. Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 8.

In one raid al-Mundhir attacked Osroëne and captured the *duces* Timostratus and John.[74] Shahîd suggests that this was directly related to Persian concerns over the continued payment of Roman subsidies.[75] In 523 Justin sent an embassy to negotiate with al-Mundhir for the release of the two officers, which concluded a peace treaty at Ramla, south-east of al-Ḥīra, in February 524.[76] At Ramla messengers reached al-Mundhir from the king of Ḥimyar, seeking his support for the anti-Christian pogrom underway in South Arabia. Al-Mundhir refused (see **6.47**), but this episode also reflects the complex way in which the Roman and Persian conflict played out through their Arabian alliances.[77] The account of the capture of the two *duces* is included in Procopius' explanation of Justinian's decision to support the Jafnid Arethas (**5.15**).

527–32: THE FIRST PERSIAN WAR OF JUSTINIAN

Justin I died in 527 and was succeeded by his nephew Justinian (527–65). The first years of Justinian's reign saw the strengthening of defences across Syria, Mesopotamia, and Armenia and included activity at Dara, Martyropolis, Edessa, and Amida. The upgrading of the defences and public buildings at Palmyra also belongs to this period.[78] Attention was also given to the north: by the end of 525 an attempt by Iberia to defect to the Romans had been dealt with by the Persians, but neighbouring Lazica was now allied with Rome.[79] In 528 Justinian undertook a major restrengthening of Armenia, even creating the new military post of *magister militum per Armeniam*.[80] Meanwhile, between 527 and 529, the raids of al-Mundhir continued.

> Further raids of al-Mundhir (527–9)
> [**5.11**] Malalas, *Chron.* 18.32/p. 445 (trans. Jeffreys et al., p. 259)
> In that year Alamoundaros, the Persian Saracen, came with a force of Persians and Saracens and plundered Syria I as far as the borders of Antioch, even burning some places within its territory. On hearing these events, the Roman exarchs went out against them. Once the Saracens became aware of this, they took all their booty and escaped across the outer *limes*.

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[74] Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 9.16; Proc. *BP* 1.17.43–5. For Timostratus, see n. 34; John, *PLRE* 2: 611 (Ioannes 70).

[75] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 44.

[76] Vasiliev 1950: 278–83; Shahîd 1964: 115–31; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 40–2; Greatrex 1998b: 228–30.

[77] Ch. 3, and see Robin 2014a; Rubin 1989; Greatrex 1998b: 226–40.

[78] Mal. *Chron.* 18.1–2/pp. 425–6.   [79] Greatrex 1998b: 142–7.

[80] Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 83–4.

[**5.12**] Theophanes, *Chron.* AM 6021/p. 178 (trans. Mango and Scott, p. 270)
On 21 March of the 7th indiction, Alamoundaros son of Zekike, kinglet of the Saracens, invaded and looted First Syria as far as the boundaries of Antioch, at a place called Litargon, and the estates of Skaphathai. He killed many people and burned the territory outside Chalcedon and the Semian estate and the Kynegian country. The news brought the Roman commanders out against him. When they realized this, the Saracens, with the Persians, took their booty and prisoners and fled across the inner *limes*.

John Malalas was born *c.*490 in Antioch. He wrote a chronicle in 18 books, which began with Adam and Eve and ended with the reign of the emperor Justinian; he has sometimes been denigrated for his sloppiness, incompetence, and ignorance.[81] Malalas entered the imperial service, probably finishing it in Constantinople, where he died in the 570s. His work was written in two sections—the earlier by 530, focused on Antioch, and the second, updated version, with greater interest in Constantinople.[82] Malalas made use of a range of sources, including written records, oral material, official imperial notices, and first-hand observation and experience.[83] The majority of excerpts used in this volume come from book 18, dealing with the reign of Justinian.

The account of the raid given by Theophanes in **5.12** is more complete than that of Malalas; it took place in March 529, as Theophanes notes, following a Roman reprisal attack on al-Mundhir's territory late in 528, which had returned to Roman territory in April 528, as Malalas mentions. It is clear that the measures Justinian had taken to strengthen the frontier defences, e.g. by installing a *dux* in Palmyra, were insufficient to withstand such a *razzia*.[84]

The Romans responded to al-Mundhir's raids by harassing Nisibis, and attempted to construct a fortress at Thannuris as protection against Arab raiders, suggesting that concerns similar to those which underpinned Anastasius' construction of Dara were still relevant.[85] Persian Arab allies from the vicinity of Singara put a stop to this venture. In summer 528 Belisarius made another attempt to construct a fortress at Thannuris but this was met by Persian attempts to stop it.[86] A Roman army engaged the Persian force in battle, but it was defeated, and to this phase of the war belongs a mention of an otherwise-unknown Arab ally of the Romans, al-Tafar.

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[81] See the discussion in Treadgold 2010: 235–56, and in the translation of Jeffreys et al., pp. xxi–xli, and Jeffreys 1990.

[82] Treadgold 2010: 239–40. There had been some dispute about whether Malalas was in fact the author of both parts, but there is some agreement now that this is, in fact, the case.

[83] See the translation of Jeffreys et al., p. xxiii; Treadgold 2010: 246–56; Jeffreys 1990: 178–216; Scott 1985; Scott 1981.

[84] Mal. *Chron*. 18.1/p. 426; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 43–4, 70–80, 722–3, and 732–3; Greatrex 1998b: 15–18, 131, 152; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 86; Fisher 2011a: 68.

[85] Ps.-Zach. *Chron*. 9.2.

[86] Mal. *Chron*. 18.24–6/pp. 441–2; Ps.-Zach. *Chron*. 9.2a; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 76–8; Kennedy and Riley 1990: 118–21.

Al-Tafar

[**5.13**] Ps.-Zachariah, *Chron.* 9.2b (trans. Phenix and Horn, pp. 319–20)

So an army of soldiers was assembled to go into the wilderness of Tannuris against the Persians with Belisarius, Coutzes the brother of Boutzes, Basil, Vincentius, and other leaders of the army, along with Al-Tafar the commander of the Ṭayyāyē. When the Persians heard [of the army's plans], they dug several pits among their defensive trenches by way of a stratagem, and on the outside they drove in wooden tripod-like stakes, and they left an interval (between them). When the Roman army arrived, they were not aware ahead of time of the deceptive stratagem of the Persians. The heads of the army, in the rush of their impetuosity, entered the defensive trench of the Persians; when they fell into the pits they were captured and Coutzes was killed. Belisarius and the cavalry of the Roman army turned back, and, fleeing, they returned to Dara, but [those of] the infantry who did not escape were killed or taken captive. Al-Tafar, the king of the Ṭayyāyē, as he was fleeing, was knocked down [from his mount] at close range and died. He was an experienced man of war, was well trained in the technology of the Roman [military], and was famous everywhere [for] having won [several] battles.

Shahîd has raised the possibility that the al-Tafar referred to in this passage, Tapharas in Greek, might be the Jafnid king Jabala, the father of al-Ḥārith, but this is by no means clear.[87] Indeed, remarkably little is known about al-Tafar.[88] Both Malalas and Procopius also describe the same engagement reported here.[89] Like Ps.-Zachariah, Malalas notes the death of the phylarch after his fall from the horse (although he suggests only that the horse stumbled), but Procopius' account does not mention al-Tafar at all.[90]

Meanwhile the Persians, especially via al-Mundhir, did what they could to interrupt Roman attempts at strengthening their defences. Al-Mundhir's attacks in the period between 527 and 529 included one on Syria and Palestine in 527/8 which killed the phylarch of *Palaestina I*, Arethas, probably to be identified with the same 'Ḥujrid' Arethas (al-Ḥārith) discussed above (**5.4**).[91]

Arethas (al-Ḥārith) killed in battle

[**5.14**] Malalas, *Chron.* 18.16/ pp. 434–5 (trans. Jeffreys et al., p. 252)

In that year it happened that enmity developed between the *dux* of Palestine Diomedes, a *silentarius*, and the phylarch Arethas. Arethas took fright and went to the inner *limes* towards India. On learning this Alamoundaros, the Persian Saracen, attacked the Roman phylarch, captured him, and killed him, for he had 30,000 men with him. On learning this, the emperor Justinian wrote to the *duces*

[87] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 63–7, contra Whittow 1999: 214. Cf. Evag. *HE* 3.36; Theophanes, *Chron.* AM 5990/p. 141; *PLRE* 2: 489 (Gabala), *PLRE* 3b: 1216 (Tapharas).

[88] Though see Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 63–7.

[89] Proc. *BP* 1.13.1–8; Mal. *Chron.* 18.26/p. 442.

[90] Cf. Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 299.

[91] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6021/p. 179; Mal. *Chron.* 18.15–6/pp. 434–5; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 86; Fisher 2011a: 88.

of Phoenice, Arabia, and Mesopotamia and to the phylarchs of the provinces to go after him and pursue him and his army. There set out at once the phylarch Arethas, Gnouphas, Naaman, Dionysius *dux* of Phoenice, John *dux* of Euphratesia, and the chiliarch Sebastianus with their military force. Learning of this Alamoundaros the Saracen fled to Indian territory with the Saracen force that he had. The Roman *duces* and phylarchs went in with an accompanying force and, not finding him anywhere there, they set off towards Persian territory. They captured his camp and took prisoner a number of men, women, and children, as many dromedaries as they found, and other animals of various kinds. They burnt four Persian fortresses, capturing the Saracens and Persians in them, and they returned victorious to Roman territory in the month of April of the 6th indiction.

John Malalas' account of al-Mundhir's victory and of the Roman raid that followed is remarkably detailed; Procopius omits the episode entirely. The chronicler probably owed his information to a report from the expedition's leaders (despatched to Antioch, and thence to Constantinople). It is usually assumed that this report refers to the Ḥujrid ruler al-Ḥārith/Arethas of Kinda (not to be confused with the Jafnid of the same name in **5.15**), who fled outside the boundaries of the empire, referred to as the inner *limes*, i.e. towards the interior of the Arabian Peninsula, where he fell an easy prey to his rival, al-Mundhir the Naṣrid. Although al-Ḥārith had built up a powerful position since the start of the sixth century, he was unable to match his adversary, and little is subsequently heard of Kinda of the family of Ḥujr in the late antique sources (see, though, **5.18**). Despite the common acceptance of this identification, it should be mentioned that it is quite possible, however, that this al-Ḥārith is not the Ḥujrid ruler, but rather the al-Ḥārith who concluded a treaty with Anastasius in 502 (above), a ruler associated with the banu Thaʿlaba(t). As noted earlier in this chapter, it is often difficult to identify precisely the Arab individuals reported in our sources.

Whether al-Mundhir could muster 30,000 men may be doubted, and this number may reflect the report of the Roman commanders, who had every reason to inflate the scale of the task they undertook. It is noteworthy that Justinian intervened personally to galvanize the commanders into action; the individuals named are not well known, save for the second Arethas (al-Ḥārith) mentioned by Malalas, who would soon be promoted to a supreme phylarchate by the emperor. The expedition probably took some time to mobilize and set out in winter 527–8 before returning (as noted) in April 528.[92]

It was probably in response to al-Mundhir's ability to penetrate quickly and deeply into Syria that Justinian recognized the necessity to counter the strength of the Naṣrids.

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[92] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 148–53; Robin 1996a: 698; Greatrex 1998b: 151–2; Fisher 2011a: 51, 84–91. See too the shorter version given by Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6021/p. 179.

Justinian and the Jafnid Arethas (al-Ḥārith)

[**5.15**] Procopius, *BP* 1.17.40–8 (trans. Dewing, vol. 1, pp. 157–9)

For Alamoundaras [al-Mundhir, Naṣrid leader] was most discreet and well experienced in matters of warfare, thoroughly faithful to the Persians, and unusually energetic—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. And he was confronted by no one at all. For he never made his inroad without looking about, but so suddenly did he move and so very opportunely for himself, that, as a rule, he was already off with all the plunder when the generals and the soldiers were beginning to learn what had happened and to gather themselves against him. If, indeed, by any chance, they were able to catch him, this barbarian would fall upon his pursuers while still unprepared and not in battle array, and would rout and destroy them with no trouble; and on one occasion he made prisoners of all the soldiers who were pursuing him together with their officers. These officers were Timostratus, the brother of Rufinus, and John, the son of Lucas, who he gave up indeed later, thereby gaining for himself no mean or trivial wealth. And in a word, this man proved himself the most difficult and dangerous enemy of all to the Romans. The reason was this, that Alamoundaras, holding the position of king, 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 men 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, the son of Gabalas, who ruled over the Saracens of Arabia, and bestowed upon him the dignity of king, a thing which among the Romans had never before been done. However Alamoundaras continued to injure the Romans just as much as before, if not more, since Arethas was either extremely unfortunate in every inroad and every conflict, or else he turned traitor as quickly as he could. For as yet we know nothing certain about him. In this way it came about that Alamoundaras, with no one to stand against him, plundered the whole East for an exceedingly long time, for he lived to a very advanced age.

Procopius of Caesarea, a contemporary of John Malalas, Marcellinus Comes, Nonnosus, and John Lydus, is one of the most important sources for the sixth century, and stands in the long tradition of classicizing historians who could trace their stylistic framework back to Thucydides. Born in Palestine in *c.*500, Procopius was probably from a family of some wealth and prominence. He was provided with a classical education of considerable quality, and was trained as a lawyer. As a young man he moved to Constantinople, where he encountered Justinian's future general Belisarius, to whom he became

secretary—a post he held for 13 years.[93] This job placed him in a superb position not only to be an eyewitness to many of the events which he describes, but also to have access to official documents and records. He took part in Belisarius' campaigns against the Vandals, as well as against the Ostrogoths in Italy. These experiences, together with Belisarius' service on the eastern front, informed his history of the empire's wars which he wrote after leaving his employment with Belisarius in 540. Procopius' work (which included the panegyric *Buildings* as well as the *Anecdota* or *Secret History*) is frequently moralistic, as well as heavily classicizing in style. This tendency, together with his deep interest in individuals (and his shifting views of them, as with Belisarius and Justinian), the fact that he is sometimes the only source for events he describes, and his historiographical framework (which may have affected the way he viewed 'barbarian' Arabs), can cloud any critical or analytical perspectives which he may have followed in his work.[94]

Procopius' classicizing focus on foreign and military affairs also means that the Arab allies and enemies of Rome tend to appear only when they form a part of his wider narrative, as in this extract here, which reflects the bold step taken by Justinian in *c.*529 in elevating al-Ḥārith to the rank of supreme phylarch. Justinian was likely motivated by several concerns: Aksūm's conquest of Ḥimyar (Ch. 3) strengthened the desirability of having a strong family to control the desert fringes on Rome's behalf. With Abū Karib (below) granted the oases of the Ḥijāz, and with Ḥimyar dominated by a Christian ally, all of western Arabia might fall under Roman influence.[95] A more immediate concern was the defeat of the Naṣrid al-Mundhir, as Procopius notes. Al-Mundhir had proved a redoubtable adversary, notably by his capture of Timostratus and John in the mid-520s, but also by his raids deep into Roman territory, almost as far as Antioch itself. Although the emperor could give orders for the local Roman commanders to launch reprisal raids, as Malalas indicates (**5.14**), it was more efficient to appoint someone on the spot to take charge. Justinian therefore gave al-Ḥārith overall command of all the Arab tribes allied to the Romans, whereas hitherto each frontier province had had its own phylarch who acted in collaboration with the *dux*, or military commander. Now these phylarchs answered to al-Ḥārith, just as the *duces* were subordinate to the *magister militum per Orientem*, the supreme commander of the eastern (or rather, south-eastern) frontier. Procopius' verdict on al-Ḥārith's reliability and competence is clearly unfavourable, but it should be

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[93] *PLRE* 3a: 181ff. (Belisarius 1).
[94] The literature on Procopius is extensive. See most recently Greatrex 2014b; see also Treadgold 2010: 176–226; for comprehensive treatments see Cameron 1996; Kaldellis 2004; Brodka 2004; Whitby 2007; Börm 2007. Meier forthcoming will be an indispensable resource.
[95] Robin 2012b: 293.

noted that he tempered it later on (**5.22**), when he notes how al-Ḥārith defeated al-Mundhir and nearly captured two of his sons (*c*.545).[96]

   While al-Ḥārith and his forces were tasked with dealing with the incursions of al-Mundhir, internal security problems also required the attention of Arab phylarchs:

The Samaritan Revolt
[**5.16**] Malalas, *Chron.* 18.35/pp. 445–6 (trans. Jeffreys et al., pp. 260–1)
In the month of June of the 7th indiction a riot broke out among the local people when the Samaritans fought with the Christians and Jews, and many parts of Scythopolis were set on fire by the Samaritans. On hearing of this the emperor was angry with the governor Bassus, and so he relieved him of his office and had him beheaded in that district. When the Samaritans learnt of the emperor's anger against them, they rebelled and crowned a bandit chief, a Samaritan named Julian . . . [. . .] the *dux* [Theodoros, 'the snub-nosed'] set out against Julian with a large force, taking with him the phylarch of Palestine. The *dux* pursued him with his force, and they joined battle [. . .] 20,000 of the Samaritans fell in the battle. [. . .] The Saracen phylarch of the Romans took 20,000 boys and girls as booty from the Samaritans; he took these as prisoners and sold them in Persian and Indian territory.

The Samaritan revolt of 529 is reported in several sources, including Ps.-Zachariah.[97] The rebels, under their leader Julian,[98] enjoyed some initial successes, perhaps emboldened by al-Mundhir's daring razzia of that year (**5.12**), but within a year they had been crushed by Roman forces, as Malalas describes. Malalas is the only source to note the involvement of the Arabs, and in particular of the phylarch of Palestine; whether this phylarch should be identified with the Jafnid al-Ḥārith or his brother Abū Karib is debated. Given that war was looming on the frontier in Mesopotamia, it is certain that the phylarch and his forces will have played a crucial role in restoring order, for which they were no doubt rewarded by the booty and prisoners that they took.[99]

   The proxy war of the early reign of Justinian escalated into direct conflict between Roman and Persian forces when Kavadh ordered an attack on Dara in June 530. The battle was the first significant engagement fought by Belisarius as *magister militum per Orientem* and is described in detail by Procopius, who was present.[100] Belisarius was at Dara attempting to negotiate with the Persians when they mounted their surprise attack on the fortress. The outcome of

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[96] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 95–124; Greatrex 1998b: 160, Dignas and Winter 2007: 169–71; Fisher 2011a: 96–7. Greatrex forthcoming suggests that Procopius might have updated this passage following al-Mundhir's death in 554, and thus gave the 50-year span of al-Mundhir's career.
   [97] Ps.-Zach. *Chron.* 9.8a.   [98] *PLRE* 3a: 729 (Iulianus 3).
   [99] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 82–95; Greatrex 1998b: 161; Pummer 2002: 259–61.
   [100] Proc. *BP* 1.13.9–14; see also Greatrex 1998b: 168–85.

the battle was a victory for the Romans, but the Persians continued to threaten Roman Mesopotamia.[101] There is no direct mention of the presence of the Jafnids under al-Ḥārith at the battle, although Shahîd suggests that they may have been present.[102] Kavadh also advanced into Armenia following the retaking of Iberia, and proceeded into Lazica. A smaller force of 25,000 Roman soldiers met a 50,000-strong Persian army at Satala but the Romans held off the Persians and inflicted a defeat on them.[103]

At around the same time Justinian sought an alliance with Aksūm and Ḥimyar in South Arabia, which provided the possibility of an attack on Kavadh and al-Mundhir from the south (cf. Ch. 3).

Justinian's southern policy
[**5.17**] Procopius, *BP* 1.20.9–12 (trans. Dewing, vol, 1, pp. 193–5)
At that time, when Hellesthaeus [Kālēb; see **3.13**] was reigning over the Aethiopians, and Esimiphaeus [Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ; see **3.20**] over the Homeritae, the Emperor Justinian sent an ambassador, Julianus,[104] demanding that both nations on account of their community of religion should make common cause with the Romans in the war against the Persians; for he purposed that the Aethiopians, by purchasing silk from India and selling it among the Romans, might themselves gain much money, while causing the Romans to profit in only one way, namely, that they be no longer compelled to pay over their money to the enemy. (This is the silk of which they are accustomed to make the garments which of old the Greeks called Medic, but which at the present time they name 'seric'.) As for the Homeritae, it was desired that they should establish Caïsus, the fugitive, as captain over the Maddeni, and with a great army of their own people and of the Maddene Saracens [Maʿadd] make an invasion into the land of the Persians. This Caïsus was by birth of the captain's rank and an exceptionally able warrior, but he had killed one of the relatives of Esimiphaeus and was a fugitive in a land which is so utterly destitute of human habitation. So each king, promising to put this demand into effect, dismissed the ambassador, but neither one of them did the things agreed upon by them. For it was impossible for the Aethiopians to buy silk from the Indians, for the Persian merchants always locate themselves at the very harbours where the Indian ships first put in (since they inhabit the adjoining country), and are accustomed to buy the whole cargoes; and it seemed to the Homeritae a difficult thing to cross a country which was a desert and which extended so far that a long time was required for the journey across it, and then to go against a people much more warlike than themselves. Later on Abramus too, when at length he had established his power most securely, promised the Emperor Justinian many times to invade the land of Persia, but only once began the journey and then straightway turned back. Such then were the relations which the Romans had with the Aethiopians and the Homeritae.

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[101] Ps.-Zach. *Chron.* 9.3a.   [102] Shahîd 1995–2010: vol. 1: 132.
[103] Proc. *BP* 1.15.1–19.   [104] *PLRE* 3a: 731 (Iulianus 8).

Around the year 530/1 Justinian sought to open a new front in the ongoing war with Persia. His aim was to cut out the middleman—i.e. Persia—in the lucrative silk trade with the Far East. If the Aksūmites could buy the silk from the Far East, then the Romans could buy this important material without benefiting the Persian treasury; hitherto they had been obliged to rely on Persian intermediaries. At the same time he hoped to exert pressure on the Persians by establishing Qays (Procopius' Caïsus) as ruler of Maʿadd in central Arabia, who could then threaten the south-east of the Persian kingdom and its Naṣrid allies. Neither plan came to fruition. The successor of Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʿ, Abramus (Abraha; Ch. 3) who threw off Aksūmite overlordship, had little interest in undertaking long-range campaigns on the Romans' behalf; the war was soon concluded by the Eternal Peace in any case. The Sasanians, moreover, enjoyed an extensive trade network in this period and were easily able to thwart this attempt at circumventing them. There has been much discussion about the identity of the Qays concerned, and the relationship of Procopius' account here of his installation as ruler.[105]

Roman diplomatic initiatives to the south are also described by the surviving fragments of the work of the diplomat Nonnosus, preserved in the *Chronicle* of John Malalas and here, in the *Bibliotheca* of the ninth-century patriarch of Constantinople, Photius.[106]

> [**5.18**] Nonnosus = Photius, *Bibliotheca* 3 (trans. Bevan)
> Justinian ruled the Roman state at this time. Kaisos [Qays] bore the title of phylarch of the Saracens, a descendant of Arethas, who had himself been a phylarch, to whom the grandfather of Nonnosus had served on an embassy sent out by Anastasius, who was then ruler, and concluded a peace treaty. Not only this but the father of Nonnosus—Abrames was his name—served on an embassy to al-Mundhir, phylarch of the Saracens, and he rescued two Roman generals, Timostratus and John, who had been taken as prisoners of war. He secured the release of the generals for the emperor Justin.
>
> Kaisos, to whom Nonnosus was sent, led two of the most distinguished tribes among the Saracens: the Chindenoi [Kinda] and the Maadenoi [Maʿadd]. The father of Nonnosus, before Nonnosus was appointed to serve as an ambassador, was dispatched to this Kaisos at the behest of Justinian [in *c.*528] and concluded peace treaties (with him), on condition that he take the son of Kaisos, named Mavias [Muʾāwiyah] as a hostage and take him back to Justinian in Byzantium. Later [see note on dating, below] Nonnosus served as ambassador for the following two reasons:[107] to take Kaisos, if possible, to the emperor; to go to the King of the Axumites (at that time Elesabas [Ella Asbeha] held sway over the nation); and, in addition to these goals, to visit the Ameritae. [. . .] (Nonnosus

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[105] Shahîd 1995, vol. 1: 153–64; Greatrex 1998b: 231–8; Robin 2008a; 175–6; Fisher 2011a: 88–9; Beaucamp 2010: 197–200.

[106] Mal. *Chron.* 18.56/pp. 457–9. For Photius see the discussion after **1.27**.

[107] Actually three reasons, not two.

says) that Kaisos, after Abrames had come to him a second time as an ambassa-
dor, went to Byzantium once he had divided his own phylarchy between his sons
Ambrus [ʿAmr] and Yezid [Yazīd]. He brought with him a large number of his
subjects and received control over Palestine from the emperor.

Nonnosus (born perhaps *c.*500)[108] was a member of a family of diplomats—
Euphrasius, Abraham (Abrames), and Nonnosus—which undertook missions
around the Red Sea not only for Justinian, but also for Anastasius and
Justin I.[109] The episodes described here fit into the same general context as
that described by Procopius (**5.17**) and elsewhere by Malalas,[110] that is, an
effort to place pressure on Persia by extending Roman influence into the
Arabian Peninsula. This effort included maintaining diplomatic links with
Aksūm, and by bringing Maʿadd, traditionally under Ḥimyarite influence
(Ch. 3), into the Roman political-diplomatic orbit.[111]

The agreement made between Arethas and Anastasius referred to at the
beginning of **5.18** should probably be connected with the report for 502/3
made by Theophanes in **5.4**.[112] Complete assurance on this is not possible, due
to the general uncertainty over the identity of Arethas here and in the accounts
of Theophanes (**5.4**) and John Malalas (**5.14**), although both Theophanes and
Malalas had access, like Photius, to Nonnosus' text.[113] It is worth mentioning
that there are other uncertainties, such as the exact identity of Kaisos, who is
sometimes associated with a figure of the same name known in later collections
of pre-Islamic poetry, or indeed with the famous pre-Islamic poet Imruʾ al-Qays
(Ch. 8; no relation to the Imruʾ al-Qays of the Namāra inscription, **7.3**).[114]
Another problem is presented by the connection, if any, between the embassy of
Nonnosus and that of Julianus discussed by Procopius, and the different statuses
of Kaisos/Qays: an exile for Procopius, yet the leader, for Nonnosus, of both
Kinda and Maʿadd. These might perhaps be understood by seeing the mission
of Nonnosus as a successor to that carried out by Julianus.[115]

The text of Nonnosus does offer support to indications in the epigraphic
evidence from Arabia (**3.10**) and the Arab-Islamic tradition (e.g. **8.6**) of the
complex historical relationship between Ḥimyar, Kinda, and Maʿadd (as well
as others, such as Muḍar), into which the Romans were attempting to extend

[108] See Treadgold 2010: 257.

[109] For the family, see Bowersock 2013: 135–43. See too the summary and discussion of
Nonnosus' activities in Bowersock 2012: 22–5, and Millar 2010b: 207–9.

[110] Mal. *Chron*. 18.56/pp. 457–8. See Beaucamp 2010: 200–3.

[111] Cf. Rubin 1989, for earlier perspectives, although note Power 2012: 72–3.

[112] See Millar 2010b: 208.

[113] Bowersock 2013: 136; Treadgold 2010: 256; Beaucamp 2010: 204; Elton 2014.

[114] Robin 2012a: 42–4, which offers the most recent reconciliation of the Muslim-Arabic
tradition and the texts of Nonnosus and Procopius with regard to Kaisos' identity. See too Fisher
2011a: 157 on the poet Imruʾ al-Qays and the Kaisos discussed here.

[115] Robin 2012a: 37, 41–4; see Beaucamp 2010: 204–6, discussing the disagreements between
the two texts, with full references, and Treadgold 2010: 256 n. 101.

their reach.[116] The tribal groupings of northern and central Arabia assumed greater strategic value as war between Rome and Persia was renewed in the early sixth century, and the difficulty of scoring a decisive victory in Mesopotamia added value to the search for new allies in the deserts to the south; it is possible that the detachment of the Ḥujrid leaders might be connected, too, with tensions between Ḥimyar and Axum (Ch. 3). The final comments about the efforts to remove Kaisos are interesting. Clearly Nonnosus failed in the first attempt, and his father was sent on the second. Bowersock suggests that Kaisos had become too powerful, and might have compromised Roman efforts to maintain pressure against al-Mundhir, the Naṣrid leader, perhaps by trying to play Rome and Persia against each other from his position of strength, looking for better opportunities from the 'other side'.[117] Robin suggests that Kaisos' inefficiency in a period of heightened tensions prompted his removal.[118] Eventually Kaisos benefited from Justinian's diplomatic efforts, receiving control over Palestine, and leaving his own sons as imperial appointees in his previous position. (The type and degree of 'control' is not clear.)[119] If a later date is to be preferred for Nonnosus' embassy (perhaps as late as 540, according to Robin), this offers a rare glimpse into direct imperial management of Arab allies during the period of Jafnid leadership (529/30–82).

As Nonnosus indicates, part of Justinian's approach to the south included using the existing phylarch system. Procopius, too, comments on this tactic:

Justinian and the 'Palm Groves'
[**5.19**] Procopius, *BP* 1.19.8–14 (trans. Dewing, vol. 1, p. 181)
This coast [the coast of Arabia] immediately beyond the boundaries of Palestine is held by Saracens, who have been settled from of old in the Palm Groves. These groves are in the interior, extending over a great tract of land, and there absolutely nothing else grows except palm trees. The Emperor Justinian had received these palm groves as a present from Abochorabus, the ruler of the Saracens there, and he was appointed by the emperor captain over the Saracens in Palestine. And he guarded the land from plunder constantly, for both to the barbarians over whom he ruled and no less to the enemy, Abochorabus always seemed a man to be feared and an exceptionally energetic fellow. Formally, therefore, the emperor holds the Palm Groves, but for him really to possess himself of any of the country there is utterly impossible. For a land completely destitute of human habitation and extremely dry lies between, extending to the distance of a ten days' journey; moreover the Palm Groves themselves are by no means worth anything, and Abochorabus only gave the form of a gift, and the emperor accepted it with full knowledge of the fact. So much then for the Palm Groves.

Procopius here refers to Abū Karib, the brother of al-Ḥārith, although he fails to note the relationship. The region to which he refers, the Phoinikôn, lay to

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[116] Ch. 3, and Robin 2014a.   [117] Bowersock 2013: 140.
[118] Robin 2012b: 291–2.   [119] Millar 2010b: 208.

the south-east of *Palaestina III*, in the Ḥijāz (see Fig. 7.2, and Ch. 7). Justinian was prepared to accept Abū Karib's offer no doubt to extend Roman influence, which could be of help in furthering his projects in South Arabia. Abū Karib may have been the phylarch who helped crush the Samaritan uprising; he is also attested epigraphically (**6.24**) and in the Petra papyri.[120]

Despite some attempts at peace, the war resumed in the spring of 531 when Kavadh's forces attacked Roman fortifications on the Middle Euphrates. A Persian force of 20,000, including 5,000 under the command of al-Mundhir, advanced along the Euphrates from the confluence with the Khabur at Circesium. They marched virtually unopposed to the vicinity of Barbalissos, where the Euphrates begins to bend in a northerly direction. Belisarius was so taken by surprise at the invasion that he was seemingly unaware of it until this point, and hurriedly sent troops west from Dara.[121] This force of only 8,000 men included 5,000 Jafnid troops under al-Ḥārith, while an army of reinforcements under the *magister officiorum* Hermogenes was also sent from Antioch.[122] In the face of the growing Roman military presence, the Persian force began to withdraw and made its way back along the Euphrates towards Callinicum. On 19 April 531 an eager Roman army of approximately 20,000 men, under the overall command of Belisarius, engaged the Persian force near the city. The battle, and the part of the Arabs in it, is reported by both Malalas and Procopius.[123]

The Naṣrid al-Mundhir had guided the Persian invasion force along the south bank of the Euphrates, penetrating into Syria, but Belisarius, apprised of the attack, had swiftly withdrawn most of his forces from Mesopotamia and moved to intercept the Persian force. The Persian and Arab army was in danger of finding itself cut off in the heart of Roman territory and therefore withdrew, having seized a handful of fortresses. Belisarius prudently shadowed the retreating force, seeing no need to engage it before it returned to Persian territory. But as a result of the complaints of his troops and subordinates, who were no doubt dissatisfied with al-Mundhir's frequent ability to raid their territory, he found himself obliged to give battle not far from the city of Callinicum. His forces, and particularly those under the phylarch al-Ḥārith, proved inferior to the Persians; they were no doubt disadvantaged by engaging after a full day's march on an empty stomach (because it was Holy Week, just before Easter).[124] Malalas' version of events is critical of Belisarius and may

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[120] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 124–30; Robin 2008a: 180–1; Robin 2012b: 293; Fisher 2011a; for the papyrus: Ch. 7 n. 76.

[121] Mal. *Chron.* 18.59–60/p. 461; Proc. *BP* 1.18.1–13; Greatrex 1998b: 193–9.

[122] *PLRE* 3a: 590 (Hermogenes 1).

[123] Proc. *BP* 1.18.1–50; Mal. *Chron.* 18.60/pp. 462–3; Ps.-Zach. *Chron.* 9.4; Greatrex 1998b: 200–7.

[124] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 134–43; Greatrex 1998b: 195–207; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 92–3.

reflect the results of an official enquiry into the defeat, which sought to pin the blame on him; Procopius, on the other hand, prefers to attribute the blame to al-Ḥārith, noting that the Arab contingent on the Roman side 'broke their formation and moved apart, so that they got the reputation of having betrayed the Romans to the Persians'.[125] It is possible that al-Ḥārith may have had difficulty in controlling his subordinates, jealous at his promotion to a supreme phylarchate. In the aftermath Sittas (the first holder of the new position of *magister militum per Armeniam* in 528) briefly replaced Belisarius as *magister militum per Orientem*, and Roman forces were strengthened in the face of continued Persian threats.[126]

Malalas reports that in June 531 the Naṣrid leader al-Mundhir requested a peace envoy, a deacon named Sergius, to be sent to him by the emperor.[127] At about the same time al-Mundhir was approached about prisoners he had retained following an attack on Antioch:

> Al-Mundhir and Antioch
> [**5.20**] Malalas, *Chron.* 18.59/pp. 460–1 (trans. Jeffreys et al., p. 270)
> In that year a petition was sent to the patriarch Ephraimios from those remaining in captivity under the Saracen Alamoundaros, to the effect that their imprisonment had been accompanied by harsh punishment; for he beheaded some of them, fearing they might act treacherously. Some had fallen at his feet, begging him to give them a few days' grace to send a petition to the Roman state for money to be sent for their ransom. When Alamoundaros heard this, he agreed gladly, it was said. He gave them a limit of 60 days after Taizanes the Saracen chieftain had interceded on their behalf. When the petition was sent out, it was read in Antioch and everyone tearfully contributed according to his means to what are known as offertory boxes in each church. First among them the patriarch, moved to pity, with his clergy and the civic magistrates contributed of their own volition. And when the petition sent by the captives was read, the whole population asked for a public meeting to be summoned. When the public meeting was summoned and a carpet stretched out, each threw what he could afford on the carpet. When all the money was gathered up and sent, the captives were ransomed.

Malalas here provides precious details on events that took place in his home city, Antioch, and how the patriarch Ephrem[128]—a staunch defender of the Council of Chalcedon, much criticized by the council's opponents—raised funds to ransom prisoners taken in the course of al-Mundhir's raid two years earlier. He clearly had no difficulty in establishing contact with the Naṣrid leader, although we have no details of how he accomplished this; it was not

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[125] Proc. *BP* 1.18.35.   [126] *PLRE* 3b: 1160 (Sittas 1).
[127] Mal. *Chron.* 18.61/pp. 466–7; Scott 1992: 163–4; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 142–3; Greatrex 1998b: 208; Fisher 2011a: 117.
[128] Cf. **6.21**.

unusual, however, for a bishop to take on such a role, as occurred also later during Khusrau's invasion in 540. It seems likely that Ephrem resorted to these measures because the prisoners had remained in captivity now for two years, and, as Malalas notes, were subject to maltreatment. Evidently the imperial authorities had proved reluctant to intervene, and so it fell to the church to undertake the ransoming of members of its flock. The Taizanes referred to is not otherwise known.[129]

Justinian continued to request peace from Kavadh, and sent gifts to al-Mundhir, but Kavadh continued the war. Persian troops crossed the Tigris in the vicinity of Amida but were defeated by Bessas, the *dux* of Martyropolis.[130] In Armenia Kavadh ordered a siege of Martyropolis, which continued on until the end of the year when the Persian forces withdrew, due, in part, to news of the death of Kavadh.[131] The new Persian king, Khusrau I Anushirvan (531–79), was keen to establish peace with the Romans, given the challenges he was facing in asserting his authority in Persia. While there were some obstacles over the control of forts in Lazica and Iberia, a peace treaty was struck in September 532, which was supposed to last for as long as both states existed.[132]

540: THE BREAKING OF THE ETERNAL PEACE AND THE SECOND PERSIAN WAR OF JUSTINIAN

The so-called 'Eternal Peace' of 532 allowed Justinian to commence his bold undertaking of conquering Vandal Africa and Ostrogothic Italy, returning parts of the west to the empire, and it also gave Khusrau time to establish his position. While Justinian was focused mostly on the west during this period, he ordered an important reorganization of Armenia into four provinces and also took steps to strengthen the Roman position in Lazica.[133] The peace only held for seven years, however, and while it was generally quiet during that period there were some events in Syria and Mesopotamia which suggested that the peace would not have held for long in any case. In 536 two Arab chieftains, accompanied by 15,000 of their kinsmen, emerged from central Arabia in search of pasture due to a prolonged drought.[134] They arrived in Persian territory first, but al-Mundhir drove them into Euphratesia where the

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[129] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 80–2; Greatrex 1998b: 198.
[130] Mal. *Chron*. 18.61/p. 467. Cf. *PLRE* 3a: 230.
[131] Ps.-Zach. *Chron*. 9.5–6; Proc. *BP* 1.21.6–8.
[132] Mal. *Chron*. 18.71/p. 477; Proc. *BP* 1.22.15–19; Ps.-Zach. *Chron*. 9.7a–b.
[133] Adontz 1970: 133–6; Braund 1994: 290–5.
[134] Marc. Comes, addit. s.a. 536.11.

Roman *dux* of the province dealt with them peacefully. Three years later a dispute between al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir was the direct cause of the premature end of the Eternal Peace, and of the outbreak of war between Rome and Persia. Procopius signifies the importance of this dispute by locating a detailed description of it at the beginning of his account of Justinian's Second Persian War.[135]

War breaks out in 540
[**5.21**] Procopius, *BP* 2.1.1–11 (trans. Dewing, vol. 1, pp. 261–3)
Not long after this Chosroes, upon learning that Belisarios had begun to win Italy also for the Emperor Justinian, was no longer able to restrain his thoughts but he wished to discover pretexts, in order that he might break the treaty on some grounds which would seem plausible. And he conferred with Alamoundaras concerning this matter and commanded him to provide causes for war. So Alamoundaras brought against Arethas, the charge that he, Arethas, was doing him violence in a matter of boundary lines, and he entered into conflict with him in time of peace, and began to overrun the land of the Romans on this pretext. And he declared that, as for him, he was not breaking the treaty between the Persians and Romans, for neither one of them had included him in it. And this was true. For no mention of Saracens was ever made in treaties, on the ground that they were included under the names of Persians and Romans. Now this country which at that time was claimed by both tribes of Saracens [i.e. Roman- and Persian-allied] is called Strata, and extends to the south of the city of Palmyra; nowhere does it produce a single tree or any of the useful growth of corn-lands, for it is burned exceedingly dry by the sun, but from of old it has been devoted to the pasturage of some few flocks. Now Arethas maintained that the place belonged to the Romans, proving his assertion by the name which has long been applied to it by all (for Strata signifies 'a paved road' in the Latin tongue), and he also adduced the testimonies of men of the oldest times. Alamoundaras, however, was by no means inclined to quarrel concerning the name, but he claimed that tribute had been given him from of old for the pasturage there by the owners of the flocks. The Emperor Justinian therefore entrusted the settlement of the disputed points to Strategius, a patrician and administrator of the royal treasures, and besides a man of wisdom and of good ancestry, and with him Summus,[136] who had commanded the troops in Palestine. This Summus was the brother of Julian[137] who not long before had served as envoy to the Aethiopians and Homeritae [**5.17**]. And then one of them, Summus, insisted that the Romans ought not to surrender the country, but Strategius begged of the emperor that he should not do the Persians the favour of providing them with pretexts for the war which they already desired, for the sake of a small bit of land and one of absolutely no account, but altogether unproductive and unsuitable for crops. The Emperor Justinian, therefore, took the matter under consideration, and a long time was spent in the settlement of the question.

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[135] Proc. *BP* 2.1.1–15; see Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 209–20.
[136] Previously the *dux Palaestinae*. See *PLRE* 3b: 1206 (Summus).   [137] N. 104.

It is likely that al-Mundhir was induced by the Sasanian king Khusrau to fabricate a justification for the war that broke out in 540. Having agreed to the Eternal Peace in 532, Khusrau required at least some sort of pretext for launching a sudden invasion of Roman territory. He was aware of Justinian's successes in the West: since the conclusion of the Eternal Peace, Justinian had overrun North Africa, and, in 540, the Ostrogoths in Italy had surrendered to Belisarius. The region referred to, around the *Strata Diocletiana*, a road across the Syrian steppes from Damascus to Sura via Palmyra, had once been garrisoned by Roman forces; from Procopius' description, it is clear that this was no longer the case, with the result that there was some ambiguity over who controlled the territory.[138] The dispute arose in 539, and evidently Justinian sought to defuse the situation by drawing things out, perhaps in the hope of having time to transfer troops to the region from the West. Khusrau anticipated this move, and invaded in May 540. A similar account, apparently from the Persian side, is preserved in the tenth-century *Shāhnāmeh* (**8.45**) and also in al-Ṭabarī, likely based on a Persian source (**8.23**).[139]

Despite Roman attempts to discourage it, Khusrau began his invasion in May 540 from the Khabur/Euphrates confluence up the Euphrates towards Antioch. Circesium and Halebiye/Zenobia were not captured as Khusrau sought to move upriver quickly.[140] Initially repulsed at Sura, Khusrau persisted at this fortress and captured it.[141] The Romans, under the general Bouzes (temporarily sharing the position of *magister militum per Orientem* with Belisarius) sought to withstand the invasion from Hierapolis and, after this strategy failed, the city bought off Khusrau with 2,000 pounds of silver.[142] Khusrau then successfully attacked Beroea, opening the way to an attack on Antioch, which was connected to Beroea by an impressively constructed road.[143] With Antioch vulnerable, 6,000 troops arrived from *Phoenice Libanensis*, but this did not deter Khusrau. Requesting payment of ten *centenaria* as the price of sparing the city, Khusrau was rebuffed. His forces quickly overran Antioch and many of its citizens fled.[144] The city was looted and several of its major buildings razed, although reports of the damage are probably exaggerated.[145] Khusrau took captives, some of whom were later ransomed by the city of Edessa, and the rest of whom were settled in their own city (Veh-Antioch-Khusrau) near Ctesiphon.[146] Negotiations for peace began soon after and revolved mostly around Persian demands for tribute. While Justinian considered the terms, Khusrau took his army south-east to the cities

[138] Cf. Proc. *Anec.* 24.12–4; Casey 1996.
[139] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 210–18; Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 66–7; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 102–3; Dignas and Winter 2007: 171.
[140] Proc. *BP* 2.5.1–7.   [141] Proc. *BP* 2.5.8–27.   [142] *PLRE* 3a: 254ff. (Buzes).
[143] Proc. *BP* 2.7.1–13.   [144] Proc. *BP* 2.8.1–35.
[145] Proc. *BP* 3.9.14–18; Joh. Lyd. *De Mag.* 3.54; Downey 1961: 542–4.
[146] Proc. *BP* 2.14.1–4.

of Apamea and Chalcis, which both bought him off with payments of gold. He then headed north and made for Edessa, which also paid tribute in exchange for his withdrawal. Justinian now agreed to terms, but this did not stop Khusrau extracting more payments from the cities of Mesopotamia and also attacking Dara, before withdrawing to Persia.[147]

In 541, with Belisarius now sole *magister militum per Orientem* again, a Roman offensive campaign took place which was directed at Persian territory in Assyria. This campaign was able to get as far as Assyria because Khusrau had invaded Roman-controlled Lazica in the Caucasus and had deployed some of the troops from Mesopotamia.[148] Despite initial difficulties, Belisarius bypassed Nisibis, and the smaller fort of Sisauranon, to the east, was attacked.[149] From here, Belisarius sent the Jafnid leader al-Ḥārith, along with a detachment of 1,200 Roman troops, into Assyria.[150] The Roman detachment was comprised of crack troops from Belisarius' own guard and it was under the command of two of Belisarius' most trusted guardsmen, Trajan and John the Glutton.[151] This force undertook raids in Assyria, which Procopius described as wealthy and ripe for plunder.[152] Belisarius ordered al-Ḥārith to ravage the land around and then return to the Roman camp, but, Procopius explains, al-Ḥārith ignored his orders in order to hold on to his plunder.[153]

Belisarius was undoubtedly under pressure for various reasons at this time, partly from his subordinates, who feared Arab incursions into Roman territories while they were absent on Persian soil, and partly also, Procopius alleges, because his wife arrived at the front in the midst of the campaign and he wished to confront her about her infidelities.[154] In this context, Procopius argues that Belisarius might have penetrated as far as Ctesiphon if he had not allowed himself to be distracted.[155] In the text Belisarius is dismissive towards Arab capabilities at siege warfare—Procopius has him say that 'the Saracens are by nature unable to storm a wall, but the cleverest of all men at plundering'—no doubt reflecting general Roman prejudices regarding barbarians:[156] Ammianus attributes to the Gothic leader Fritigern the policy of 'keeping peace with walls' for the Goths, who proved unable to seize any Roman cities even after their victory at Adrianople in 378.[157] The fact remains, however, that it was not until the Arab invasions in the seventh

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[147] Proc. *BP* 2.12.1–13.29.   [148] Proc. *BP* 2.15.31–5.
[149] Proc. *BP* 2.19.2.   [150] Proc. *BP* 2.19.15–6.
[151] *PLRE* 3b: 1333 (Traianus 2); *PLRE* 3a: 665 (Ioannes 64).
[152] Proc. *BP* 2.19.17–9.
[153] Proc. *BP* 2.19.12–30. Agapius, the Chalcedonian bishop of Manbij (Hierapolis), who wrote a chronicle in Arabic in the 940s, records for the 16th year of Justinian, i.e. for 543, a raid by al-Ḥārith which offers a similar account of plundering and captive-taking. It is possible that these events might be reflected by Agapius, *Kitāb al-ʿUnwān* (*PO* 8, 431).
[154] Proc. *Anec.* 2.18–25.
[155] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 226–30; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 108–9.
[156] Proc. *BP* 2.19.12.   [157] Amm. 31.6.4; cf. Proc. *Aed.* 2.9.4.

century that any Arab force succeeded in capturing a Roman city. The Persians, on the other hand, were adept at siege warfare.[158]

On receiving news of the Roman military offensive, Khusrau broke off the Lazic invasion and headed south. Justinian took the opportunity to invade Persarmenia with 30,000 men but met with defeat.[159] In summer 542 Khusrau invaded *Euphratesia* with the ultimate aim of marching as far as Palestine in order to plunder Jerusalem.[160] Part of this invasion included a siege of Sergiopolis. This was unsuccessful, although Khusrau invested 6,000 soldiers, including an unknown number under al-Mundhir, against the town's tiny garrison of only 200.[161]

The arrival of Belisarius again was enough to discourage Khusrau from advancing any further; however, on his retreat he captured a poorly defended Callinicum and attacked other sites in Mesopotamia.[162] While Procopius makes no mention of Jafnid involvement in the conflict of 542, it is difficult to imagine that they did not participate.[163] Khusrau returned in spring 543, principally to besiege Edessa. This was a protracted and determined siege that continued into 544. The besieging army included both Hephthalite and Naṣrid allies, the latter being stationed at the rear so as to deal with any escapees from the city.[164] A huge mound was constructed around the entire city in an attempt to starve its inhabitants into submission.[165] The Roman defenders mined the siege mound, firing the mines, thus destroying it.[166] Khusrau eventually withdrew after the city bought him off.[167] In 545 a truce was established between Khusrau and Justinian which was to last five years. Justinian agreed to pay 20 *centenaria* in gold and to send the physician Tribunus, who had previously cured Khusrau of a serious disease, to the Persian king.[168]

545–62: NEW TREATIES AND CONTINUED WAR

While a truce had been established between Justinian and Khusrau, the Jafnids and Naṣrids remained at war. This was the case for most of the following 15 years, and like the situation in the last years of Justin's reign and the early years of Justinian's, it was essentially a proxy war between Rome and Persia.[169] According to Procopius, one of al-Ḥārith's sons was captured by al-Mundhir and brutally killed not long after the truce of 545:

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[158] Kaegi 1992: 66–7.   [159] Proc. *BP* 2.24.1–25.   [160] Proc. *BP* 2.20.17–19.
[161] Proc. *BP* 2.20.1–16; Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 133–4.   [162] Proc. *BP* 2.20.24–32.
[163] See Shahîd 1995–201, vol. 1: 230–1.   [164] Proc. *BP* 2.27.30.
[165] Proc. *BP* 2.26.23–4.   [166] Proc. *BP* 2.27.1–17.   [167] Proc. *BP* 2.27.18–46.
[168] Proc. *BP* 2.28.7–11. *PLRE* 3b: 1342 (Tribunus 2).
[169] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 236–66.

Al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir at war
[**5.22**] Procopius, *BP* 2.28.12–4 (trans. Dewing, vol. 1, pp. 517–19)
And a little later Arethas and Alamoundaras, the rulers of the Saracens, waged a war against each other by themselves, unaided either by the Romans or the Persians. And Alamoundaras captured one of the sons of Arethas in a sudden raid while he was pasturing horses, and straightway sacrificed him to Aphrodite; and from this it was known that Arethas was not betraying the Romans to the Persians. Later they both came together in battle with their whole armies, and the forces of Arethas were overwhelmingly victorious, and turning their enemy to flight, they killed many of them. And Arethas came within a little of capturing alive two of the sons of Alamoundaras; however, he did not actually succeed.

The Romans and Persians agreed to a truce on the Mesopotamian frontier in 545; they limited their direct hostilities to the Caucasus region thenceforth, although it took another 17 years before a definitive treaty could be concluded. Meanwhile, however, their Arab allies fought a proxy war in the Syrian steppe region, in which al-Ḥārith ended up gaining the upper hand, as noted in this extract. It is worth noting that Procopius is here prepared to revise his negative judgement on al-Ḥārith, stemming from his performance at Callinicum; he clearly felt that the phylarch had proved his worth.[170] However, a sticking point in negotiations between Justinian and Khusrau to extend the truce in 551 was al-Ḥārith's treatment of al-Mundhir during peace time.[171] There is also evidence for a resumption of hostilities in Lazica[172] despite the truce of 545, and when the truce was finally extended in 551, Lazica remained a theatre of conflict between the two powers. Procopius was critical of the extension of the truce in 551, because Justinian agreed to the payment of 20 *centenaria* of gold that was perceived as giving the Persians the upper hand.[173]

In the meantime, al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir continued hostilities, and in 554, moreover, al-Ḥārith actually killed al-Mundhir himself at a battle fought near Chalcis. This major event is only known to us via the later medieval Syriac chronicles, and a handful of contemporary notices. The most detailed version is given in the hagiography of Symeon the Stylite the Younger (**6.12**).

The death of al-Mundhir
[**5.23**] Michael the Syrian, *Chron.* 9.33/p. 269 (trans. after Chabot)
In the twenty-seventh year of Justinian, al-Mundhir (son) of Saqiqa went up to the country of the Romans and ravaged much of the region. Al-Ḥārith, son of Gabala, met with him, offered battle, beat him, and killed him, at the source [ʿAin] of ʿOudaye, in the region of Qennesrin. The son of al-Ḥārith, named Gabala, died, having been killed in combat.[174] His father buried him in a martyrion in the village.

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[170] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 237–9; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 123, 129.
[171] Proc. *BP* 8.11.10.   [172] See Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 116–19.
[173] Proc. *BP* 8.15.6–7; Braund 1994: 296–310.
[174] It is possible that this notice actually refers to the events in **5.22**. See Greatrex forthcoming.

A chronicle written in 640 (embedded in *The Chronicle to 724*) notes laconically under AG 865 (= AD 554) that 'Al-Mundhir died in June'.[175] This slightly more detailed version is from the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian (Patriarch of Antioch, 1166–99). Two other short versions, not quoted, but very similar to that of Michael, are given in the *Chronicle to 1234* (hereafter *1234*) and the *Chronicle* of Bar Hebraeus.[176] These three important moralizing and critical Syriac texts were all completed in the 12th and 13th centuries, and are important sources for the relationship between the Arabs and the Romans for the latter part of the sixth century (see here and in Ch. 6).[177] *1234* was likely written by an (anonymous) Edessene (?) urbane cleric who may have lived between *c.*1160 and 1240. The text, which was subject to two continuations which brought it down to the year 1234, is divided into the secular and the ecclesiastical, following the earlier precedent of Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē (d. 845).[178] This organizational division, which reflects the belief that both God and man affect the course of events,[179] is also found in the text of Bar Hebraeus (Bar ʿEbrōyō/Gregory Abu al-Faraj), who became Primate (Maphrian) of the East in 1264, and died in 1286.[180]

Michael's *Chronicle* is a universal history whose main edition is based on a Syriac text from 1598, found at Edessa (Urfa) in 1889.[181] It is divided into sections which address political history, ecclesiastical history, and interesting miscellany, and is a valuable witness to texts by other authors, some of which have since been lost—for example, Jacob of Edessa, the earlier books of John of Ephesus, and the work of Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē. Michael names many of the authors which he uses, but the selection of texts, and authors, depended on their utility in his project, which was to prove for his contemporaries the strength of the Miaphysite community (see Ch. 6) in the past.[182] The exact source used here by Michael, and by the unquoted, rather similar notices in *1234* and Bar Hebraeus' *Chronicle*, is not clear. While Dionysius was Michael's main source for the period between 582 and 842, for the earlier period, Michael's main sixth-century sources were Zachariah of Mytilene and John of Ephesus.[183] It thus seems likely that a lost part of one of these authors, perhaps John's second book, which probably recorded events from

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[175] Trans. Palmer, p. 14; see Palmer, pp. 23–4, and Howard-Johnston 2010: 59–66 for a discussion of the text and its dating.

[176] *1234* p. 192; Bar Hebraeus, *Chron.* 81.   [177] Weltecke 2010: 95, 102.

[178] Weltecke 2010: 101–2.   [179] Weltecke 2010: 106.

[180] The secular part of Bar Hebraeus' work is the *Chronicle*; its companion is usually known as the *Ecclesiastical History*.

[181] Brock 1976: 21–2. See Chabot's introduction to Michael and his life in his translation (vol. 1: ii–liii).

[182] Van Ginkel 1998: 353. Weltecke 2010: 97–8 further discusses the scope of Michael's project.

[183] Van Ginkel 1998: 353; Van Ginkel 1995: 79–81; Brock 1979–80: 16 offers a useful table of Michael's sources.

450 to 571,[184] was the basis for Michael's account. The very slight differences between the three versions might be accounted for perhaps by the intentions of the authors.[185]

One such small difference between the three is curious. While Bar Hebraeus names al-Ḥārith's lost son simply as 'son of Ḥarith', both Michael and *1234* name him as 'Gabala'. Very little is known about the Jafnid family beyond the main actors; for 'minor' figures, on occasion the sources simply furnish a name, as here, but with no other information. Unnamed sons of al-Mundhir are known from an inscription at al-Burj in Syria (**6.32**) and a likely son of al-Ḥārith, 'Eretha', is known from the Church of St Sergius at Nitl (**6.30**). The 'Gabala' here is not otherwise known.

The ongoing stalemate in Lazica and the setback to the Naṣrids with the death of al-Mundhir was encouragement enough for a truce between Khusrau and Justinian in 557, with a view to striking a formal treaty. The negotiations over the terms of the treaty were protracted, and it was not finally agreed upon until 561/2. In the lead up to the treaty, Khusrau agreed to cede Lazica to the Romans, and Justinian agreed to a large annual payment of gold to the Persians.[186] The treaty left open the question of who controlled the small principality of Suania, once under the control of Lazica, and this would partly sow the seeds of the unravelling of the treaty only a decade later. The terms of the treaty demonstrate the extent to which both sides were committed at the time to preserving the peace for 50 years.[187] The first of 13 clauses was a formal agreement on the defence of the Caucasus Passes, and the second (**5.24**) bound the Arab allies of both sides to the peace in both military and commercial terms.

The treaty terms are preserved in a fragment of Menander 'the Guardsman' (or 'the Protector'). Menander was born sometime around the middle of the sixth century, and like Procopius, he also studied law, but followed a rather different career path. His chequered young life included attending chariot races in the Hippodrome in Constantinople, and admiring the scantily clad pantomime actresses in the capital.[188] Meanwhile his brother joined government service, and later, Menander (either through imperial commission or some other means) began work, for the Emperor Maurice, on a continuation of the history of Agathias (b. 532, and who had himself worked to continue the

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[184] Van Ginkel 1995: 54.

[185] Chabot's introduction (vol. 1: xxxi); Michael's sixth-century sources are discussed by Van Ginkel 1998 and by Chabot. See also the discussion of Michael in Howard-Johnston 2010: 192–8 and Brock 1976: 21–2 on Michael and the *Chronicle of 1234*, as well as Brock 1979–80: 17–18. For all three texts, see Weltecke 2010.

[186] Menander, fr. 6.1.134–54.   [187] See Dignas and Winter 2007: 138–48.

[188] See the amusing sketch offered by Treadgold 2010: 294. A fuller biography and analysis are provided by Blockley 1985: 1–37.

history of Procopius), down to the year 582.[189] The patronage of the emperor gave him access to archives and documents, and when he completed his work, he obtained the title *protector*. Like that of Nonnosus, his work survives only in fragments in the tenth-century *Excerpta* (Ch. 1).[190]

> The treaty of 561/2: the text of the treaty concerning the Arabs
> [**5.24**] Menander, fr. 6.1 (trans. Blockley, pp. 71–3)
>   [*Menander states*] I shall now detail the provisions set out in the treaty:
> 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.
>   [. . .]
>   It is agreed that Saracen and all other barbarian merchants of either state shall not travel by strange roads but shall go by Nisibis and Daras, and shall not cross into foreign territory without official permission. But if they dare anything contrary to the agreement (that is to say, if they engage in tax-dodging, so-called), they shall be hunted down by the officers of the frontier and handed over for punishment together with the merchandise which they are carrying, whether Assyrian or Roman.

For the first time, Arab allies of the two states are specifically included, apparently in an attempt to correct the omission reported by Procopius in **5.21**. The treaty stands as a clear reflection of the greater role being played by the Arabs in the conflict between the two states.[191] Yet despite this clear provision, ʿAmr (Ambros), the son of the Naṣrid al-Mundhir, would nevertheless violate territory under Jafnid control, according to a complaint by al-Ḥārith to Justinian in November 563 (**5.27**).[192]

Menander's history is also noteworthy for its detailed discussion of other matters, such as subsidies, relevant to the place of the Arabs in the Roman–Persian conflict.

> The question of subsidies in negotiations in 561
> [**5.25**] Menander, fr. 6.1 (trans. Blockley, pp. 69–71)
> Then the Zikh[193] raised the subject of Alamundar's son, Ambrus, the chief of the Saracens, saying that he, like the previous chief of the Saracens, ought to receive the hundred pounds of gold. Peter[194] replied, 'Our master honoured Ambrus' predecessor [al-Mundhir] with a free gift of gold, given in whatever amount and at whatever time the Emperor saw fit. Thus, a messenger was dispatched by the

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[189] Blockley 1985: 4.
[190] See Treadgold 2010: 80–1 and 293–9 for a concise biography and discussion.
[191] Fisher 2011a: 119–21, for a full analysis.
[192] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6056/p. 240.
[193] The Persian envoy. *PLRE* 3a: 722 (Isdigousnas Zich).
[194] Peter the Patrician, whose work on embassies to Persia is partially preserved in the *Excerpta* and also used by Menander. Peter was *magister officiorum* in 561. See *PLRE* 3b: 994 (Petrus 6); Treadgold 2010: 264–9.

public post to deliver to the Saracen whatever the Roman Emperor sent to him. In the same way, the Saracen for his part sent an envoy bearing gifts to our Emperor, and again our ruler bestowed gifts in his turn. Therefore, if Ambrus is willing to do the same, he shall receive gifts, should the Emperor wish it. If Ambrus is unwilling, he is very foolishly raising a problem to no purpose. For he will receive nothing at all.'

It was fairly normal Roman practice to offer subsidies to allied peoples, both on the eastern frontier and in the Balkans; this had been standard practice even in the early days of the empire. Many ancient historians, such as Procopius, criticized such a policy, seeing it as an admission of weakness. Here Menander deals with financial payments between the Roman state and the Naṣrid leaders. The matter formed part of the diplomatic wrangling between Rome and Persia, and turned on the question of whether such payments were gifts—given through generosity on an ad hoc or one-off basis—or were part of a policy which should be transferred from one Naṣrid leader to the next. In these particular instances, the problem was whether ʿAmr (Ambrus/os) should continue to receive payments which his powerful father had occasionally won from Justinian. The protestations of Roman envoys that gifts were freely and generously given, and did not represent any sort of institutionalized or formal arrangement, were not altogether convincing.[195]

Astonishingly, ʿAmr felt secure enough in his position to criticize the Zikh for his failure to obtain financial backing for him:

[5.26] Menander, fr. 6.1 (trans. Blockley, pp. 83–5)
The [Persian] king [Khusrau I] 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 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, O 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

[195] Blockley 1992: 149–51, Kaegi 1992: 90 (citing Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6122/pp. 335–6); Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 135–6.

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 argu-
ments advanced concerning Ambrus.

The problem of subsidies was not solved here; later, John, the envoy of the
Roman emperor Justin II (565–78), found himself once again negotiating
payments for the Naṣrids.[196]

Menander's text offers further clarification of the more powerful position of
the Arab allies of both states in the second half of the sixth century. While John
denigrates the Arabs in familiar terms, describing them as uncouth and
unreliable, it is quite evident that they can no longer be ignored, or as easily
subjected to the sort of summary treatment described by Ps.-Joshua (**5.9**)—put
to the sword and hanged for their transgressions. Interestingly the exchanges
which Menander records between Roman and Persian diplomats use words
which emphasize an unequal relationship between the empires and the Arabs;
we find in the text words such as 'slave', for example, and phrases using
prepositions which clearly indicate that the Arabs are seen to be entirely
under the control of Rome and Persia. Yet the treaty text uses the word
symmachoi, a term which denotes allies on a more equal footing than the
hypospondoi of previous years. Although the term *symmachoi* seems to have
been employed prior to this treaty, it is clear that the treaty offers glimpses of a
changing relationship.[197]

562–80: JUSTINIAN TO TIBERIUS II

By 563 al-Ḥārith, who was getting old, visited Justinian to address a number of
issues, including who would succeed him:

> Al-Ḥārith in Constantinople
> [**5.27**] Malalas, *Chron.* 18.148/p. 496 (trans. Jeffreys et al., p. 305)
> In November, Arethas the patrician and phylarch of the Saracens, came to
> Byzantion, since he was obliged to report to the emperor which of his sons,
> after his death, would obtain his phylarchy, and to discuss the activities of
> Ambros, son of Alamoundaros, in his territory.[198]

Al-Ḥārith the Jafnid had been Rome's primary ally on the Mesopotamian
frontier for over 30 years by the time of this visit to Constantinople. As a client

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[196] *PLRE* 3a: 672 (Ioannes 81); Menander, fr. 9.1.

[197] Fisher 2011a: 119–21; Fisher and Wood forthcoming. For *symmachoi*, see Greatrex 1998b:
26 and Greatrex 2014a.

[198] Note that Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6056/p. 240 offers an almost identical report.

king, even one endowed with the patrician dignity, he was obliged to report to the emperor and to remit to him the final decision, for Justinian's approval, as to who would inherit his position as chief phylarch. It is striking, however, that Malalas implies that al-Ḥārith had already made his own decision about the transmission of his office and intended merely to communicate it to Justinian. A recently discovered inscription from Jordan (**6.31**) suggests that al-Mundhir, al-Ḥārith's son, may have been 'in preparation', already with imperial consent, for his new role. The reference to an attack by Ambros (ʿAmr) is probably to be connected with his unsuccessful attempts to secure a subsidy from the Romans during the negotiations that brought about the peace treaty of 562 (above); in order to exact vengeance, he attacked al-Ḥārith's territories, but not those of the Romans, since otherwise he would have violated the treaty.[199]

Al-Ḥārith outlived his patron Justinian, and in his final years he witnessed the breakdown of Rome's peace with Persia. For just as the 'Eternal Peace' of 532 lasted less than a decade, the treaty of 561/2, which was meant to last 50 years, barely held for ten. An important catalyst for conflict was the more aggressive policy of the new Roman emperor, Justin II, who assumed the throne in 565. In 567 he sent an embassy to the court of Khusrau to announce his accession. Part of its mission was to deal with the open question of Suania, and also to announce a cessation of subsidies to the Arab allies of the Sasanians which Justinian had routinely paid for much of his time in power.[200] Shortly thereafter, an embassy sent by ʿAmr, numbering 40 members, accompanied an embassy of Khusrau to the court of Justin to protest the cancellation of the subsidies, but it achieved nothing.[201] Menander reports that '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 [Qābus] . . . to ravage Alamundar's territory'.[202] This attack on the Jafnid al-Mundhir, who had only just taken over from his father, al-Ḥārith, who had died in 569, was rather opportunistic.[203]

The confrontation between al-Mundhir and Qābus is related in detail by John of Ephesus (*c*.507–88), a crucial source for the later history of the relationship between the Jafnids and Rome. John's numerous works included a series of hagiographies of saints (Ch. 6) and an *Ecclesiastical History* in three parts. The first two parts of the latter, largely lost, addressed the period between the death of Julius Caesar (44 BC) and the early part of the reign of Justin II. The six books of the third part (copied in a seventh-century manuscript, now in the British Library) were added only shortly before his death.

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[199] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 282–9; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 135; Greatrex 2014a.
[200] Menander, fr. 9.1.   [201] Menander fr. 9.3.   [202] Menander fr. 9.3.
[203] Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.6.3/p. 281; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 340–7.

This final section was likely written in Constantinople, and parts of it may have been completed during John's imprisonment by Justin II during the persecution of Miaphysites under his reign.[204] Not all of the third book has survived, but analysis of the use of John by Michael the Syrian and *1234* can offer insights into the subjects of the lost chapters.[205]

As a participant in (and eyewitness to) many of the events he describes, John is a valuable source for the history of the sixth century. His account of the devastation wrought by the Justinianic plague, from book two of the history and preserved in the eighth-century *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, is of considerable interest.[206] But John's value also lies in the fact that he was not a Chalcedonian (like Evagrius, for example) but a Miaphysite—an opponent of Chalcedon— allowing us to see the affairs of the Roman state 'through the eyes of the religious opposition'.[207] His work is often polemical, as he seeks to preserve what he understands and defends as the 'orthodox' faith against persecution from the imperial authorities.

Towards the end of his life John became extremely prominent amongst the Miaphysites in Constantinople. As discussed in Ch. 6, the Jafnid leaders al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir both emerged as high-profile supporters of the Miaphysites in Syria and Arabia, and this ensured that they feature conspicuously in John's history. It is important to note that it is by no means clear that all of the material relating to al-Mundhir which appears in book 3 was actually part of John's original composition;[208] indeed, much work remains to be carried out on this important author.

Qābus fights al-Mundhir
[**5.28**] John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.6.3/pp. 280–2 (trans. Wood)
The Arabs of the Persians were in great awe and fear of Ḥārith, king of the Arabs 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 would now be delivered into their hands. They gathered and went and made camp in the land of the house of Ḥārith, 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 . . . Qābus their king mounted and fled with a small body of men, and they escaped without their possessions. Mundhir entered [Qābus'] 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 Qābus, which is more than three days' travel away, which is where all of the flocks and wealth of the Persian Arabs

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[204] Van Ginkel 1995: 70–85 offers a full discussion; see, concisely, Millar 2013b: 81.
[205] Millar 2013b: 82.   [206] See Witakowski 1987.
[207] Van Ginkel 1995: 2.   [208] Van Ginkel 1995: 82–3.

were. He encamped there for a long time, so that when Qābus' raiders came they saw that his tent had been pitched in the land of Qābus and thought that their king Qābus was in it. Trustingly, they entered and dug in in the camp of Mundhir, but he caught them and killed them and imprisoned the notables who were with them. After they [the Roman Arabs] 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, Qābus 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.[209] He [al-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.

The conflict, fought without Roman or Persian help, but also without their interference, is a further testament to the clout of both groups in the second half of the sixth century. As John indicates, al-Mundhir took the opportunity to invade deep into Naṣrid territory and brought back considerable booty. The portrait of al-Mundhir here is typical of the way that he is presented in John's text: utterly fearless, formidable in battle, and contemptuous of his enemies. Qābus would suffer a further defeat in 570, while attempting to regain some prestige after the defeat of the previous year.[210]

The fighting was not as one-sided, though, as John suggests. Al-Mundhir suffered losses as well, and this led him to request gold from Justin, who was enraged. In somewhat mysterious circumstances, he then ordered the assassination of al-Mundhir. Perhaps Justin thought that al-Mundhir had overstepped the mark in his conflict with the Naṣrids, and had placed the treaty of 561/2 in jeopardy; alternatively, it is possible that the order came as a result of Chalcedonian/Miaphysite tensions in Constantinople.[211] Justin's orders, contained in a letter to the *magister militum per Orientem*, were mistakenly sent to al-Mundhir, and this prompted the immediate withdrawal of the Jafnids from the alliance with Rome. Variants of the story appear in both the *Ecclesiastical History* of John of Ephesus (**5.29**) and the *Chronicle* of Bar Hebraeus (not quoted).[212]

Al-Mundhir, Qābus, and Justin II
[**5.29**] John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.6.3–4/pp. 282–4 (trans. after Brooks)
[*Following the victory over Qābus, al-Mundhir approached Justin II for help*]. And because the recollections of these things are earlier preserved in other narratives,[213]

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[209] Literally, 'did the deed with a word.'   [210] *Chron. 724*, AG 881 = AD 570.
[211] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 348–50.   [212] Bar Hebraeus, *Chronicle* 86–7.
[213] Perhaps in the lost second part of John's text.

because at the present time, we should present notice of the unjust things done to him, without regard to probity—the trick, after these great glories and a great victory of such a size in two battles, which was contrived against him. Since Mundhir thought that the things he had done would be received and praised by the emperor, he wrote to him [about them], about his utter and complete victory, and after these things, [because] he imagined that they [the Persian Ṭayyāyē] would certainly again come together against him, he wrote to him that he might send gold, with which he might assemble together an army. But when Justin, the emperor, heard that he had written to him for gold, he was greatly irritated, and boiled with rage, and he attacked him with abuse, and threatened him severely. And he strove to kill him through a secret treachery.

The king Justin, then, filled as it were by a certain spirit of perversion, wrote a letter to the patrician Marcian[214] so that, as he thought, he might have Mundhir killed, and he wrote this, in the letter: 'I have written to Mundhir the Arab to come and see you. Make sure that he comes, and without delay, cut off his head, and write to me. I have however written to Mundhir this: "I have written to the patrician Marcian on some certain matters of importance, that he might talk with you— immediately, without delay, go to him, and talk with him about these things."' But, in truth, as everyone eventually found out, by the grace of God, these [the letters] were changed, and on the order which was to be sent to Marcian ordering him to cut off Mundhir's head, the name of Mundhir himself was written, and in the one for Mundhir, the name of Marcian was written, as if by error. As a result, the messenger, having received both [sets of] orders, delivered them to the people to whom they were addressed, respectively. And so it happened that Mundhir received the order addressed to Marcian ('cut off his head'), and Marcian the order which was written to Mundhir ('go to Marcian; I wrote to him that he should speak with you').

Al-Mundhir's request for funds was not unreasonable given that the Roman government often had recourse to payments to friend and foe alike: this was a standard element of late antique foreign policy, as illustrated elsewhere in this chapter. Thus, with respect to this particular episode, it is possible that al-Mundhir's request, on its own, was not the cause of Justin's ire. Indeed, some scholars, while accepting the historicity of this episode, find the motives of Justin incomprehensible,[215] and others even actually question the authenticity of this account of the assassination attempt.[216] It should also be noted that there is nothing intrinsically unusual about the possibility of an assassination attempt in and of itself, for assassinations and kidnappings were established means of eliminating important figures, and there were no less than 16 such attempts made by the Romans to assassinate or kidnap foreign rulers between *c.*350 and *c.*650.[217] After al-Mundhir discovered the plot against him, John says, he retired to the desert, leaving the frontier undefended against the Persians and their Arab allies.

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[214] *PLRE* 3b: 821 (Marcianus 7).   [215] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 349.
[216] Whitby 1988: 257–8; Lee 2009: 12.   [217] Lee 2009: 10.

Hostilities between Rome and Persia resumed in 572/3. Difficulties with Arab allies played a role, but there were other causes as well. The emergence of the Turks in Central Asia, at the increasing expense of the Hephthalites, introduced a new element into imperial competition. In 568/9, for example, a Turkish embassy had arrived in Constantinople proposing cooperation with the Romans against Khusrau.[218] This was favourably received, and in the summer of 569 Justin sent his own embassy to the Turks headed by Ze-marchus, the *magister militum per Orientem*.[219] Zemarchus subsequently accompanied the Turks on a raid into Media.[220] Furthermore, according to al-Ṭabarī, Khusrau sent a force to Yemen in 570 in response to a request from a Ḥimyarite prince, Sayf b. dhī-Yazan, for assistance countering Aksūmite influence in the kingdom.[221] The success of this expedition added to the growing list of grievances between the two powers.[222] Finally, a secret agree-ment struck in 570 between Justin and the Persarmenians led to the open revolt of the Persarmenians against the Persians the following year.[223] This was primarily an issue grounded in the harsh treatment of Christians in Persarmenia. Apart from these specific problems, the overall concern for Justin, reflected in his actions towards Persia at this time, was the ignominy of ongoing annual payments of gold to Khusrau as part of the peace agreement of 561/2.

In the end, the sources clearly identify Justin as the aggressor in the renewed war between Rome and Persia. In 572 he ordered Marcian, the recently appointed *magister militum per Orientem*, to invade, and this saw raids into Arzanene in northern Mesopotamia.[224] In 573 Nisibis was besieged, an oper-ation scuppered, in the event, by a lack of resources.[225] Khusrau was quick to respond, and led a force up the Khabur to deal with the Roman siege of Nisibis, while sending another force, which included Arab allied troops, up the Euphrates towards Antioch. The latter detachment was under the com-mand of the Persian general Adarmahan, and threatened Antioch before capturing Apamea.[226] Michael the Syrian claimed that Adarmahan plundered a number of other cities in Syria as well.[227] It seems likely that the withdrawal of al-Mundhir (above) from Roman territory was a factor in Adarmahan's success.

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[218] Menander, fr. 10.1.   [219] *PLRE*3b: 1416 (Zemarchus 3).

[220] Menander, fr. 10.3.

[221] al-Ṭabarī, 1.946–9; see Gajda 2009: 157–61; Robin 2012b: 297.

[222] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 364–72.

[223] Evag. *HE* 5.7; see Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 137–42.

[224] N. 214 (Marcian); Theoph. Sim. 3.10.1–3.

[225] Evag. *HE* 5.8–9; Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.6.2/pp. 278–80; Theoph. Sim. 3.10.4–5.

[226] Evag. *HE* 5.9; Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.6.6/pp. 292–3; Theoph. Sim. 3.10.6–11.1; *PLRE* 3a: 12 (Adarmaanes).

[227] Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 10.9.

The most significant setback for the Romans during this period, however, was the Persian capture of Dara. Khusrau committed an enormous force to the project, and after cutting the water supply to the city, building earthen mounds around it, and using heavy artillery against the walls, the city capitulated.[228] Much of the population was killed or enslaved. The absence of Rome's Arab allies was clearly being felt. The loss of Dara represented a serious setback, but during 572/3 the Romans had success in Persarmenia and Iberia which became a significant advantage as the war with Persia progressed.[229]

Justin II was afflicted by a serious disease in 574 (perhaps connected to what had taken place at Dara) and handed control to Tiberius, *comes excubitorum*, whom he adopted, and appointed Caesar.[230] Justin's wife, Sophia, is also portrayed in a powerful position and sent embassies to Khusrau to establish a truce in Mesopotamia.[231] In 575 this met with some success and included more annual payments by the Romans to Khusrau. The truce did not apply to Armenia and Iberia, where conflict between the two powers was concentrated over the following three years.[232] Importantly, the rift that had developed in 572 between Justin and the Jafnid ruler, al-Mundhir, was settled in 575.

Al-Mundhir reconciled
[**5.30**] John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.6.4/pp. 284–7 (trans. after Brooks)
Against Marcian there was anger because Mundhir had escaped, and lived, and because the secret had been made known and declared, and because the plan had not in the end come to fruition. It was also made clear to everyone how the command against him had been given without [any] respect for the fear of God, and by what unfairness and injustice it was to have been done. King Mundhir persevered in his vigilance and caution by which he stood, with all of his army against all of the princes and the army of the Roman kingdom for about three years. Then, as a Christian man worried about the Roman realm, and full of anger towards the Persian Ṭayyāyē, since they dared with the army of the Persians to make an incursion and [then] devastated and burned and took captives as far as Antioch, and had then returned to their own land with great plunder and an infinity of captives—he proposed that he might be reconciled to the Roman state and fight for them. While the king [i.e. the Roman emperor] continued to send letters to him through a number of nobles, the king [continued to] deny [everything] and said that the letters to kill him were written without his knowledge. [Mundhir] stubbornly stood firm, and declared that he would accept neither the letters nor whoever was sent to carry them to him. He was prepared for war against anyone who might dare to approach the vicinity of his camp. Then, at last, he sent a message to the patrician Justinian, son of Germanus, who was himself the commander-in-chief over all the other officers of the Roman army in the east: 'From the beginning I heard of, and recognized, the deceit of the Romans. Now

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[228] John Eph. *HE* 3.6.5/pp. 287–91.   [229] Sebeos 67.27–68.8; Whitby 1988: 254–6.
[230] The *Excubitors*, or 'Sentinels', were the imperial bodyguard. See Jones 1964: 658–9.
[231] Menander, fr. 18.2–4.   [232] Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 153–60.

however I learn the reality by the trial made against me [that] my mortality would be exchanged for my labours [on behalf of the state]. Afterwards, I accepted and trusted nothing of any of the Roman nobles . . . but you, since I knew you to be a Christian man, and a noble who fears God—if you would go to the house of the blessed Mar Sergius at Ruṣāfa, and send a message to me, I will come there, along with my army, ready to fight. And, if peace is my lot, and you speak the truth with me, you and I will leave in peace. If, on the other hand, I find deceit, I trust in God, in whom I believe, that he will not relinquish the care which he has continued to hold for me.' When the patrician Justinian received this, he rejoiced with great delight, and he sent a message to Mundhir: 'Do not doubt me—for the God of the Christians is between us. Come on that day to the house of the blessed Mar Sergius, and you shall find me there. And do not trouble your army; for I trust in God that we shall leave from that place in peace, and in mutual agreement, and in friendship.' When Mundhir received this response, he changed his mind, and sent back [his army]. Immediately he set out for [Justinian] with only a few men. And when both men were standing before the tomb of the blessed Mar Sergius, and when many things, too many to record, had been said between them, they asked for and received the promises which each wished. And so, they departed in confidence and in peace with one another. When these things were made known to the king, Justin, and to all of the senate, they themselves were also filled with a great joy because Mundhir had returned to them in peace. And afterward, letters of peace and reconciliation were made mutually by each party.

   After a short time, the bold and strong Mundhir, full of anger at the audacity of the Persian Ṭayyāyē, and eager to rescue and liberate the captives who had been taken from the Roman lands, quietly gathered together his brothers, and his sons, and all of his family, together with all of their forces, so that they might equip themselves with provisions and arms and come to him on the second day. When they arrived, ready and equipped, he declared a secret to them:[233] 'Immediately, with no man leaving or separating himself from us, let us all fall as one on the camp [ḥīrtā] of Nuʿmān in the land of the Persians. And because of their arrogance and the violence of their audacity shown against the Christians, God will hand them over into our hands.' Therefore, after setting out vigorously, they reached the camp, and fell up on it in its peace, when its inhabitants were quiet and silent, and threw them into great confusion. They butchered and destroyed the whole force which was there, and they burned and ruined the whole settlement, with the exception of the churches. And Mundhir, after setting up his tent in the middle of it all, remained there for five days. And he bound all of the Ṭayyāyē which he had captured, and he then led away all of the captives from the settlement, and all of the captives which had been taken from the land of the Romans—and all of the horses, and all of the camels. After setting out [from there] he returned to his own territory in great triumph, and after a great victory. These events particularly increased his glory and his wealth, and he distributed [the plunder] to all of the orthodox[234] churches and monasteries, and especially

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[233] The reason for their rapid preparation.   [234] Miaphysite.

to the poor. And he was venerated by all, and the men of two realms[235] admired and wondered at the vigor of his strength, and the triumphs which he had achieved.

The new *magister militum per Orientem*, Justinian, met al-Mundhir at Sergiopolis, a location whose association with the Jafnids (Ch. 6) heightened the significance and religious solemnity of the occasion.[236] John of Ephesus' narrative covers al-Mundhir's invasion in considerable detail, and is a celebration of the prowess and vigour of one of the most prominent heroes in his narrative. It also contains a certain amount of moral indignation, at al-Mundhir's earlier treatment, and then satisfaction at the reconciliation; note, too, that in John's telling of the story it is al-Mundhir, whose loyalty to Rome, still burning under the surface, prompts his overtures to Justinian, thus further strengthening John's moral case. Given the later course of events which would see al-Mundhir betrayed a second time (below) it is tempting to see in John's text a deliberate emphasis on al-Mundhir's return to alliance with Rome for literary and dramatic effect.

In 576, taking advantage of the fact that most Roman troops were still in Mesopotamia, Khusrau, advancing through Persarmenia, made his way to Theodosiopolis and thence to Melitene. He suffered a serious defeat just to the west of Melitene before withdrawing.[237] The Romans responded with an attack on Persian territory, which continued over the winter of 576/7.[238] Negotiations between Tiberius and Khusrau continued, but the appointment of Maurice[239] to the post of *magister militum per Orientem* (as Justinian's successor) in 577 saw Khusrau take his chances, and invade Mesopotamia with 20,000 troops, including Arab allies. He also moved troops south from Armenia, and the two forces attacked key Roman Mesopotamian cities including Constantia and Amida.[240] Maurice responded by attacking Persian territory as far east as Singara.[241] While negotiations were under way in 579 between Tiberius (who had assumed sole rulership following the death of Justin in September 578) and Khusrau, the Sasanian ruler of almost 50 years died. His son and successor Hormizd IV (579–90) was in no mood to negotiate. Al-Mundhir took advantage of the cessation of negotiations by attacking and defeating the Naṣrids in 580.[242]

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[235] Rome and Persia.   [236] *PLRE* 3a: 744 (Iustinianus 3).
[237] Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.6.8/pp. 297–300; Sebeos 68.18–69.8; Theoph. Sim. 3.14.1–9.
[238] Evag. *HE* 3.5.14; Theoph. Sim. 3.15.1–2.
[239] *PLRE* 3b: 855ff. (Mauricius 4).
[240] Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.6.14, 27/pp. 309–11, 330–2; Theoph. Sim. 3.15.11–2.
[241] Theoph. Sim. 3.16.1–2.   [242] Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.4.42/p. 225.

581–90: WAR BETWEEN MAURICE AND HORMIZD IV

As *magister militum per Orientem*, Maurice marched into Persian territory in 580 and 581, crossing the Tigris and attacking Media and Babylonia.[243] The campaign of 581 was especially significant because it targeted Ctesiphon, and also because of al-Mundhir's involvement, his alleged actions, and their consequences.

> Al-Mundhir and Maurice in 581
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> [**5.31**] Theophylact Simocatta, *Hist.* 3.17.5–10 (trans. Whitby and Whitby, pp. 99–100)
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> With the arrival of winter, the Roman leader came to Caesarea in Cappadocia, but as the summer came round again, he arrived in the east with the whole Roman army at the city of Circesium. Next, he subsequently hastened through the desert of Arabia to reach the land of Babylonia and then to steal a victory by the shrewdness of the enterprise. In this he was accompanied by the leader of the nomadic barbarians (his name was Alamundarus) who, they say, revealed the Roman attack to the Persian king: for the Saracen tribe is known to be the most unreliable and fickle, their mind is not steadfast, and their judgment is not firmly grounded in prudence. Therefore, as a result of this, the king of the Persians transplanted the war to the city of Callinicum, after electing Adormaanes[244] as a not untalented custodian of the expedition. Then, after Alamundarus had like a drone destroyed the beehives, or in other words had ruined Maurice's enterprise, the manoeuvres of the expedition against the Medes became unprofitable for the Romans: for they returned to quench the disasters at home.

Theophylact Simocatta set out during the reign of the emperor Heraclius (610–41) to continue the work of Menander.[245] Little is known about him, although in common with many of the authors discussed in this chapter, he was trained as a lawyer. A Chalcedonian Christian, he later assumed high office (probably as city prefect) after earning the support of the Patriarch of Constantinople. He wrote several works, including the history quoted here, providing a narrative from 582 to 603. Theophylact intended to extend this work, but for reasons that are not completely clear, never did so.[246] Theophylact has been criticized for his style ('so ludicrously convoluted and ornate that it bothered even Photius');[247] he is the last of the chain of sixth-century classicizing historians who provide an important narrative between 518 and 603.

Details about this particular Persian campaign are few.[248] The campaign of Maurice did, though, run into trouble; a bridge across the Tigris had been

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[243] Theoph. Sim. 3.17.3–11.   [244] See n. 226.
[245] For Theophylact, see Treadgold 2010: 329–40 and the introduction in the translation of Whitby and Whitby (xiii–xxx).
[246] See the introduction by Whitby and Whitby (xvi–xvii).
[247] Treadgold 2010: 337.   [248] Whitby 1988: 272.

destroyed.[249] Rather more significantly, shortly after the Romans made it to the area around Ctesiphon the Persians, under Adarmahan, launched a counter-attack on Osroëne.[250] Both Edessa and Callinicum were attacked. As a result, Maurice was forced to retreat to meet the invading Persians, so abandoning the campaign. This failure seems to have led to a quarrel between Maurice and al-Mundhir, with the likely outcome being that al-Mundhir abandoned the Roman attack on Adarmahan.[251] Our sources reflect a debate about whether al-Mundhir was disloyal to Maurice by providing intelligence on Roman positions to Hormizd. Theophylact clearly accuses al-Mundhir of treachery, and Evagrius blames him for the failure.[252] John of Ephesus, who reports the events in two places (one version quoted below, **5.32**) is more circumspect, claiming that Maurice and al-Mundhir blamed each other for problems during the invasion.[253] Religious disagreements might also have played a part, with the Chalcedonian Evagrius and Theophylact perhaps expressing unease over al-Mundhir's Miaphysitism.[254] Nevertheless, in the context of imperial failure, alongside the participation of an allied barbarian force, treachery seems to have been a convenient charge.[255]

Hormizd subsequently ordered an attack on Mesopotamia, directed especially at Callinicum, and this forced the invading Roman army and its Arab allies to withdraw. The Persians caused considerable damage to Callinicum and the surrounding countryside. Al-Mundhir sought revenge against the Persians, and led a force of his own troops and a contingent of Roman troops against the Persian Arabs, over whom he won a significant victory.[256] Al-Mundhir also prosecuted a siege of the island fortress of Anatha on the lower Euphrates, and proved too much for the Persian commander Adarmahan.[257]

In the winter of 581/2, as a result of growing suspicions about his conduct (but also very much because of the failure of some crucial negotiations: **6.26–7**), al-Mundhir was arrested and taken to Constantinople, triggering a succession of events.[258] John's account (**5.32**) opens with *his* version of what had happened on the doomed expedition with Maurice.

> Al-Mundhir arrested and exiled
> [**5.32**] John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.3.40–3/pp. 173–8 (trans. after Brooks)
> When Count Maurice was in the east, in command of the army, he undertook an agreement with Mundhir, king of the Ṭayyāyē, to invade the land of the Persians together. They marched for several days . . . until they reached Beth Arāmāye, in

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[249] Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.3.4/p. 125.   [250] Whitby 1988: 273.
[251] Whitby 1988: 273.   [252] Evag. *HE* 5.20.
[253] See van Ginkel 1995: 82 on the problems with some duplication of events in Brooks's edition of John's text. We omit here the version reported in Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.6.16–7/pp. 312–13.
[254] Contra Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 593.
[255] Cf. Menander fr. 9.1:67–9 and 9.3:103.
[256] Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.6.18/p. 314.   [257] *1234* pp. 209–10.
[258] Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.6.41–2/p. 341; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 459–63; Fisher 2011a: 173–84.

which the royal city of the Persians [is situated], when they found the bridge—which they were expecting to cross so that they could assault the city [i.e. Ctesiphon]—destroyed before them. Then they fell into a mutual quarrel, when Maurice judged that Mundhir had himself sent a message to the Persians, subsequent to which they destroyed the bridge. Therefore, with mutual hostility and distrust growing between them, they returned, having accomplished nothing. Then they undertook to write to the king Tiberius against each other, and the king, in vain, tried his hardest to reconcile them. As this had not been possible, Maurice went to the king and severely and wickedly accused him [Mundhir], and the king accepted, and full of great anger towards Mundhir, he gave thought to how he could trick him and arrange for him to be brought as a captive to Constantinople.

There was a man named Magnus, a Syrian *curator*, who was a friend and patron of Mundhir, in whom he had confidence, and who would be his agent before the king.[259] Seeking the favour of the king, however, Magnus said to him: 'If you order it, I will bring him here in chains.' And the king was pleased, and sent him [to do so]. He travelled by a swift horse to the east, to his own region, where he had founded a town called Ḥaurin. [This place] he had surrounded with a wall and in it he had built a church, the consecration of which was the pretext for his arrival. Also with him, he took the Patriarch of Antioch, so that he might further deceive Mundhir and [cause him] to come. And then in trickery he sent a message to Mundhir, saying: 'I have come here for the consecration of the church, but had I not been tired from the journey, I would have come to see you and to greet you. However, since I would like to see you, I ask that you come to me right away. You should not bring with you a large bodyguard, because I would like you to stay with me for several days, and we should enjoy each other's company. Do not go to any expense for a large force, but come with just a few.'

When Mundhir received this message from Magnus, he was very pleased. Immediately, without delay, he confidently came to his dear friend without a large army, having no fear of anything in his mind [concerning Magnus]. And Magnus, keen to show that he intended nothing wicked, received him happily, and ordered a banquet to be prepared. He said, 'Send away those who came with you.' But Mundhir replied, 'As you instructed, I did not come with a great force, but when I go back, I cannot travel without an army, even a small one.' But Magnus said [again], 'Send them away; and when you return, you can send for them, and they will come.' Mundhir, however, as he was a man of great skill, was not pleased by this, and he began to get suspicious. He sent a message to his bodyguard to fall back a little, and wait for him. After they were dismissed, Magnus ordered the force which he had secretly with him to be ready, and the *dux* who was with him, to be prepared. Then, when dusk arrived, he said to Mundhir, 'My lord Patrician, you are accused before the king, and he has ordered that you should go to him in the capital, and there prove yourself, and show to him that nothing said against you is the truth.' Mundhir replied to him, 'After all the effort I have made, I do not think that accusations made against me should be

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[259] Ch. 4 and *PLRE* 3b: 805 (Magnus 2).

heard. For I am a servant of the king, nor do I refuse to go [to Constantinople], but I am not able at this time to break camp, so that the Persian Ṭayyāyē will come and make captives of my wives and children, and take everything that I possess.' [But] then the Roman soldiers appeared, prepared to fight; and Magnus said to him: 'Unless you go of your own accord, I will throw you into chains, and ensure that you are carried by an ass, and send you that way.' Now that his trick was clear, and he saw that he had been relieved of his bodyguard, and made a prisoner, and handed over to a Roman force which would guard him, he felt weak and beaten, like a lion of the desert, which was shut up inside a cage.

When his bodyguard learned what had happened, they surrounded the fort, and prepared to burn it, but when they saw the Romans appear and prepare to fight, they backed down. And Mundhir, enveloped by the Roman guard, was removed, and taken to the capital. When they reached it, the king ordered that he should stay where he had previously stayed [on visits to the capital] and expenses assigned to him. He remained there, without being received [by the king], but with his wife, two sons, and a daughter.

Mundhir had four sons; the eldest was Nuʿmān, a man even more ferocious and more readily equipped for war than Mundhir himself. After gathering together his forces, he fell upon the fort of Magnus, who by now had returned to Constantinople. Except the men who they made captive or killed, they destroyed everything and carried away gold and silver, and brass and iron, dresses of wool and linen; [they took] corn, wine, and oil; all kinds of herds of beasts, whatever fell into their hands, they took, and all the flocks of bulls, and all the flocks of sheep and goats. And the army of the Ṭayyāyē burst out and, when all of the country of Arabia and Syria around them was despoiled, they took away limitless wealth and plunder. And they withdrew into the interior of the desert, and having pitched their camps there in large numbers, they divided the spoils, prepared vigilantly for war, and guarded against [danger] from all sides. And once more they went out and despoiled and plundered and [then] went [back] to the desert, until the whole of the east, up to the [Mediterranean] sea was in terror before them. The people fled into the cities, and did not dare to be seen before them. When the provincial governors and the leaders of the army sent messengers to them[260] saying, 'Why do you do all of these things,' they replied, saying, 'Why did your king lead our father into captivity, after all the labours and victories, and acts of courage which he had carried out and fought for him? [And] he has rescinded our corn supplies, so that we cannot live. It is for this that we are compelled to do these things. It should suffice that we do not kill or burn [you].' And finally, they set out against the city of Bostra, and surrounded it, and said, 'Give the armour of our father and the rest of his royal equipment which we left with you: if not, we will tear out, and burn, and kill [everything] in your city, and in the whole land.' When the *dux*—who was a celebrated and illustrious man—heard this, he was angry, and after assembling his army, he made a sally, holding the Ṭayyāyē in contempt. They drew up in formation against him, and overpowered him, and killed him, along with much of his army. The inhabitants

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[260] I.e. al-Nuʿmān and his people.

of the city saw this, and were terrified. They sent a message, saying, 'Stop the slaughter! We will give you what is yours; accept it in peace.' And so they took out to them their father's property, and when they had received these things, the [Ṭayyāyē] returned to their camp in the desert. But for a long time, they continued to plunder and devastate.

Following Tiberius' death in August 582 and the accession of Mundhir's nemesis, Maurice, the Jafnid leader was exiled to Sicily. Evagrius and *1234* also report versions of the story: Evagrius connects Maurice's arrest of al-Mundhir to the military failure in 581/2, and both mention the actions of al-Mundhir's son, al-Nuʿmān, who, according to Evagrius, exacted revenge on Rome through raiding and pillage.[261] He is likely the figure referred to as phylarch and *stratēlatēs* (*magister militum*) on a bronze plaque from Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān in northern Syria. The date of the plaque is not clear.[262]

In these raids, an especially devastating outcome was the defeat and death of the *dux* of *Provincia Arabia* following a siege of the capital, Bostra. Subsequently, al-Nuʿmān later journeyed to Constantinople to negotiate his position, but was arrested and condemned to death. Michael the Syrian adds a few extra details to John's account, about the aftermath of al-Mundhir's arrest and exile.[263]

Magnus and al-Nuʿmān
[**5.33**] Michael the Syrian, *Chron.* 10.19/pp. 373–4 (trans. after Chabot)
When al-Nuʿmān, the son of al-Mundhir, learned what had happened to his father, he assembled the soldiers and invaded Roman territory. He began by pillaging and stealing gold, silver, and everything else; but he did not take people, he committed no murder, and he burned nothing... [*Later, after the death of Magnus, al-Nuʿmān decided to go to Maurice*] ... This man welcomed him and swore to him that if he fought against the Persians, he would free his father [al-Mundhir] from exile. He said to al-Nuʿmān that he would have to hold communion with the Synodites [the Chalcedonians]. He refused [the emperor], saying: 'All of the tribes of the Ṭayyāyē are orthodox [Miaphysite]; and if I hold communion with the Synodites, they will kill me.' Because of this, his hatred grew, and, while leaving, al-Nuʿmān swore that he would no longer come willingly to see the face of the Romans. This is why, while he was on the road, he was seized and taken into exile, along with al-Mundhir, his father.

The kingdom of the Ṭayyāyē was broken up amongst fifteen princes. The majority of them joined the Persians, and from then on the empire of the Christian Ṭayyāyē ended, because of the perfidy of the Romans. [And] the heresy [Chalcedonian Christianity] spread itself amongst the Ṭayyāyē.

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[261] Evag. *HE* 6.2; *Chron. 1234* p. 213; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 466–71. Moschus *Prat. Spir.* 155 also refers to these events, noting that 'in the reign of the most faithful [Chalcedonian] Emperor Maurice ... the Saracen leader Naaman was making his raids' (trans. Wortley, p. 129).
[262] *IGLS* 4.1550. See Gatier 2014: 208; Millar 2010b: 218; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 505–7.
[263] Cf. too *1234*, p. 213, with a shorter version.

Michael exonerates al-Nuʿmān, noting that (in contradiction to John) 'he did not take people, he committed no murder, and he burned nothing'. The sharper divisions between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites by Michael's time are clearly visible in this version of the story. Al-Nuʿmān's claim that 'communion with the Synodites' will result in his death is repeated in *1234*.[264] The multitude of betrayals perpetrated against the seemingly blameless Jafnids has the effect of suppressing any wrongdoing of which al-Mundhir might have been guilty; and the faithless guile shown by the Romans is, indeed, just that— Chalcedonians, the tale suggests, cannot be taken at their word.

How had al-Mundhir gone from reconciliation in 575 to arrest and exile in 581/2? As noted in Ch. 3, the failure of Rome's policy in the Arabian Peninsula may have played a role, from the wider view of Roman strategic thinking, in determining the viability of the Jafnid alliance. Closer to home, the stories of blame and counter-blame provide a clear explanation, but from a broader perspective, the precarious place occupied by al-Mundhir was susceptible to the machinations of his enemies. Al-Mundhir had no strong claim to credibility in Constantinople beyond the pedigree of his father, al-Ḥārith, and his legal status as phylarch. (Magnus' position as his patron, and promoter of his interests at court, was obviously subject to 'better offers'.) Furthermore, al-Mundhir was a Roman client, whose position depended on the personal support and consent of the emperor. This personal aspect was typical of the way that the Romans conducted agreements, and changes in either ruler or client could adversely affect the relationship.[265] As discussed further in Ch. 6, al-Mundhir worked closely with Tiberius II to assist the emperor in his efforts to solve religious strife, particularly amongst the Miaphysites. These negotiations failed, which cast a shadow over al-Mundhir's credibility, and gave an opening to his enemies; Maurice's accusations clearly found sway with Tiberius, who was probably facing some embarrassing questions of his own over al-Mundhir's failure. It was not difficult to arrange for al-Mundhir's 'friends', such as Magnus, to be turned against him. The rapid ascent in status of the Jafnid leader also probably did not remove the perception of some at court that he was still very much a barbarian.[266] If to this we add the growing independence of action on the battlefield (characterized also by his father), and the demand for gold which al-Mundhir made to Justin, it is possible to see that some may have viewed the Jafnids with increasing distaste in the 570s, and the final blow was the accession to the throne of al-Mundhir's accuser, Maurice. Without a family pedigree in Constantinople, and, having built his power base in *Provincia Arabia*, remaining very much an outsider in the labyrinthine world of the imperial court, al-Mundhir could not hope to protect

[264] *1234*, p. 213.   [265] See Fisher 2011a, ch. 5, for a detailed analysis.
[266] Cf. Evag. *HE* 5.20.

himself very effectively against Maurice. The revolt of al-Nuʿmān reflects a desperate attempt to stave off the inevitable.

Later in 582, and without al-Mundhir, Maurice's troops scored a significant victory over the Persian commander, Tamkhusrau, near Constantia, defeating his army and killing him in the process.[267] To the north, the Persians had regained control of Persarmenia in 578/9 and were also in the ascendancy in Iberia. For most of the next decade the conflict was fought primarily in Mesopotamia and Arzanene. The Romans sought to make gains in the latter, while the Persians continued to threaten and harass Roman defensive installations in the former.[268] The deterioration in Roman relations with the Arabs continued in this period; Michael the Syrian (see **5.33**) paints a grim picture for the Romans. It is difficult to say with certainty what level of military difficulty was engendered by the disruption of the long-standing agreement between Rome and the Jafnids. At any rate, there were still some Arab allies observing the alliance with Rome, and they took part in campaigns of 586 and in 587 in the person of 'Ogyrus' (Ḥujr) and 'Zogomus' (Ḍujʿum), and again, simply as 'Saracens', in 587. Little is known of these individuals.[269]

590–602: THE REVOLT OF BAHRAM CHOBIN AND ELEVATION OF KHUSRAU II

By the late 580s both sides were in need of a resolution to the drawn-out conflict. The Romans faced a growing problem with the Avars in the Balkans, and the Persians were entering a prolonged period of internal instability. The revolt of the Persian general Bahram Chobin and the subsequent instability in the Persian leadership had direct implications for the war with Rome. Hormizd's deposition in February 590, before Bahram himself could effect it, saw the elevation of Hormizd's son, Khusrau II, with the support of sections of the Persian nobility. Khusrau's defeat at the hands of Bahram soon after his father was overthrown saw Khusrau flee to the Romans.[270] Khusrau and Bahram undertook a bidding war with Maurice, offering generous territorial and financial concessions in exchange for the emperor's support. A note from *1234* from 590/1 offers further hints at the role of Arab allies of the Romans in the period after al-Mundhir's arrest and exile.

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[267] Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.6.26; cf. the errors in Evag. 5.20. *PLRE* 3b: 1215 (Tamchosroes).
[268] Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 167–75.
[269] Theoph. Sim. *Hist.* 2.2.5, 2.10.6–7; see discussion in the translation of Whitby and Whitby, p. 45 n. 5; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 551–3.
[270] Theoph. Sim. 6.2.2–12.8; Evag. *HE* 6.17.

Abū Jafna Nuʿmān b. al-Mundhir at Ruṣāfa (Sergiopolis)
[**5.34**] *1234*, p. 215 (trans. Palmer, p. 115)

Chosroēs [Khusrau] decided to seek asylum with the king of the Romans. He sent for the Arab general who dwelt at Ruṣāfa as a subject of the Romans, a zealous Christian man called Abū Jafna Nuʿmān b. al-Mundhir. When he arrived he gave him a letter to take to king Maurice. He sped to Maurice, gave him the letter from Chosroēs and described to him exactly how dramatic the situation was, and that Chosroēs was standing ready to come to the King as soon as he should have his leave to do so. As for Maurice, when he had read Chosroēs's letter and understood its contents, he granted his request and sent him word to come to him, promising that he would help him. Abū Jafna conveyed this message back to Chosroēs. When the latter heard what Maurice had promised, he left his palace, taking care to avoid being observed, and rode like a wild warrior across the border out of Persia, until he reached Mesopotamia ...

Abū Jafna Nuʿmān b. al-Mundhir here plays a curious role in the diplomatic exchanges between Maurice and Khusrau, against the background of the civil war in Persia. The anonymous chronicler identifies Abū Jafna as the son of (an) al-Mundhir, and while the latter cannot definitively be connected with the exiled Jafnid leader, it would seem perverse not to do so; the 'Jafnid' overtones noted in the account, stemming from the link with the city of Sergiopolis, raise curious questions about what trajectory the relationship between any surviving Jafnids and the Romans might have been following at this time. Furthermore, there is also an intriguing parallel with another Jafna, who appears in the text of Michael the Syrian during the same period (**6.28**). John of Ephesus was most likely dead by this point, and this notice might therefore stem from the lost text of Theophilus of Edessa (fl. *c.*695–*c.*785), transmitted via the lost work of Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē (d. 845), who was himself an important source for both *1234* and Michael the Syrian.[271] Another, more detailed version is provided by Agapius, also likely derived from Theophilus.[272] These accounts have piqued the interest of historians; Shahîd suggests that Abū Jafna shows a restored Jafnid alliance, and an intriguing seal from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna with the name *Gabala* and the title *patrikios*, and tentatively dated to the last third of the sixth century or the beginning of the seventh, might indicate some kind of restoration. Further thickening the plot is an undated graffito from Ruṣāfa, mentioning a certain 'Numinos'[273] (Abū Jafna Nuʿmān?), and a bald note from *1234*, saying that in the aftermath of the coup against Maurice by Phocas, al-Mundhir was released from exile (although nothing more is heard of him again).[274]

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[271] On Theophilus, see now the new translation and analysis by Hoyland; Howard-Johnston 2010: 198–9.

[272] Agapius, *Kitāb al-ʿUnwān* (*PO* 8, 442); see Theophilus (Hoyland), p. 47.

[273] Gatier 2014: 209–11.   [274] *1234*, p. 219.

Much of the 'Jafnid restoration' theory relies on the well-known figure of Jabala ibn al-Ayham, reputed by ʿAbbāsid-era sources to be the last Arab king in alliance with Rome, and who, fighting on the losing side at the pivotal battle of Yarmūk in 636, subsequently retired to Anatolia. As Julia Bray has demonstrated, however, this Jabala is as much an ʿAbbāsid literary figure as any historical individual, and it is entirely speculative to attach him to the seal or see in him a Jafnid restoration on the basis of a single shared name. Furthermore, given the fact that the names of Arab individuals here tend to be shared across different families (e.g. al-Ḥārith, al-Mundhir), there is a further reason to remain sceptical.[275]

In the end Maurice chose to support Khusrau, and in spring 591 sent an army with him to cross the Tigris and confront Bahram. Defections to Khusrau in the previous months while he was still in Roman territory paved the way for his return, and on arriving back on Persian soil with the support of a Roman army, Khusrau found that Bahram struggled to hold off the assault.[276] Khusrau inflicted a serious defeat on Bahram at Gandzak, the capital of Media Atropatene, from which Bahram was unable to recover. The Roman troops departed Persian territory soon after, and with Khusrau's position secure, a treaty was sealed between Maurice and the Persian king in 591. This saw peace between the two powers for more than a decade. Towards the very end of Maurice's reign, there is some evidence for Roman Arab allies mounting an attack into Persia, specifically Babylonia, although their identity is difficult to establish.[277]

602–9: KHUSRAU II AND THE REVOLT OF PHOCAS

The overthrow of Maurice by Phocas in 602 provided the pretext for a war between Rome and Persia which would result in the most spectacular losses for the Romans, and an equally remarkable recovery soon after. The events of 602 coincided with Khusrau's successful suppression of a decade-long rebellion in Persia. Significant also was Khusrau's deposition of al-Nuʿmān, the Naṣrid ruler, in 602, which followed a course rather similar to the arrest and exile of the Jafnid al-Mundhir discussed above. The Naṣrid al-Nuʿmān embraced Christianity in *c.*590/4 (see **6.41**, **8.40**), but this decision is unlikely to have played much of a role in Khusrau's decision to remove his ally. An alternative political explanation is hinted at by the *Khuzistan Chronicle*, a text composed in Syriac in Persia shortly after 660. Covering the period between

[275] Bray 2010. See Shahîd 1989a, 1995–2010, vol. 1: 558–9, 562–8; Fisher 2011a: 175–6. The fascinating seal is published by Shahîd 2001b.
[276] Theoph. Sim. 5.3, 6.   [277] Theoph. Sim. 8.1.1–3.

*c.*579 and the 650s, it has been described as 'a precious document of the final years of the Sasanian empire'.[278]

Al-Nuʿmān and the war between Khusrau and Bahrām
[5.35] *Khuzistan Chronicle*, pp. 19–20 (trans. M. Greatrex = Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 231–2)
When Khusrau was fleeing from Bahrām and had reached Roman territory, he is said to have asked al-Nuʿmān, the king of the Ṭayyāyē, to travel with him, but he refused; he also requested a very noble horse from him, which he did not give him. And Khusrau also asked for the daughter of al-Nuʿmān, who was most beautiful, and al-Nuʿmān did not agree; but he (al-Nuʿmān) replied, 'I would not give my daughter as a bride to a man who enters marriage in the manner of beasts.' Khusrau put all these things together and kept them in his heart. When Khusrau had a pause from wars, he wished to exact vengeance on his enemies, and among them al-Nuʿmān. One day he invited al-Nuʿmān to dinner, but in place of food he broke scraps made of hay before him and al-Nuʿmān was very embittered, and sent (word) to his fellow tribesmen, the Maʿadd. They devastated many places and took captives from Khusrau, and they penetrated as far as the ʿArab. When Khusrau heard (of these things) he was disturbed, and enticed him (al-Nuʿmān) to come to him by all sorts of means, but he refused. But one of al-Nuʿmān's interpreters, (who was) from the island of Derin, Maʿne by name, conspired with Khusrau and said to al-Nuʿmān, 'The King really loves you', and swore by the gospel, 'The king will not hurt you.' Mawiyah, too, the wife of al-Nuʿmān, said to him, 'It is more fitting for you to die with kingly status than to live expelled and driven away from kingly status.' But when he reached the royal court, (Khusrau) did not kill him, but ordered him to remain at the gate afterwards, however, it is said that he slew this illustrious confessor by deadly poison.

The confluence of court politics and intrigue recalls the demise of the Jafnid al-Mundhir. Curiously, the story of Khusrau's sexual preferences is repeated in the longer narrative of al-Nuʿmān's demise contained in the history of al-Ṭabarī (**8.25–7**). Beyond the salacious story—one of many in the *Chronicle*[279]—is the hint that al-Nuʿmān had refused to back Khusrau in the war with Bahram, and this error of judgement, combined with his precarious position as a client of the king, made him tremendously vulnerable. Howard-Johnston has suggested that al-Nuʿmān was removed against the broader context of Khusrau's preparations to extend Persian power west, around the desert, where what he terms 'a unitary system of client-management' based on the Naṣrids might have been less useful than before. Friction between al-Nuʿmān and Khusrau, described in varying ways by our sources (especially in the Arab-Islamic tradition), might have provided a suitable short-term

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[278] Quotation from Brock 2009: 63: 'un précieux document des dernières années de l'empire Sassanide'. For a summary of what is known about the text, see Howard-Johnston 2010: 128–37; Brock 2009; Nautin 1982.
[279] Some of the more gruesome stories are related by Howard-Johnston 2010: 129–30.

incentive to take action.[280] Note also the version of events in the tenth-century *Tārīkh Bal'amī* (**8.44**).

The instability in the Roman empire following the overthrow of Maurice, especially the revolt of Heraclius in 608, made it very difficult for Phocas to mobilize an army necessary to meet that of Khusrau. Khusrau made the claim that Maurice, who had supported him ten years earlier in gaining the Persian throne, needed to be avenged and some Roman military commanders also staged revolts in response to Phocas' 'usurpation'.[281]

The most significant immediate development in Khusrau's war to avenge Maurice was the capture of Dara in 604, which had been handed back to the Romans as part of the negotiations with Maurice 13 years earlier.[282] Following the fall of Dara, the Persian forces under Shahrvaraz[283] undertook a systematic invasion of Mesopotamia and Armenia. In Mesopotamia there was virtually no Roman resistance to the Persian advance, with all of the fortifications east of the Euphrates captured by 610. This included Mardin, Amida, Reshaina, and Cephas between 606 and 609, and Callinicum, Circesium, Carrhae, and Edessa in 609/10.[284] During the same period in Armenia, Roman and Persian forces sparred in a series of battles, which saw the Persians mostly victorious. By 608 the Persian commander in Armenia, Shahin,[285] succeeded in ejecting Roman forces from Roman Armenia with all of the major Roman fortifications including Theodosiopolis, Satala, and Nicopolis captured by 609/10.[286] The stage was set for Persian penetration into Syria and Asia Minor over the following decade. It is possible that Rome's Arab allies caused difficulties for Khusrau during the war against Phocas by raiding territory in Iraq that used to be under the control of the Naṣrids.[287]

610–30: KHUSRAU II'S WAR WITH HERACLIUS

Heraclius was crowned emperor late in 610, following a successful rebellion against Phocas. While internal instability continued for some time, and despite continued Persian successes in 611 and 612, there were signs that the new emperor attempted a military response. In 611 the Persian general Shahin advanced into Cappadocia, but was forced back to Armenia in 612 after a Roman army surrounded the metropolis, Caesarea.[288] Under the

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[280] Howard-Johnston 2006: 20–1; see too Bosworth 1983: 607.
[281] *1234*, pp. 218–21.
[282] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6095/p. 292; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 184–5.
[283] *PLRE* 3b: 1141ff. (Shahrbarāz).   [284] Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 185.
[285] *PLRE* 3b: 1140 (Shāhīn).   [286] *PLRE* 186–7.
[287] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 623–6.
[288] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6102–3/pp. 299–300; Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 188.

general Shahrvaraz another Persian force advanced across the Euphrates into Syria and, by mid-611, the key Syrian cities of Apamea, Antioch, and Emesa had fallen.[289] At this point Heraclius showed some of the signs of boldness he displayed a decade later by taking field command of the Roman forces which were trying to deal with the Persian invasion. In 613, after the capture of Melitene, the last Roman stronghold in Armenia, the Persian army under Shahin marched south and joined that under Shahrvaraz. In 613 Heraclius suffered defeat in a battle against the Persians outside Antioch, and once again, later in the year, in Cilicia.[290] This left southern Syria, Palestine, and Arabia open to Khusrau's forces. Later in 613 Damascus was captured and then, in 614, came the momentous Persian capture of Jerusalem.[291] With the complete breakdown of Roman political and military authority in the area, raids by Arab tribes, possibly from the Peninsula (as opposed to allies of Persia or disaffected Roman allies) took place throughout Syria, Palestine, and Arabia.[292] After the capture of Jerusalem, the Persians began to threaten Asia Minor. By 615 Shahin was besieging Chalcedon, while elements of the Persian army caused devastation throughout Asia Minor. Attempts by Heraclius to bring the war to a conclusion came to nothing and the Persians continued their activities in Asia Minor and Cilicia until 622. Constantinople itself was under threat as Heraclius and his generals fought to stave off attacks by the Avars and Slavs on the other troublesome front in the Balkans. Sharvaraz began planning the invasion of Egypt in 618 and by mid-619 Alexandria was in Persian hands.[293] By 621 the Persians had conquered the whole of Egypt.

The situation in 621/2 was desperate for Heraclius and the Romans, prompting the emperor to set out on an offensive campaign, which at the time must have appeared foolhardy to most.[294] The emperor left Constantinople on 4 April and gathered a large and diverse army in Asia Minor. Heraclius put the army through training exercises before marching towards Armenia in July, during which time he encountered Persia's Arab allies, an indication that despite the demise of al-Nuʿmān, the Persians, like the Romans, continued to make use of Arab militia.[295] In a brief engagement, the leader of the Arab contingent was captured, divulging a Persian plan to ambush and capture Heraclius. After the Roman and Persian armies attempted to outmanoeuvre each other, they met in battle in August, and the Roman

[289] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6102/pp. 298–9.   [290] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 637.
[291] *1234*, pp. 226–7; Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6103/p. 300; al-Ṭabarī 1.1007; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 637–40.
[292] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6103/p. 300; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 640–1.
[293] *Khuz. Chron.*, pp. 25–7.
[294] See now on this period, Howard-Johnston 2010: 436–44; see also Howard-Johnston 1999 for an earlier detailed account of Heraclius' war of reconquest.
[295] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6113/pp. 303–6.

army was overwhelmingly victorious.[296] More problems with the Avars saw Heraclius spend most of 622 in Constantinople, while the Persians kept up the pressure in Asia Minor.

Setting out from Constantinople in March 623, Heraclius began an invasion of Persarmenia on 20 April that saw the capture of Theodosiopolis and the sack of Dvin. During this campaign, Heraclius received intelligence that Khusrau had an army of 40,000 men stationed at Gazacon. Heraclius 'sent forward some of his subject Saracens as an advance party', who killed and captured some of Khusrau's personal guard.[297] In 624/5, Heraclius campaigned in the Transcaucasus, where he outmanoeuvred Shahrvaraz and inflicted a serious defeat on him.[298] Through this part of the conflict, Heraclius needed to keep one eye on events to the west, as the Avars continued to be a threat, and the Persians continued to cause difficulties in Asia Minor. In 626, while Shahrvaraz was at Chalcedon and the Avars threatened Constantinople from the north, the Persian general received news of an intercepted message from Khusrau ordering his execution. Shahrvaraz subsequently formed an alliance with Heraclius and this, together with a Roman sea victory over the Avars, turned the tide.[299] Meanwhile, Heraclius' previous establishment of contact with the Turks in the Caucasus marginalized Khusrau's position even further, and in 627 Heraclius inflicted serious losses on Persian forces in the southern Caucasus.[300] Soon after, Heraclius invaded enemy territory and defeated a Persian army at Nineveh. The *Chronicon Paschale* includes a specific reference to Arab allies—'Saracens who are subject to our Christ-loving state'—taking part in this invasion and victory.[301] Khusrau fled and took refuge at Dastagird before being overthrown and executed in 628.[302] His son, Kavadh II, quickly came to terms with Heraclius and this saw Armenia, western Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt returned to the Romans.[303] Heraclius ceremonially celebrated these events when he returned the true cross to Jerusalem in March 630.

CONCLUSION

For over 130 years Rome and Persia had been at war on an almost continual basis. There were many occasions during the sixth century when either side

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[296] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6113/p. 305.
[297] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6113/p. 307, trans. Mango and Scott, p. 439.
[298] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6113/p. 309.
[299] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6113/pp. 313–14; Mango 1985.
[300] Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6113/pp. 313–14.
[301] *Chron. Pasch* 730, trans. Whitby and Whitby, p. 185.
[302] *Chron. Pasch* 729–30; Theoph. *Chron.* AM 6118/pp. 317–19.
[303] Dignas and Winter 2007: 148–51.

scored important victories. Khusrau I's capture of Antioch in 540, and the Roman detachment of Lazica from Persia early in Justinian's reign, provide two examples. For the most part, however, the wars of the sixth century were eventually fought to a stalemate. Try as they might, Roman soldiers never succeeded in capturing Nisibis from the Persians in the sixth century, and even though the Persians captured the fortress of Dara a number of times, they could never hold it for long. The wars in Armenia, Iberia, and Lazica were sometimes of significant impact, but neither side could claim to have made serious territorial advances in this region over the whole course of the sixth century—with the possible exception of greater Roman influence in Lazica. To the south, the Arab alliances effectively held each other in check, but inflicted serious damage on cities and the countryside on numerous occasions. In northern Mesopotamia these, and other allied troops drawn from the Isaurians and Huns, played important roles in sieges and open battles prosecuted by the armies of both major powers.

The wars of the first three decades of the seventh century were in some ways different from those of the sixth century. The rapid successes of Khusrau II from 602/3 to 622 were unprecedented in the relationship between Rome and either Parthia or Persia. Rome's inability to withstand these invasions was matched to an extent by the difficulties it faced against Shapur I in the mid-third century, but the scale, now, was considerably larger. The turmoil that ensued following the overthrow of Maurice by Phocas in 602, and the subsequent revolt of Heraclius in 608, was partly to blame, as was the increased strength of the Avar threat from the Balkans, which threatened Constantinople itself for much of the second and third decades of the seventh century. The much reduced reliance on alliances with the Arabs, after the demise of al-Mundhir in 582, and al-Nuʿmān in 602, also clearly played a part. Syria, Palestine, Arabia, and even Egypt were now more vulnerable, and this showed in Khusrau's almost unstoppable advance from 610 to 622. Equally remarkable were Heraclius' successes against Khusrau, commencing in 622 and ending only six years later. Heraclius' chances of this level of success must have been very slim when he departed Constantinople to confront the seemingly invincible Sasanian ruler. The Sasanian decision to repudiate the alliance with al-Nuʿmān two decades earlier was likely a contributor to the extent of Khusrau's defeat; and we might speculate, too, on how the fortunes of Maurice, Phocas, and Heraclius might have shifted, had Maurice not arrested and exiled al-Mundhir.

6

Arabs and Christianity

Greg Fisher and Philip Wood, with contributions from George Bevan, Geoffrey Greatrex, Basema Hamarneh, Peter Schadler, and Walter Ward

INTRODUCTION

The penetration of Christianity into Arab life was a complex and multi-faceted process that should be understood in the context of several larger trends in late antiquity. These trends included the spread of Roman diplomatic and military power into desert margins, Rome's long-standing competition with Persia, and intercommunication between the two empires which facilitated the introduction of Christianity into the Persian empire from her western neighbour. The most crucial trend was arguably the emergence of Christianity as the state-sponsored religion of the Roman empire, during the reign of Constantine. The establishment of the emperor as the arbiter of religious orthodoxy endowed religious confession with significant political overtones, and Constantine set an important trend at Nicaea in 325, tying the development of orthodox doctrine to the imperial throne. Future church councils, convened to address a bewildering array of competing interpretations of Christ's incarnation, cemented the close association between the religious and political dimensions of imperial rule.[1] Increasingly, to be a Christian in the Roman empire therefore meant an affiliation with political implications, as much as any personal, religious one.[2] As a consequence, the Christianizing of so-called 'barbarian' allies—whether Goths along the Danube, or Arabs in the desert—also assumed a political character, and became an effective way to secure treaties with frontier peoples. This was important in more highly charged frontier environments where conflicts were sometimes connected to the

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[1] Cameron and Hoyland 2013; Drake 2006; Fowden (G.) 1993. See too Allen 2000 and van Rompay 2005; Grillmeier 1975–2013.
[2] Greatrex 2000.

persecution of Christians, and official concerns over the well-being of fellow Christians.[3]

From the Roman perspective, Arab Christianization can thus be seen as part of a wider effort to gain political allies in areas bordering the Roman empire, including along Rome's southern frontiers. Constantius II, for example, sent an embassy to the kingdom of Ḥimyar that was designed to 'persuade their ruler to worship Christ and renounce pagan error'.[4] While the Romans did not succeed decisively in gaining Ḥimyar's loyalty, the gradual adoption of Christianity in nearby Aksūm resulted in the alignment of the African kingdom's political interests with those of Rome, a process that had significant consequences in the early sixth century (Ch. 3).[5] Christianizing groups of Arabs could bring about similar results (even if on a necessarily smaller scale) and some of these are visible beneath the rhetoric of the Christian writers who narrated the encounters of stylites, priests, and wandering monks with groups of Arabs in the deserts and rural areas of the Near East.[6] Hagiographers and church historians delighted in stories of 'conversion',[7] which demonstrated for their audiences the power of Christianity to civilize and tame the 'wild barbarian'. As many of the excerpts below demonstrate, these narratives of Christianization often revolved around rhetorical biblical scenes of renewal, rebirth, and the rejection of a nomadic lifestyle, perceived to be full of

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[3] Cameron 2013: xxviii; Haas 2008; van Rompay 2005; Maas 2003 provides a good overview. See also Fisher forthcoming; Fisher 2011a: 34–9; Greatrex 2014a. The links between religious choice and political allegiance is a common theme in ancient literature: see for example Agath. *Hist.* 3.12.7–8; Proc. *Aed.* 3.7.6; Proc. *BP* 1.12.2–4; Evag. *HE* 5.7. For examples of conflict with religious dimensions: 420/2 (see Ch. 1 and Decret 1979, Greatrex 1993, and Greatrex 2008); the tensions between Rome, Ḥimyar, and Aksūm over the massacre at Najrān in the 520s (Ch. 3 and below); and the wars of Heraclius in the seventh century. On the latter see Howard-Johnston 2010: 16–35. Cf. Greatrex 2007 for the complex role of clergy (including monks) in imperial defence.

[4] The mission of Theophilus the Indian and his colleagues, reported by Philostorgius, *HE* 3.4, trans. Amidon, p. 41, and see the translator's comments in nn. 8–9. See Ch. 3, Robin 2014a: 43 Dihle 1989; Fiaccadori 1983; Retsö 2003: 513; Hoyland 2001: 51; Kelly 1995 on John Chrysostom's letters from exile.

[5] Rufinus, *HE* 10.9–10, discussed in Amidon's translation, 40 n. 8, on Rome's establishment of a relationship with the kingdom; for a recent view of Aksūm's Christianization, see Haas 2008. See too Piovanelli 2014; Bevan 2014; Robin 2012b: 273–6.

[6] On wandering monks, see now Rousseau 2010 and Caner 2002; cf. Farès-Drappeau 2011 on recent excavations from Kilwa, near Tabuk, in north-western Saudi Arabia, suggesting that late antique monasticism was established well beyond the Roman frontier. The literary evidence for interactions between monks and Arabs focuses, however, on the region further north in Syria and the province of Arabia.

[7] The term tends to obscure the complex processes involved with adopting Christianity. The one-way impression of abandoning old for new provided by famous accounts (e.g. that of St Augustine) and which are also a common part of conversion narratives of barbarians is misleading, and glosses over the survival of traditional lifeways and practices amongst new converts. The literature is extensive. See for discussion the classic account, Nock 1933, but also Mills and Grafton 2003 and Hefner 1993, which offer an excellent introduction to the main problems. In this chapter, 'conversion' is used for the sake of familiarity and convenience.

ignorance, replaced by one of 'civilizing' settlement and membership in the Christian commonwealth.[8] Yet very often Rome might in fact gain the expected political benefit: the conversion of the Arab chieftain Zokomos, Sozomen explains, turned his people into formidable foes of the enemies of Rome (**6.2**); after acceding to the demand of Mavia for a bishop, the Romans had found her people defending Constantinople (**1.26**).

While the Romans might derive benefits from newly Christian allies, Christianity also provided barbarians with some of the advantages of membership in, and association with, a powerful empire. Germanic Christians in western Europe, represented most famously perhaps by Clovis (who appears to have adopted Christianity in *c.*507), found military and political advantages in their choice. Anastasius conferred the consulate on Clovis, and the recognition of Constantinople gave a crucial measure of support to the growing authority of the Frankish king—although the Frankish adoption of Nicene Christianity (as opposed to the Arian form favoured by the Visigoths and the Vandals) certainly helped to provide for far better relations with Roman authorities.[9] In the East, Arabs similarly found that conversion could provide access to the resources and opportunities of the state. One Arab convert, Aspebetos, attained high rank in the religious establishment, becoming a bishop and attending the Council of Ephesus in 431 (**6.13**). In some cases, pretending allegiance to the faith could also be an effective ruse to win political gain, as with the case of Amorkesos, who fled the Persian empire in the late fifth century, appropriating the customs post of Iotabe and its tax revenue for a generation (**1.27**). In the sixth century the Jafnid family augmented their role as military allies of the state by playing an important role as mediators and power brokers in ecclesiastical affairs, further extending their powerful political base in the process (below).

As the Jafnids would find, some of the best opportunities for political advancement lay in the back and forth of the religious disputes of the empire. As noted in Ch. 1, the conflict between Mavia and Valens was, in the opinion of some Christian authors, related to tensions between Nicene and Arian interpretations of the faith. This friction allegedly provided Mavia with an excuse, based in a real or invented affront to her own Nicene beliefs and those of her people, to demonstrate her military prowess and cement her position.[10] In the fifth and sixth centuries, continuing disputes over the relationship between the divinity and the humanity in Christ saw a multitude of new, competing positions emerge.[11] Debates over this issue resulted in Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople (428–31), advancing a strongly Dyophysite (two-

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[8] Lim 2001: 198; MacMullen 1984: 25; MacMullen 1983: 180.
[9] Clovis: Sarris 2011: 122–4.   [10] Fisher forthcoming.
[11] See Millar 2013b and Beeley 2012 for a comprehensive analysis; Gray 2005; van Rompay 2005; Brock 1992.

nature) Christology; Nestorius himself was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Over the next 20 years further controversies erupted, and Marcian (450–7) convened the Council of Chalcedon in 451, hoping to end the damaging divisions in belief that threatened the internal security of the empire. The council again condemned the teaching of Nestorius, but also anathematized that of Eutyches, associated with an extreme version of the view that the human and divine existed in a single 'fusion' in Christ (Monophysitism or Miaphysitism; see below). Under pressure from Marcian to provide a solution, the bishops at the council offered an 'interpreted' version of the creed adopted at Nicaea, allocating two natures to Christ, with the addendum that he was 'in one person'. To those who supported Eutyches, this 'one person, two natures' formula seemed too close to what Nestorius had said, and, as a result, the definitive conclusion hoped for at Chalcedon did not in fact emerge, at least in the East; the western bishops, who became ardent supporters of Chalcedon, enjoyed greater consensus with imperial orthodoxy. But in the eastern provinces, Chalcedon's artful blurring of some key areas left a 'chasm', with supporters of the council on one side—Chalcedonians—and opponents, anti-Chalcedonians, on the other.[12] In the years to come, the Chalcedonian position would usually have the public backing of the emperor in Constantinople, while the anti-Chalcedonians would often find themselves opposed to the imperial establishment.

Many of the anti-Chalcedonians subscribed to a Christology advanced by Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria (412–44), who, in 431, had led the chorus against Nestorius' division of the human and divine natures of Christ. Cyril briefly softened his ideas in 433, but then soon hardened them with his *Second Letter* to Succensus that advanced his formulation of the 'one incarnate nature'. This unitary position, the 'mingling' of human and divine, has earned the 'ardent Cyrillians', anti-Chalcedonians, the moniker 'Miaphysite' in modern scholarship, a name derived from the Greek for 'one nature'. This label is problematic, as it obscures the spectrum of those who held to the belief of the 'one and single nature of Christ', including the so-called 'Real Monophysites', such as Eutyches, and the Miaphysites themselves, whose precise views seem to have differed. The term anti-Chalcedonian is also problematic, since, in theory, it also includes some hard-line Dyophysites. Both terms (Miaphysite, anti-Chalcedonian) have however become shorthand in current scholarship to describe opponents of the Council of Chalcedon, and, with the caveats presented here, are used here for the sake of familiarity and convenience.[13]

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[12] Cameron and Hoyland 2013: xvi–xvii; Gray 2005: 220–2.

[13] Gray 2005: 218, quote from 223; Bevan and Gray 2008–9 on Eutyches. See Winkler 1997 and 1999 (quote from 586) as well as Millar 2013b: 51–2, with a cautionary note about the use of 'Miaphysite'.

The emergence of the two positions—Chalcedonian and Miaphysite—gives the misleading impression that they constituted unified movements, incontrovertibly opposed to each other. In fact there were ardent individuals in both camps who resisted reconciliation, as well as those who worked equally obdurately to achieve it. These divergences could provoke domestic conflict; the Miaphysites, in particular, were often threatened by internal discord, and as different emperors variously persecuted the Miaphysites (Justin I, 518–27) or negotiated with them (Justinian, 527–65), it was sometimes a challenge to find individuals who could claim to be the credible representatives of the 'movement'.[14] This meant that for much of the sixth century the situation was fluid—especially when emperors sympathetic to the Miaphysites, such as Anastasius (491–518), were on the throne. The arrival on the scene of yet new interpretations of theology (Neo-Chalcedonians, Julianists, Tritheists) further clouded the situation, as did the fact that labels were flexible: each side might consider itself to be orthodox, continuing the traditions of the apostolic church. Both Chalcedonians and Persian Christians could be called, pejoratively, 'Nestorian', while they in turn could claim Miaphysites, and others, to be heretics.[15] Miaphysites were not necessarily disloyal to the Roman throne, especially since the attempts at reconciliation, often driven by Constantinople, endowed the Miaphysites with a kind of 'imperial approval'.[16] Only much later, when the consequences could be felt of the consecration of new Miaphysite bishops—which took place sometime after 542, and provided a hierarchy of bishops which could rival that of the Chalcedonians—and when the Miaphysite position hardened as negotiations with Justinian dragged on without a convincing result, did the 'chasm' between the two positions become something more difficult to bridge.[17] Yet when, in the late sixth century, a new Miaphysite church structure had emerged, spanning Syria and Egypt, even this did not provide a unified opposition to the Chalcedonians. Bitter disputes between rival Miaphysites would lead to a schism between the sees of Alexandria and Antioch, resolved only in 616 (**6.25–8**).[18]

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[14] To borrow the title of Frend 1972.   [15] Millar 2013b: 47.

[16] Van Rompay 2005: 252. Some of these attempts at negotiation are set out in Wood 2010a: 168–75, Gray 2005: 227–38, van Rompay 2005: 239–44; Allen 2000: 828–34 (post-Justinian) and Allen 1981. For neo-Chalcedonianism, see Gray 2005: 225–6. For Julianism and Tritheism, see van Rompay 2005: 252–4. Julianism (after Julian of Halicarnassus) was concerned with the corruptibility of Christ's human body, with Julian arguing against corruptibility, but opposed by the deposed Miaphysite patriarch of Antioch, Severus. See *DHGE* s.v. 'Gaianites' (M. Jugie) for further on the Julianists. The Tritheists argued that each person of the Trinity had their own substance and nature, an idea 'far removed from the core belief of Miaphysite Christianity' (van Rompay 2005: 254).

[17] Van Rompay 2005: 239.

[18] Van Rompay 2005: 252; Allen 2000: 825–31; Olster 1985.

Tensions between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites were fraught with ambiguities; prospects for reconciliation remained open for a considerable part of the sixth century. This fluid situation was ably exploited for political gain by the Jafnids, who, under Arethas/al-Ḥārith (528/9–69) and Al(a)moundaros/al-Mundhir (569–81/2), became leading patrons of the Miaphysites. They did so perhaps out of personal faith or opportunism, or a convenient mix of the two—or maybe, initially, for the straightforward reason that during the reign of Anastasius, Miaphysitism had spread to areas at the fringes of the empire, including the Arabian and Syrian frontiers. This was the region where the Jafnids appear to have entered the empire (cf. Ch. 5) and that they seem to have done so during the reign of Anastasius suggests that their association with Miaphysitism might be ascribed to pragmatism. When, under Anastasius' staunchly Chalcedonian successor, Justin I, the reassertion of imperial orthodoxy strengthened the anti-Chalcedonians along the frontiers, the Jafnids were presented with an opportunity which could be exploited by the dramatic increase in power granted by the 'elevation' of al-Ḥārith by Justinian (**5.15**). As powerful allies with the backing of the emperor, they were well placed to exploit the tenacity of the Miaphysites, as well as the ongoing uncertainty of the relationship between the Miaphysites and Chalcedonians which, by 527, had drifted back towards a programme of reconciliation under Justinian. It is clear that al-Ḥārith had been chosen for military reasons first and foremost, but it is likely that Justinian also had in mind a different kind of 'frontier security' which might be provided by a reliable link between Constantinople and the Miaphysites.

Supporting Miaphysitism offered a range of political benefits to the Jafnids. One such gain included the development of a power base amongst the Miaphysites, many of whom may have been Arabs who had arrived with the Jafnids.[19] However, due to their personal relationship with Justinian, and the fluidity and ambiguities of the religious environment of the sixth-century East, the Jafnids also retained their credibility in Constantinople. It was al-Ḥārith, for example, who was (seen to be) involved in the procurement from the Empress Theodora of new bishops for the Miaphysites in 542—Jacob Baradeus (hence, 'Jacobites')[20] and Theodore—accumulating significant prestige as a local patron in the process, and simultaneously bolstering his credentials with the imperial family as a reasonable and practical representative of the Miaphysites (**6.19**).[21] Indeed, al-Ḥārith and his son, al-Mundhir, won sufficient prominence amongst the Miaphysites to act as mediators, sometimes at imperial request, to assist in reconciliation efforts (**6.26**). The Christological disputes of the fifth and sixth centuries are thus critical to understanding one

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[19] For migration, see **8.1–3**; for the association of the Arabs with Miaphysitism, see Millar 2013b: 55–6.

[20] Millar 2013b: 54–6 on the term.   [21] Hoyland 2009a: 128.

of the pillars that supported the position of the Jafnids. In the writings of the Miaphysite bishop John of Ephesus, the family assumes an important role as a model of religious-political leadership for the Miaphysite community.[22]

In addition to their function as patrons of the Miaphysites, the Jafnid family also became supporters of the prominent martyr cult of St Sergius, which also gave them visibility and prominence in the Christian communities of the province of Arabia.[23] The cult was centred at the city of Ruṣāfa in *Euphratesia* (**4.7**), where Sergius was martyred.[24] The cult was popular throughout the East, appealing strongly to the Arabs,[25] and became closely associated with the Jafnid family. Available to both Miaphysites and Chalcedonians, its popularity throughout the regions where the Jafnids were active offered an important way for al-Ḥārith and his son, al-Mundhir, to further build their power. Below we examine several important examples of the Jafnid connection to St Sergius, including a mosaic inscription discovered by chance in Jordan in 2009 (**6.29–31**).

Religious disputes and different interpretations of Christology were not confined to the Roman empire. Christianity appears to have arrived in Persia through trade contacts with Rome, and there may have been Christians in the Parthian state since the very late second century, on the testimony of *The Book of the Laws of the Countries*, composed in the school of Bardaisan in Edessa. Third-century conflict between Rome and Persia, resulting in the wholesale deportation of Roman civilian populations, may have strengthened Christianity's foothold in what had then, at the end of the 220s, evolved into Sasanian Persia.[26]

Christians in Persia became part of a pluralist religious landscape that placed Zoroastrianism, closely identified with many of the Sasanian rulers, at its core. A major persecution of Christians under Shapur II in 344–79, the memory of which was upheld in the hagiographies of Persian martyrs, was followed by a reconciliatory approach by Yazdegerd I (399–420). In 410 a key synod was convened at Seleucia-Ctesiphon that provided the genesis for the Church of the East.[27] Borrowing from Roman models during a period of détente between Rome and Persia, a hierarchy of bishops was created, grouped in metropolitan provinces under the authority of the *catholicos* of Seleucia-Ctesiphon; further councils followed, along with an expansion of Christian

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[22] Wood 2010a, esp. ch. 7.
[23] We use here the more familiar Latinized version of the name, rather than 'Sergios'.
[24] Fowden (E. K.) 1999.   [25] Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 38–9; Theoph. Sim. *Hist.* 5.1.7.
[26] Walker 2012: 998.
[27] See Walker 2012: 995–1000; Daryaee 2013: 69–99; Shaked 2008: 103–18; Cameron and Hoyland 2013: xxi. On persecution, Walker 2012: 995, 1000–3, Walker 2006: 109–12. On the Synod of 410, the organization of the church, and the agenda of Yazdegerd, see Wood 2012a: 58–62; Rist 1996.

communities to the edges of the Persian empire, including the eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula.[28] While relations between Persian rulers and Christian clergy could be close, they were not always straightforward. For example, the later invasion by Khusrau II of the Roman empire in 603 caused conflict amongst his Christian advisors, and, as the martyr legends such as that of Mar Qardagh show, the memory of periods of persecution stimulated the widespread production of martyr literature.[29]

Persian Christianity differed from Roman Chalcedonian orthodoxy in its adherence to a two-nature, 'Dyophysite' theology, developed from the teachings of Theodore of Mopsuestia. Christians who followed this theology earned the misleading label 'Nestorian', after Nestorius, who worked within the tradition of Theodore of Mopsuestia, as well as Diodore of Tarsus (the 'Antiochene School').[30] The 'orthodoxy' of the Church of the East, grounded in Diophysitism, placed those Christians who adhered to it in opposition to both Chalcedonians and Miaphysites. Rivalry between the different groups (predominantly with the Miaphysites) earned a highly charismatic Persian preacher, Simeon of Beth Arshām, the title 'the debater' for his defence of Miaphysitism.[31] The success of preachers like Simeon helped to create a Miaphysite foothold in Persia, a trend reflected in the consecration of Miaphysite clergy such as the bishop of Tikrīt, Aḥūdemmeh (6.35–40).

The 'East Syrian' clerical hierarchy faced threats to orthodoxy from heresy, schism, political divisions, and periods of persecution orchestrated by the state. The problems faced by the Church of the East differed from those in the Roman empire, and 'becoming' Christian in Persia did not have the same political ramifications that it sometimes did further west. Nevertheless, there were important religious ties between the Persian and Roman empires.[32] One key association was found in the veneration accorded in both Rome and Persia to St Sergius—'the most efficacious saint in Persia'.[33] Churches and monasteries of the saint were dedicated in the western part of the Persian empire, and Aḥūdemmeh engaged in strenuous efforts to divert attention away from the primary shrine to Sergius at Ruṣāfa, by providing a replacement closer to

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[28] Walker 2012: 1003–6; Wood 2012a: 57; Walker 2006: 94–102; Debié 2010. On sites in the Gulf and eastern Arabia, see Beech 2009; Elders 2001; Hellyer 2001; King 1997; Potts 1994; see too Beaucamp and Robin 1983. Cf. Payne 2011b; the older summary in Trimingham 1979: 159–61 remains useful.

[29] McDonough 2001; Walker 2006: 88; Payne 2011a; Walker 2010.

[30] Millar 2013b: 46, Brock 1996, and Walker 2012: 1009 on the inaccuracy of the term 'Nestorian' to describe East Syrian Christians. For the development of East Syrian theology, see Miller 1984.

[31] Millar 2013b: 46; Walker 2006: 94; van Rompay 2005: 257. See the biography of Simeon in Joh. Eph. *Lives* (*PO* 17, 137–58).

[32] Wood 2012a.

[33] Theoph. Sim. *Hist.* 5.14.3, quoted by Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 120; cf. Fiey 1961.

home.[34] (The Sasanian king Khusrau II was also linked closely with the cult, dedicating two offerings to Sergius in 591 and 593.[35]) The involvement of Aḥūdemmeh with the cult of St Sergius, which helped to enlarge his reach amongst Arab populations of the Jazīra, also reflects the expanding pattern of Miaphysite footprints in the borderlands of both empires, and these connections constituted an important part of the growing identity of the Miaphysites as a confessional community within the late antique East. This identity was increasingly expressed in Syriac texts, such as the biographies of saints and the *Ecclesiastical History* of John of Ephesus, which recounted the history of the Miaphysite 'orthodox' in the face of oppression and persecution.[36]

Within this complex religious environment, the Arab allies of the Persian empire, the 'Naṣrids', appear to have remained pagan for almost their entire tenure. Their decision to avoid too open a public link with Christianity might be explained by their close relationship with the Sasanian rulers, links between the Sasanians and Zoroastrianism, the involvement of the Naṣrids in the conflict with Rome, and finally the efforts by the Romans to interfere in Persian political life by portraying themselves as the defenders of the Christian faith.[37] There were, however, important connections between the Naṣrid leaders, the Christians of al-Ḥīra, and the Persian empire. While Roman authors demonize the Naṣrid leader al-Mundhir for his pagan atrocities (e.g. **5.10**) this is, as we see below, only part of the story (**6.41–4**).

Against the background briefly sketched here of a landscape of different understandings of Christianity which engendered both conflict and reconciliation, the broad link between religious confession and political allegiance, and the ties and tensions between Roman and Persian Christians, this chapter presents a diverse range of sources to illustrate the ways in which Arabs were attracted to, adopted, or remained aloof from Christianity. It focuses predominantly on contact between Christians and non-Christian Arabs of the frontier regions in the period between *c.*300 and 610.[38] The vast majority of our evidence for such interactions is derived from ecclesiastical histories and hagiographies produced in the Roman empire. These narratives frequently describe conversion as a process focused around a number of common elements, such as the meeting of hermits or monks with wandering Arabs,

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[34] *Aḥūd.* 4 (*PO* 3, 29); Sergius cult in Persia: Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 120–9, and the excellent map (2) illustrating the dispersion of Sergius sites throughout the East.

[35] Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 136.

[36] Millar 2013b: 87; ter Haar Romney 2012; also Wood 2012b: 186–90; Wood 2010a: 175–208 (on John of Ephesus); Hainthaler 2007: 106 and Fiey 1970: 128–31 on the biography of Aḥūdemmeh; see also van Rompay 2005: 260. On identity, note the cautious comments of Millar 2013b: 43–5, esp. 44.

[37] Walker 2012: 1014–15 on religious tensions at court and the efforts by Sasanian monarchs to deal with Roman attempts to suborn or otherwise influence Christians in the Persian empire.

[38] For an older but useful examination of the period before *c.*300 see Trimingham 1979: 41–85.

who, after meeting these holy men, renounced idol-worship or other forms of polytheism in favour of Christianity. The decision of many monks and hermits to live in the desert naturally facilitated their contact with those who also lived there, and made them likely agents of Christianization; indeed, Sozomen would note the role of monks as instrumental drivers of Arab Christianization.[39] Lying behind the rhetorically attractive vision of a wandering monk educating the barbarians of the wilderness also lay the very real extension of settlement into steppe and desert throughout the Roman eastern frontier regions. This had facilitated greater degrees of contact between the communities of villages and desert nomads than had previously taken place.[40] Whether because of settlement patterns or eremitic wanderings, though, monks and ascetics separated from urban-based power networks offered those in rural areas or in the desert access to a spiritual authority that was not grounded in the traditional social order represented by bishops and city officials. Such distance from city-based power structures might have appealed to those Arabs, and others, who made their homes in the rural borderlands between Rome and Persia.

Holy men of all kinds would emerge as important agents of Christianization. These men, 'the locus of the supernatural'[41] who offered local solutions to all sorts of problems and questions, acted as mediators and arbiters—half-way options between the Christian world and potential converts. After conversion, they mediated between Christians and a remote but beneficial God.[42] Holy men might also offer more practical forms of mediation, and, as we see in this chapter, their skill at negotiation found a parallel in the traditional functions of tribal chiefs, who were also arbiters, mediators, and negotiators. It is possible that this correspondence might have facilitated the conversion and baptism of chiefs and their tribes.[43]

According to a significant proportion of conversion stories, encounters between holy men and Arabs were sometimes followed by the 'building' of churches. While there is no compelling reason to think that such things did not take place from time to time, the significance of such acts can be over-dramatized, and need not be taken literally. The act of marking out a church, or adopting an altar in an encampment, could itself be represented by hagiographers and church historians as an 'Augustinian' conversion process—a literal turning away from a life of polytheistic 'ignorance' to an acceptance of the true faith, and might make for a useful literary device. The building of churches, or the sudden attachment of Arabs to churches following conversion, also

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[39] Soz. *HE* 6.34; Athanasius, *Ant.* 50 offers similar observations. See also Millar 2010b: 204; Millar 2005: 312; Fowden (E. K.) forthcoming, on the 'facilitators' of conversion.

[40] Tchalenko 1953–1958. Lenski 2011: 249–54 provides a concise summary.

[41] Brown 1971: 100.   [42] Brown 1971: 97–8; cf. Weingarten 2005: 108.

[43] See Fisher forthcoming.

represented a perceived transition from aimless wandering to civilized settle-
ment. Such an idea had long been evoked rhetorically as an essential factor in the
refining of those who were (rightly or wrongly) perceived to be nomads.[44]

What is particularly of interest, however, is that beyond the obvious literary
utility of images of settlement or convergence around churches for demon-
strating the ability of the Christian religion to cause people to adopt new
habits, Christian 'fixed points' such as martyria (churches dedicated to mar-
tyrs, usually to hold relics), village churches, and monasteries did in fact
emerge as important nodes of communication and community organization,
particularly in the rural frontier areas in Syria, Arabia, and the Jazīra. Such
points enabled local elites, including Arab leaders such as the Jafnids, to
demonstrate their largesse, display their benefactions, communicate with
people and solve problems, and meet with high-ranking officials. When the
Jafnid al-Mundhir wanted to re-join Roman service, he did so by meeting the
patrician Justinian at the shrine of St Sergius at Ruṣāfa (**5.30**); when he was
later deposed, it was at a bogus church consecration (**5.32**). The use of fixed
points for all sorts of communicatory purposes was not necessarily new, and
the types of Christian fixed points discussed in this chapter appear in other
contexts, and were not only associated with Arabs.[45] However, those who lived
in the desert were already accustomed to other types of fixed points, such as
supplies of water, which might also act as important loci of communication.
Such a place could function as a 'shared holy site, or *haram* . . . [a] point of
convergence where common ground, both literal and figurative could be
found seasonally'. Men with access to the supernatural had often been linked
with such places, and the re-imagining of these locales in a Christian context
in the late antique East reflects the flexibility with which the Arabs mapped the
'new identities' which arrived with conversion onto older ways of life.[46] Many
of the examples of how Arabs might demonstrate interest in Christianity thus
feature an engagement with rural martyria, shrines, and churches, and appear
regularly here, including in the hagiography of the bishop Aḥūdemmeh
(**6.35–40**), in that of St Euthymius (**6.13–15**), in the *Life* of Symeon the Stylite
(**6.8–11**), and in the example of the shrine of St Sergius at Ruṣāfa, patronized
by the Jafnid leader al-Mundhir (**6.29**). A further way in which the attention of
Arabs might be focused on Christianity after conversion includes the numer-
ous bishops 'of the Saracens' who appear in the acts of the councils and acted
as human 'fixed points', such as Auxilaos (Ephesus II, 449) and Ioannes and
Eustathius (Chalcedon), as well as Jacob Baradeus and Theodore in the sixth
century.[47]

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[44] Fisher 2011a: 34–71.
[45] Maas 2003 for examples of fixed points outside the context of this chapter.
[46] Fowden (E. K.) forthcoming; 2013.
[47] *ACO* 2.1.1 pp. 80, 185, 194, and *ACO* 2.1.1 pp. 59 and 64, discussed by Millar 2005: 302–3.

The examination of the sources begins below with several extracts focusing on the period before the sixth century, drawn from texts covering events in the Sinai, Palestine, Arabia, and Syria. These texts provide examples of the types of themes and ideas that appear in texts addressing the Christianization of Arabs, or in texts by Christian authors writing about the Arabs more generally (here there is some inevitable overlap with material covered in Chs 1 and 5). These texts deal with stereotypical and formulaic stories of conversion, miracles, frontier violence carried out by Arabs against monks and pilgrims, the role of holy men in facilitating conversion, ideas about settlement or organization around fixed points, as well as other matters considered important by Christian authors in late antiquity.[48] Many of these ideas reappear in the discussion of the sixth century which follows, dealing with the literary and epigraphic sources covering the activities of the Jafnids and Naṣrids in Rome and Persia. These include excerpts from John of Ephesus, material covering the cult of St Sergius, the biography of Aḥūdemmeh, and the tenth-century *Chronicle of Seert*. We also provide a brief examination of the attachment of an 'Ishmaelite' identity to Arabs, a theme which appears repeatedly throughout the texts discussed here.

ARABS AND CHRISTIANITY BEFORE THE SIXTH CENTURY

Miracles, Conversion, and Raiding

Jerome, who was born *c*.347, became a monk in 386, and died in Bethlehem in 419, was a man of prodigious literary output. His work is an important source for the interactions between holy men and Arabs.[49] His writings contain numerous references to Saracens—a people who (he said) lived in tents and herded camels, living off their meat and milk.[50] Here, in a story which contains a number of themes common to conversion stories, St Hilarion encounters Arabs in Elusa.

St Hilarion and the Arabs
[**6.1**] Jerome, *Life of St Hilarion* 16.1–12 (trans. Fisher)
[Hilarion] reached Elusa [south-west of the Dead Sea] as luck would have it on the very day on which an annual ceremony had gathered all of the people of the

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[48] Note that in the extracts here Arabs are typically referred to as 'Saracens' (Greek and Latin texts) or Ṭayyāyē (Syriac). See Ch. 1.

[49] Millar 2010a on Jerome's time in Palestine. For a comprehensive biography see Rousseau 2010; Williams 2006, esp. 25–62.

[50] Jer. *Comm. Es.* 5.21, *Ad. Jov.* 2.7; cf. *Comm. Am.* 5.25–7.

town in the temple of Venus. The nation of the Saracens is devoted to the cult, which they worship, however, as the Morning Star. Because of its location, the town itself is in the greatest part semi-barbarian. Therefore, having heard that Saint Hilarion was passing by—for he had cured men of the Saracens by freeing them from demons—they came out to him in flocks with their wives and children, bowing their heads and saying in Syria(c): 'Barech', that is, 'Bless us.' Receiving them pleasantly and with humility, he entreated with them to worship God, rather than idols.[51] At the same time, crying abundantly and looking at the heavens he promised them that if they believed in Christ, he would come to them frequently. Wonderful is the grace of God! They would not allow him to leave, before he laid out the plan of a future church. Their priest, as he was wreathed, he marked with the sign of Christ.

Jerome wrote the biography of St Hilarion in the last decade of the fourth century. It tells the story of how the young Hilarion, born in Palestine in *c*.290/1,[52] decided to withdraw into the desert to begin two decades of solitude. His prowess at miracle-making, however, ruined his dreams of a solitary life, and he—like many other holy men—became a celebrity. The story here contains some of the expected rhetorical elements: the liberation of the Arabs (speaking perhaps Nabataean Aramaic, not Arabic)[53] from possession, the public renunciation of idols, and the rejection of a past life. The 'plan of a future church' evokes the promise of a new focus around a fixed point, where Hilarion might minister to the spiritual needs of the Arabs and draw them into membership in the Roman Christian commonwealth. The 'star' mentioned here is usually associated with Aphrodite/Venus and Al-Allat or ʿUzzai, and appears elsewhere, such as in the works of Herodotus,[54] Jacob of Serug,[55] Isaac of Antioch (Ch. 1), Ps.-Zachariah (**5.10**), the *Chronicle of Seert* (**6.41**), Theodoret (**6.8**), and Procopius (**5.22**).[56] The 'idols' (Lat. *lapides*) might refer to the Nabataean worship of baetyl blocks (stone blocks, sometimes finished with a face, sometimes unworked).

Finally, the location of Elusa is interesting: Jerome describes it as a 'semi-barbarous town'. This could have many connotations: perhaps it also stood as a half-way option between Christian conversion and pagan 'ignorance'; or it could indicate that the population lived a semi-settled, semi-nomadic lifestyle. Though Elusa was located on the edge of settled society in an arid environment, it possessed a school of rhetoric and produced several famous

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[51] Perhaps a reference to Nabataean baetyls. See Ward 2014: 33–4.
[52] See Weingarten 2005: 106.
[53] Weingarten 2005: 114, *contra* Shahîd 1984b: 290–3. The word used by Jerome is *syra*, i.e. of Syria. See Millar 2005: 300.
[54] Hdt. 1.131–2.   [55] Jacob of Serug, *On the Fall of Idols*, lines 113–19.
[56] Weingarten 2005: 187 on Venus/ʿUzzai.

scholars.[57] Jerome, therefore, seems to be exaggerating the 'barbarous' nature of Elusa. It is worth keeping in mind that for those who read or heard such stories, the drama of conversion was accentuated by ascribing to the converts an uncivilized, 'nomadic' existence away from the cities and the villages of the empire, and this, in turn, heightened the stature of the Christian protagonist of the story.[58]

Freeing people from possession by evil spirits was one type of miracle; another was the healing of a seemingly permanent physical problem, as Sozomen explains:

> The conversion of Zokomos
> [**6.2**] Sozomen, *HE* 6.38 (trans. Hartranft, p. 375)
> Some of the Saracens were converted to Christianity not long before the accession of Valens [AD 364]. Their conversion appears to have been the result of their intercourse with the priests who dwelt among them, and with the monks who dwelt in the neighbouring deserts, and who were distinguished by their purity of life, and by their miraculous gifts. It is said that a whole tribe, and Zokomos, their chief, were converted to Christianity and baptised about this period, under the following circumstances. Zokomos was childless, and went to a certain monk of great celebrity to complain to him of this calamity; for among the Saracens, and I believe other barbarian nations, it was accounted of great importance to have children. The monk desired Zokomos to be of good cheer, engaged in prayer on his behalf, and sent him away with the promise that if he would believe in Christ, he would have a son. When this promise was accomplished by God, and when a son was born to him, Zokomos was baptised, and all his subjects with him. From that period this tribe was peculiarly fortunate, and became strong in point of number, and formidable to the Persians as well as to the other Saracens.

(For a brief biography of Sozomen, see **1.26**.) In this excerpt the healing miracle takes the form of restoring the fertility of a childless couple, and is carried out by a 'monk of great celebrity'. This characterization recalls the fame of St Hilarion, and anticipates perhaps the most famous holy man of all—Symeon the Stylite (**6.8–11**). The total conversion of Zokomos' people that followed the miracle, wielded by God through the agency of the unnamed monk, makes for a potent story about the ability of Christianity to solve serious problems. Also of note here is the connection between the adoption of Christianity and political loyalty to, and military service for, the Roman state, in opposition to Persia and the problems posed by other Arab tribes. The precise identity of Zokomos is unknown, although his name has been connected with Ḍujʿum, a name linked to the ruling clan of Salīḥ. The Arab-Islamic tradition (**8.29–30**) suggests that Salīḥ were the predecessors of

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[57] Weingarten 2005: 114–15 and Mayerson 1983, showing scepticism on Jerome's characterization of Elusa.
[58] Mayerson 1983: 248. See on this episode Klein forthcoming.

Ghassān and the Jafnids as Roman allies in the fourth and fifth centuries. It is perhaps possible that the story preserved here by Sozomen may reflect such a situation, but, as the argument mostly rests on the questionable equation of Zokomos and Ḍujʿum, this is speculative.[59]

Hagiographers and ecclesiastical historians were also interested in Arab raiding and the taking of prisoners.[60] Plundering and enslavement often played a part within the context of the Roman–Persian conflict (5.7–10), but, together with acts of frontier violence, brigandage could also appear to be random, or motivated by a desire for profit. For highwaymen and raiders of any sort, monasteries, pilgrims, and congregations presented 'soft' targets, while for Christian authors, the clash of 'heathen barbarian' and 'peaceful Christian' made for good rhetoric. Stories of Arab raids could be turned towards a didactic purpose, as in Jerome's hagiography of St Malchus:

> The capture of St Malchus
> [6.3] Jerome, *Life of St Malchus* 4–5 (trans. Fisher)
> On the way from Beroea to Edessa, there is a wilderness adjacent to the public road, through which Saracens with no certain home wander to and fro. Mistrust congregates crowds of travellers in this place, so that through mutual assistance, they might escape [this] looming danger. There were in my company men, women, old people, the young, the very small, about seventy in total. Suddenly, Ishmaelites on horses and camels assaulted us, with their locks of hair bound, their bodies half-naked, cloaks flowing out behind; quivers were hanging from their shoulders, and they brandished unstrung bows and carried long spears. For they had not come to fight, but to plunder. We were seized, scattered, and taken in different directions. I, meanwhile, at a late hour, repenting of my plan, and far from being the possessor of my inheritance, came to be assigned with another sufferer, a woman, to the service of one lord. We were led—no, indeed carried—high on a camel; and through a vast waste, fearing always our ruin, we clung to [the camel] rather than sat on it. Half-cooked meat was our food; and the milk of camels was our drink.
>
> At last, after crossing a great river, we reached the interior of the wasteland, where we bowed our head to the mistress and her children, being commanded (as was the custom of the people) to show our reverence. Here, as if confined in prison, after changing my dress, I learned to walk around naked. For the lack of temperance in the climate permitted us to cover only our modesty. Some sheep were given to me to look after as they grazed, and, in a way, I found comfort in this solitude, because I saw only rarely my masters or fellow slaves. I seemed to have a fate like that of Jacob, in sacred history, and it called to mind Moses, who were both formerly shepherds of flocks in the wilderness. I fed on fresh cheese and milk. I prayed constantly, and sang psalms which I had learned in the

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[59] Fisher 2011a: 40; Fowden (G.) 1993: 120; Shahîd 1984b: 274–7; Shahîd 1989b: 3–4; Trimingham 1979: 94–5; Fisher forthcoming.
[60] See now Lenski 2011.

monastery. I was delighted with my captivity, and gave thanks to God, because I had found the life of a monk—which I was on the verge of losing in my country—in the desert.

Jerome claimed to have met Malchus personally, who narrated to the author his 'ascetic struggle to subdue his own body and achieve complete sexual abstinence'.[61] Malchus, from Nisibis, chose chastity over family pressure to marry and have children, and he arrived in Chalcis, where he spent some time in a monastery. After suffering a change of heart (of sorts), he became determined to return home. It was on this journey that he was captured, triggering the events here.[62] Later on in the story Jerome goes on to say that Malchus was paired with the female captive who appears in the extract, inferring that, for the duration of his captivity, the intention of their captor was that he might form a relationship with her. This clearly presented Malchus with some difficulties, and in the end, after engaging in a subterfuge to convince their captor that they had indeed followed his wishes, the two managed to stage a spirited escape. Run to ground in a cave, they were saved by the (miraculous) intervention of a lioness who killed their pursuers.[63]

Understood as a 'credible rendition' of 'an actual lived experience', the story is noteworthy on a number of levels.[64] Jerome's reference to the Arab raiders as Ishmaelites specifically evoked for readers the captivity of Joseph in Gen. 37, as well as reminding them of the idea that the Arabs were linked, through descent, to Abraham (**6.49–53**).[65] The story also describes the skill and alacrity of the Arabs at raiding, a theme found throughout the extracts discussed in Ch. 5, and the prominence which the story attaches to the taking and maintenance of slaves offers an important clue to the organization and functioning of the social structure of Arab society in the desert. Faced with a poverty of resources in comparison to the villages and farms of the Syrian and Arabian steppe, Arabs could take slaves to obtain a source of free labour, as well as to earn income through ransom.[66] (Al-Mundhir, the Naṣrid leader, had earned a sizeable portion of his revenue from just such an activity.)

The story leaves some questions, however: it is by no means clear that the sort of segmented, clan-based social structure of the sort which the narrative offers (in its entirety) should be accepted as a genuine reflection of ancient Arab society, and other elements also deserve scrutiny, such as the idea of half-raw meat as food, milk the only drink, and the near-nudity of both the Arab raiders and the slaves.[67] The comment on food is particularly interesting: it reflects a view of the desert nomad found in a variety of sources, including Ammianus (**1.25**), a contemporary of Jerome.[68] Is there more to this than a

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[61] Weingarten 2005: 165.   [62] Jer. *Vit. Malchi* 3.1–4.   [63] Jer. *Vit. Malchi* 5.3–10.2.
[64] Lenski 2011: 238.   [65] Weingarten 2005: 177.   [66] Lenski 2011: 239.
[67] Weingarten 2005: 180–2.   [68] Shaw 1982.

simple stereotype? Weingarten suggests that on the basis of the Babylonian Talmud, half-cooked (or half-roasted) food might actually refer to an actual type of 'real local food', and so the story of Malchus might preserve a specific dietary choice of the Arabs who held him captive.[69] Comments from Christian perspectives about 'impure' food which appear in the *Life of Symeon the Stylite the Younger* (**6.12**) and the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian (**6.21**) reinforce the possibility that Arabs might have consumed a specific type of food which could have held a cultural (or even a religious?) significance deemed objectionable by Christians. Given later Islamic dietary prohibitions, and the connection made between Jewish dietary traditions and the Arabs by Sozomen (**6.52**), it is tempting to speculate that comments on food such as those offered here preserve something beyond the stereotype.

Also of interest is another aspect of the seemingly stereotypical behaviour of the Saracens of both Jerome and Ammianus—their nudity, sexuality, and the connection with the goddess Aphrodite/Venus. From a literary standpoint, the 'oversexed' Saracens form a neat counterpoint to Malchus' desperate struggles to remain chaste. Sexuality here fights with chastity, as the barbarism of the Saracens could be polarized against the 'good' values of Roman society. We do not know much about how Saracens dressed, beyond the bald comments offered by Jerome and others, but the practicalities of living in a hot climate suggest that minimal clothing could have a less sensational explanation. Weingarten has demonstrated that Jerome's hagiography is constructed from a complex literary combination of topoi, stereotypes, and reality, and while it can be difficult to identify the reality beneath the stereotypes, it is clear that not everything in this passage should be dismissed as fabrication.[70]

The narratives preserved in the text of Ps.-Nilus, dealing with the Sinai, offer similar themes and observations:

Customs of the barbarians
[**6.4**] Ps.-Nilus, *Narrationes* 3.1–4 (trans. Caner, pp. 94–6)
'The aforesaid nation [of Barbarians] inhabits the desert extending from Arabia to Egypt's Red Sea and the River Jordan. They practise no craft, trade, or agriculture at all, but use the dagger alone as their means of subsistence. They live by hunting desert animals and devouring their flesh, or else get what they need by robbing people on roads that they watch in ambush. If neither is possible and their provisions run out, then they consume pack animals—they use camels called dromedaries—for food. Theirs is a bestial and bloodthirsty way of life. Killing one camel per clan or cluster of tents, they soften its flesh with heat from a fire only insofar as it makes it yield to their teeth without having to be too forcefully torn. In a word, they eat like dogs.

'They know no god abstractly conceived or materially hand-crafted, but bow down instead to the Morning Star. When it appears on the horizon they offer to it

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[69] Weingarten 2005: 180–1.   [70] Weingarten 2005: 189; Lenski 2011: 237–9.

the best of their spoils, if anything suitable for sacrifice falls into their hands from their bandit raids.'

Barbarian raids on Mt. Sinai
[**6.5**] Ps.-Nilus, *Narrationes* 4.1–9 (trans. Caner, pp. 103–5, excerpts)
'It was against men of such character [i.e. the monks] and so attentive to the divine that the phalanx of Barbarians fell so suddenly and unexpectedly, like a squall out of nowhere. The lawless ones attacked at break of dawn, just when the reverent ones had finished their sacred hymns. I happened to be there too with my boy, having come down from the Holy Mountain to visit the holy ones in [the church of] "the Bush", as long had been my habit. They ran at us howling like mad dogs, shouting incomprehensibly as they plundered. They seized the food that had been gathered for the winter—for [the monks] set aside to dry whatever fruit can be preserved for that purpose—making us collect it and carry it ourselves. Then they led us out of the church. After stripping off our ragged cloaks, they ordered the oldest among us to line up, naked, for execution.

'Next, some Barbarians nearby drew their swords, utterly enraged, eyes ablaze and glancing from side to side. They ordered the celebrant of the holy place to stretch out his neck first. The two men [standing] beside him did not strike at once, but took turns hacking away at his upper back from either side. The victim did not cry in pain, twist his face, or show any sign of anguish. All he said, as he sealed himself, was "Blessed be the Lord", with a whisper from his mouth . . .'

Little is known about the author of these two passages: by the tenth century, the *Narrationes* had been attached to the texts of Nilus of Ancyra because of a relatively minor similarity to Nilus' *Letter* about the martyr Plato, who had rescued two monks in the Sinai. Most scholars now reject this association, hence the name Ps.-Nilus.[71] The date of composition is also debated, with scholars suggesting fourth-, fifth-, or sixth-century dates.[72] The tale is told as an eyewitness account about the author and his son, Theodoulos, both of whom were monks at Mount Sinai.[73]

The *Narrationes* describe several 'barbarian' attacks on the monks of the Sinai, with the inference that the perpetrators were Arabs. The initial attack occurred at Mount Sinai, where it seems that there was a substantial (if disorganized) community of ascetics. The rampage continued throughout the Sinai to include attacks on a pilgrim caravan and several isolated monks.[74] There is no proof that this source describes a historical attack, and in fact the text is clearly influenced by Graeco-Roman novels, such as Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*, from which entire sentence constructions are

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[71] Mayerson 1975: 107–8; Devreesse 1940: 220–2; Gatier 1989: 518; Caner 2002; Link 2005; see discussion in the translation of Caner, p. 75.
[72] Heussi 1917: 154; Mayerson 1963: 161; Mayerson 1975: 105; Devreesse 1940: 220–2; Shahîd 1984b: 134–9; Gatier 1989: 520–1; Grossman 2001: 182; discussion in the translation of Caner, pp. 75–6.
[73] See Christides 2012.
[74] Cf. attacks on other monasteries, e.g. Cyr. Scyth. *Vit. Abram.* 1 (*c.*491).

copied.[75] Nevertheless, the author appears well informed about the topography of the region, though he could have obtained this data from other sources.[76]

The first passage echoes traditional Graeco-Roman descriptions of the Saracens and nomadic peoples in general, while the description of human and camel sacrifice which follows (not quoted here) also parallels other ancient sensationalist accounts (**5.10**).[77] As with the other ethnographic passages recounted throughout this volume, it is hard to separate descriptions of a rhetorical impulse from actual historical information.[78] Just as Jerome uses Elusa and Ishmaelites as a foil to enhance the spiritual power of Hilarion and Malchus, Ps.-Nilus employs graphic language in the second passage to demonstrate the suffering of the monks at the hands of the 'lawless ones', further increasing the monks' authority.[79]

The next passage, from the *Relatio* of Ammonius, offers another perspective on the tensions between monks and Arabs in the Sinai.

> Further Saracen raiding
> [**6.6**] Ammonius, *Relatio* 3–5 (trans. Caner, pp. 151–2, excerpts)
> After a few days a multitude of Saracens suddenly fell upon us, because the one who was in possession of the phylarchy had died. All of those whom they found in the surrounding dwellings, they killed, but those whom they did not find escaped to the stronghold as soon as they heard the uproar. With them went the holy father superior . . .
> . . . They killed all whom they captured at Gethrambē . . . as well as at . . . the rest of the places near the Holy Mountain. They reached us also, and in a short time would have killed us too, since no one opposed them. But God who loves mankind, who always extends His hand to those who call on Him with their whole mind, commanded a great flame to appear at the top of the Holy Mountain summit. We saw the whole mountain smoking, and fire rising up to heaven. We all began to tremble and faint with fear at the sight. We threw ourselves on our faces and made obeisance to the Lord, pleading for Him to make our present straits turn out for the best. When the Barbarians saw that incredible spectacle, they all cowered and fled in an instant. Most of them even left their weapons and camels behind, unable to endure for another moment that turn of the scales.

The monk Ammonius claimed (in a passage not quoted here) that he had made a pilgrimage from Egypt to Jerusalem and Mount Sinai in the late fourth century. Despite this statement, many scholars believe that this text was

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[75] Caner 2002; Link 2005. Ward 2014: 103–5.
[76] Solzbacher 1989: 228; Caner 2002: 138; discussion in the translation of Caner, pp. 76–7.
[77] Frankfurter 2001: 365–7; Lenski 2011: 256–8; see Hoyland 2001: 166. Ward 2014: 35–8.
[78] Christides 1973; Gatier 1989: 517–19; Lenski 2011: 256–8.
[79] Shahîd 1989b: 138; discussion in the translation of Caner, p. 120 n. 172.

fabricated by monks at Mount Sinai in the sixth century.[80] This scepticism arises partly from the fact that the *Relatio* comprises two different narratives. In the first narrative, the author writes in the first person and presents a supposed eyewitness account of events, but the second narrative is narrated in the third person. This second account is more detailed than the first-person, 'eyewitness' account.

The passage quoted here describes an attack on Mount Sinai, where 40 martyrs were killed (this was the same number of monks said to have been killed in the nearby community of Rhaithou, by Blemmyes). The violence at Mount Sinai broke out when the Saracen leader, who had held the position of phylarch, died. The passage mentions the legends which became associated with Mount Sinai, which other authors, such as Procopius, also reported. These legends included supernatural phenomenon (lighting, thunder, fires, smoke) that prevented individuals from spending the night on the summit.[81] Some scholars have noted the similarities of this story to the revolt of Mavia (**1.26**) and point to the inclusion of a monk named Moses (below) for support.[82]

A miraculous conversion
[**6.7**] Ammonius, *Relatio* 12–14 (trans. Caner, pp. 155–6, excerpts)
Moses had been a monk since an early age—for he was also a native of that place, having originated from Pharan. He passed seventy-three years in the monastic life, living on the mountain in a cave not far from the assembly place. He was truly like a second Elijah, for everything he asked God for was given to him. The Lord performed a great many healings through him, having granted him dominion over unclean spirits, so that he cured many, and made Christians of nearly all the lay folk who were within the confines of the Ishmaelites and dwelled in the regions of Pharan. When they saw the many prodigies and signs performed by him, they believed in the Lord and went forth to the holy, universal church to be privileged with Holy Baptism. It was said that by Christ's grace he delivered many from the sickness of unclean spirits . . .

'During the Holy Forty a man named Obedianus, the leading citizen among the pagans, came under the control of an unclean spirit and was brought from Pharan to him for a cure. As he approached the old man's cell and was about a stade away, that wicked, unclean spirit made him shake and howl aloud, "What violence! not even for a moment did I manage to interrupt the regimen of that evil old man!" And with these words he came out of the person. In this way they all became worthy of Holy Baptism. I could say many other things about him, but I will keep silent, since now is not the appropriate moment to tell them.'

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[80] Tillemont 1706: 7.574; Devreesse 1940; Mayerson 1980b; Solzbacher 1989: 231–5, 242; Gatier 1989: 514–17; Grossman 2001: 178–81; discussion in the translation of Caner, pp. 143–9.
[81] Proc. *Aed.* 5.8.7–8.
[82] Devreesse 1940; Solzbacher 1989: 231–3; discussion in the translation of Caner, pp. 144–5; Lenski 2011: 252.

In this passage Obedianus and the Pharanites are converted by Moses in a similar fashion to Zokomos and his tribe (**6.2**). Shahîd and others have suggested that the Moses who appears in this passage may be the same individual mentioned in the reports of Mavia's revolt, though this is not entirely clear.[83] Shahîd has argued that the Pharanites were Arabs who had settled at the site of Pharan.[84] Later in the text (not quoted here) Ammonius describes the aftermath of a raid by barbarians—Blemmyes—who stand and fight the 'Ishmaelites' from Pharan, when their escape route is cut off.[85] The defeat of the Blemmyes at the hands of the Pharanites—who then honour the fallen martyrs—demonstrates the effectiveness of the conversion, and from this perspective the link between military fortitude and Christian belief reflects the conversion story of Zokomos. It is also noteworthy that the Pharanites are called 'Ishmaelites', a term used by other authors such as Theodoret and Sozomen to describe Arabs (below).

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The Arabs and Symeon the Stylite

The figure of the Christian holy man stands out in many of the stories discussed here. Hagiographies emphasize the charismatic appeal such men possessed in the eyes of potential converts, a description that is further rendered credible by the clear interest in holy men and soothsayers attested in the early Islamic sources.[86] While figures such as St Hilarion and St Malchus achieved a fame of their own, the most important of these Christian holy men was the Syrian pillar saint, Symeon the Stylite (d. 459).[87]

Symeon was the first of his kind—a new ascetic phenomenon that developed in northern Syria around his village of Telanissos, and spread rapidly across the Christian world.[88] His cult was an international phenomenon that attracted pilgrims, including many Arabs, from across the Roman empire and beyond. Symeon's *Life* is attested in three different versions, two in Greek and one in Syriac. These are very different in tone: the Syriac *Life* presents Symeon as a divinely inspired prophet, while the Greek text of the bishop Theodoret of

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[83] See Shahîd 1984b: 152–8, 299–300; discussion in the translation of Caner, pp. 144–5.

[84] Shahîd 1984b: 300–2 suggests that Obedianus is the Greek form of the Arabic name ʿUbayd (or ʿUbayda).

[85] Ammonius, *Relatio* 33–7.

[86] Emphasized by Hainthaler 2012: 43, discussing Shahîd 1989b: 19. See too Fowden (E. K.) forthcoming; Hoyland 2001: 157–62; Eickleman 1969: 25–6; Serjeant 1962.

[87] 'The Elder', to distinguish him from Symeon 'The Younger' (**6.12**).

[88] On the geographical distribution of stylitism see Peña et al 1987. For the agricultural context in which Symeon was established, Tchalenko 1953–8; for discussions of the effect of Symeon on his Arab clients, see Charles 1936: 36–8.

Cyrrhus tends to portray the saint's advice as the result of his ascetic behaviour. However, their treatment of the Arabs is broadly consistent: in all the texts the Arabs have been attracted from far and wide, and Symeon impresses their leaders with spectacular miracles that prompt them to convert. In some respects, Symeon is a human avatar of the more usually inanimate fixed point in the landscape: a place where people gathered to receive his blessing, be cured of their ailments, and communicate with one another.

Theodoret, born *c*.393 in Antioch, was the author of a range of saints' lives and theological works; he also wrote an ecclesiastical history. Raised alongside monks, he chose a monastic life in 416, and then became Bishop of Cyrrhus in 423. An attendee at the Council of Ephesus in 431, he gained some notoriety by defending Nestorius before subsequently, under some pressure, changing his mind. Later Theodoret emerged as an opponent of the Miaphysites, and lost his position as bishop before being reinstated through the Council of Chalcedon (451). The three texts below are drawn from Theodoret's *Religious History*, a compendium of monks' lives written in 444 and based, in many cases, on first-hand experience.[89]

In his *Life* of Symeon, Theodoret describes how people came to him in droves.[90] Shortly afterwards, Theodoret turns to the experience of the Arab pilgrims (whom like Jerome he refers to as Ishmaelites):

> Ishmaelites and idols
> [**6.8**] Theodoret, *Life of Symeon* 13 (trans. Price, pp. 166–7)
> The Ishmaelites, arriving in companies, two or three hundred at the same time, sometimes even a thousand, disown with shouts their ancestral imposture; and smashing in front of this great luminary the idols they had venerated and renouncing the orgies of Aphrodite—it was this demon whose worship they had adopted originally—they receive the benefit of the divine mysteries, accepting laws from this sacred tongue and bidding farewell to their ancestral customs, as they disown the eating of wild asses and camels.

Theodoret informs the reader that he was himself a witness to these events, and even notes that Symeon was forced to shout at the Arab pilgrims to prevent them from mobbing the bishop as he stood in Symeon's sanctuary. Theodoret goes on to describe how Symeon cured a paralysed chief of the 'Saracens', and how he healed a number of other Arab leaders. The next section is probably a later interpolation, but it is still indicative of the kind of role played by stylites as the guarantors of oaths.

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[89] On Theodoret, see Treadgold 2010: 155–64; Wood 2010a: 62–3; Fisher 2011a: 37; Urbainczyk 2002: 95–103; Chestnut 1986: 207–14. See commentaries on the text by Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen and see Canivet 1977, esp. the map at 25–6. On Qalʿat Samʿān and the pilgrimage site that developed around Symeon's column, see Canivet 1977: 175–7.

[90] Theod. *V. Sim.* 11.

The Ishmaelite and the bird
[**6.9**] Theodoret, *Life of Symeon* 18 (trans. Price, p. 168)
It happened that another miracle occurred in no way inferior to the preceding. A not undistinguished Ishmaelite, who was one of those who had found faith in the saving name of Christ the Master, made prayer to God with Symeon as the witness, and a promise as well: the promise was to abstain thereafter till death from all animal food. At some time he broke this promise, I know not how, by daring to kill a bird and eat it. But since God chose to bring him to amendment by means of a reproof and to honor His servant who had been the witness of the broken promise, the flesh of the bird was changed in nature to stone, with the result that not even if he wanted to was he now able to eat—for how was it possible, since the body which he had got hold of for eating had been petrified? Astounded by this extraordinary sight, the barbarian repaired to the holy man with great speed, bringing to light his secret sin . . .

Like other holy men, Symeon was famous for his miracles:

An Ishmaelite queen
[**6.10**] Theodoret, *Life of Symeon* 21 (trans. Price, p. 170)
The queen of the Ishmaelites, being sterile and longing for children, first sent some of her highest officials to beg that she become a mother, and then when she obtained her request and gave birth as she had wished, took the prince she had borne and hastened to the godly old man. Since women are not allowed access, she sent the baby to him together with a request to receive blessing from him.

In these three texts, Symeon applies cures for sterility (cf. **6.2**), maintains religious oaths that surrounded dietary practices, and supervises the destruction of 'pagan' idols. There is no sense of Symeon acting as a catechist, and, for all the presentation of the instantaneous nature of the Christian conversions of the Arabs, it may be better to assume that Symeon fulfilled much older Arab expectations about the blessing of a holy man.[91] Indeed, ceremonies such as baptism may have simply been assumed to pertain to a particular devotion to Symeon, rather than a wider sense of a Christian religion. Still, the impression they give of Symeon's fame deep into the desert world is probably credible.

The insistence on a change in the diet of converts may reflect sedentary prejudice: eating camel meat seems to have been something of a symbolic division between nomadic and sedentary populations, and the same issue appeared in the story of St Malchus, and again below. But the idea that a new religious affiliation would bring different dietary requirements was probably not an alien one for many Arabs: the dietary requirements of different religious groups may have been an important part of the political functions of Arabian religion, where alliances were cemented by feasting on holy days.[92]

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[91] Trombley 1993: 164–6, comparing Symeon's blessings to the requests found in Safaitic inscriptions.
[92] Hoyland 2001: 166.

Similarly, dietary rules were an important requirement made for new converts, later, to Islam.

Theodoret does not dwell on the political significance of the pilgrimages and conversions of the Arabs, but it is apparent from the Syriac *Life of Symeon* that the saint's influence, and Roman Christianity in general, bolstered Roman authority in the borderlands with Persia (as it did in the Caucasus too: Armenians living under Persian rule were also clients of Symeon).[93] The following scene was composed as part of Symeon's Syriac saint's life, written in the third quarter of the fifth century.[94] It is placed in the mouth of an important pilgrim to the shrine, Antiochus, son of Sabinus,[95] who tells the story to other pilgrims to demonstrate the extent of Symeon's power, and the veiled threat it posed to the authority of a certain al-Nuʿmān (Naaman), who appears here as an Arab ally of the Persians.[96]

Symeon and al-Nuʿmān
[**6.11**] Syriac *Life* 67 (trans. Doran, pp. 146–7)
For Antiochus, son of Sabinus, came to him when he was made prefect in Damascus and said to his holiness before everyone, Naaman came up to the desert near Damascus and made a feast to which he invited me. At that time there was no hostility between him and the Romans. While we were dining he brought up the affair of the saint and said to me, 'This person whom you call Mar Simeon, is he a god?' I replied, 'He is not a god but a servant of God.' So Naaman again said to me, 'When reports of the saint reached us, some of our Arabs began to go up to him. Then the chiefs of our camp came and said to me, "if you allow them to go up to him, they will become Christians and follow the Romans. They will defy you and desert you." So I sent to summon and gather all the camp and said to them, "If anyone dares to go up to Simeon, I will take off with the sword his head and the heads of his family." After I had given the command and dismissed them, at midnight as I was sleeping in the tent I saw a splendid man whose like I have never seen. There were five others with him. When I saw him my heart fell, my knees shook and I fell down and worshipped him. Angrily and severely he said to me, "Who are you to prohibit the people of God?" He commanded four of them and they stretched him out by his hands and feet while one gave him a severe and cruel beating. There was no one to deliver him from his hands until he wished to have mercy on me and he ordered to release me. Then he unsheathed a sword which he was carrying and showed it to me and solemnly swore, "If you again dare to prevent even one man from praying at the house of Mar Simeon, with this sword I will cut off your limbs and those of all your family." So I rose up in the morning and gathered all the camp and said to them, "Whoever wishes to go up to the house of Mar Simeon to pray and to become a Christian, let him go without

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[93] Greatrex forthcoming. For the role of Christianity in Roman foreign policy in the fifth-century East see Blockley 1992: 140–3.
[94] The manuscript is dated by colophon to 473, and is the first known dated Syriac manuscript written west of the Euphrates. See Hatch 2012: V.
[95] *PLRE* II: 104 (Antiochus 9), as *dux Phoenices*.   [96] Rothstein 1899: 68–9.

fear or fright."' He also said to me, 'Were it not that I am servant of the Persian king, I also would go up and become a Christian. For from that frightful beating it was more than a month before I could stand up and go outside. I ordered churches and bishops and priests to be in my camp, and I said, "Whoever wants to become a Christian, let him do so without fear; and whoever wants to be a heathen, that is his own business."' Whoever heard him relating the story gave praise to God who so expanded the exploits of his worshippers everywhere.

Antiochus portrays al-Nuʿmān as a tyrannical figure who is laid low by the power of the saint. At the same time, the Arab is also characterized by his ignorance: he immediately thinks of Symeon in terms of his own polytheistic beliefs. Neither description needs to be seen as realistic, as the author's objective is to show Symeon's greatness. But the presentation of Symeon's column as a site of pilgrimage and miracle-working that encourages conversion would fit well with the treatment of the *ḥaram* in pre-Islamic Arabia, where the shrines were sites of political truce and trade. Here then is another indication of how Christian 'fixed points' could be made compatible with older, traditional structures of Arab life.

Al-Nuʿmān's expectation that religious affiliation will correspond to political allegiance also seems to be a reasonable one; as we have seen, it is a leitmotif of other hagiographies that describe Arab conversion in the fifth century. But the hagiography exaggerates in imagining that this was the first time that churches were built in al-Ḥīra. The city had 'Nestorian' bishops from at least the 410s (**4.9**, and see section 'The Naṣrids and Christianity in al-Ḥīra').[97] Perhaps al-Nuʿmān's distrust of Symeon was rooted as much in his location in Roman territory, and the threats such inter-provincial ties posed to his authority, as in his Christianity.

The hagiography of another Symeon, 'the Younger', contains a rather curious story about the death of al-Mundhir, the Naṣrid leader. Symeon, from Antioch, lived between 521 and 592, and is also known from Evagrius, who offers a eulogy for him and discusses some of his miracles.[98] The authorship of the text is uncertain.[99]

The death of al-Mundhir (AD 554)
[**6.12**] *Life of Symeon the Stylite the Younger* 186–7/pp. 165–6 (trans. Fisher)
There was a phylarch of the Saracens, of those who were dependent on the empire of the Persians, whose name was Alamoundaros. He was a pagan, bloodthirsty, and bringing cruelty on all, he submitted the Christians whom he had taken prisoner to a thousand evils. He taunted them terribly, and let them die in chains, from hunger and a number of other punishments and various tortures; he forced them to pollute themselves by eating unclean meats and by participating in the

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[97] *Syn. Or.* 35.   [98] Evag. *HE* 5.21, 6.23.
[99] See van den Ven's introduction to his translation of the *Life*, vol. 1, 101.

cults of demons. He carried on this way for a number of years, and nobody fought against him. It happened that during this time Roman envoys came down to Khusrau [I] king of the Persians, to negotiate for peace. Alamoundaros, who was a man of great stature, was there in the presence of the king and the ambassadors, blaspheming and taking the name of the Lord in vain, and showing off his body. He praised himself, saying 'For so many years I have destroyed the Christian people, and not even an arrow has hit me. I will take up arms again, and from now on there will no longer be any men living in their towns or in the country, because I will seize all of them and I will kill them all before me, both big and small.' And not long afterwards, having rounded up his soldiers, he went up against the frontiers of the Romans, exulting in his great army and his power, and all of the inhabitants of the East were greatly concerned. Then Symeon, the servant of God, went into a trance and had a vision which he told to us, saying:

'In my vision today, I was lifted up by the Spirit, and I found myself on a small hill, near the frontiers of the Saracens, Persians, and Romans, and I was in the middle of an encampment of soldiers and Saracens where Arethas, the phylarch of the Romans, had his camp. And I saw in front of me a mass of horsemen who were coming with Alamoundaros the tyrant, as numerous as the stars in the sky, and the grains of sand next to the sea, and a great fear fell on the soldiers of Arethas, and the nerves of their arms began to fail. And in front of my eyes, the battle began, the formations clashed, and Alamoundaros had the power to destroy all. The Spirit of strength was with me, bearing a ball of fire and, at my prayer, he threw it at his [Alamoundaros'] head and knocked him to the ground. Be full of confidence, my children, because today the Lord has delivered a great salvation to all of the East.' Following this, we noted amongst ourselves the time and the hour when Symeon had told these things to us. In the week which followed, news of the victory came to the great city of Antioch. The news indicated how the impious Alamoundaros had been beaten on the very day and at the time when the saint had said. Afterwards several Roman soldiers arrived, and they confirmed that in this battle which had taken place opposite the hill, which the saint had spoken about, they had found themselves in a desperate situation and, having prayed to the servant of God, they had clearly understood that God had carried out this great benefaction through him. Furthermore, they told about everything which took place during the battle. Some of them even remained with the saint until they died. And we, with all of the ones who had heard [what happened] remembered everything that Symeon had said [in his] prophecy, and we praised God who had revealed to his servant saint the things which had taken place far away as well as those which [had taken place] close by. From that point the whole of the East, having obtained peace, lived in a great tranquillity.

This excerpt provides a more detailed version of Arethas/al-Ḥārith's defeat of his Naṣrid enemy, which differs distinctly from the bald accounts discussed in Ch. 5 (**5.23**). The differences can be explained partly by the focus placed on Symeon as the protagonist; the death of al-Mundhir underscores his greatness. The impiety and arrogance of al-Mundhir, carefully built up in the passage,

heightens the magnitude of his defeat at the hands of a divinely aided smaller force. It is interesting that the author of the text implies that al-Ḥārith fought alongside Roman soldiers (or was commanding them?), which would certainly be expected with his position as phylarch, yet this detail is completely absent from the accounts of Michael the Syrian, *1234*, and Bar Hebraeus.[100] The comments about al-Mundhir's savage treatment of captives reflect the charges levelled against him by others, including Ps.-Zachariah (**5.10**) and Procopius (**5.22**). The note that al-Mundhir's raids continued undisturbed for such a long period recalls Procopius' view of the frustration directed by Justinian at his generals and phylarchs for being unable to halt the raids of the Naṣrid leader (**5.15**), and together these elements seem to lend the passage an air of veracity. On the other hand, Procopius was referring to an earlier period, and the absence of al-Ḥārith as an opponent in the years leading up to this battle, and the weakening of al-Ḥārith's army in the face of al-Mundhir's force, both serve in the end to highlight the power of Symeon. Once again dietary choices make an appearance; it is clear that the unclean meats are associated with al-Mundhir's paganism, and are to be rejected by 'good' Christians.

Greg Fisher and Philip Wood

The Monks of Palestine

An early focus for the conversion of Arabs seems to have been the province of *Palaestina I*, on the western side of the Dead Sea. The *Life of Epiphanius of Salamis,* while it is a late fifth- or sixth-century composition with fantastical elements, may provide a good impression of the ideal behaviour of Arab clients in their relations with the settled world. Early in the *Life*, Epiphanius creates a grotto near the Palestinian village of Spanhydrion. Arab raiders come to enslave him and try to break down his door, but he miraculously heals one of their number, and they agree to help him by constructing monastic buildings.[101] One of them, John, agrees to receive baptism, and is the narrator of the *Life*.[102]

The description of the Arabs in the *Life of Epiphanius* builds on a long-standing trope of Christian hagiography that goes back to the *Life of Antony*.[103] The saint establishes his credentials by going out into the wilderness,

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[100] See Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 246, who suggests that Roman soldiers were not present; on this see too Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 130 n. 38.
[101] *Life of Epiphanius of Salamis* (= Rapp 1991), 15–16.
[102] *Life of Epiphanius of Salamis* (= Rapp 1991), 17.
[103] *Life of Epiphanius of Salamis* (= Rapp 1991), 30–1 for other miracles that involve taming wild animals and cultivating the wilderness.

challenging the demons that live there, and turning the land over to cultivation.[104] The saint's pioneering role represents an assertion of the universal nature of Christianity in the newly Christian empire.[105]

The sixth-century Greek hagiographic collection of Cyril of Scythopolis, the *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, gives a more detailed account of a similar process: here the Arabs are not merely a roaming band, but are given a political context.[106] In Cyril's account, set in *c*.420, St Euthymius uses his charismatic appeal to lure a powerful Arab leader and his tribe to Roman service.[107]

> Terebon
>
> [**6.13**] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of St Euthymius* 10 (trans. Price, pp. 14–17, excerpts)
>
> Concerning Terebôn the Elder all the senior fathers gave me a unanimous report, but a more detailed one was recounted to me by his descendant and namesake, the celebrated Saracen chieftain of this region.[108] Now Terebôn the elder, the grandfather of the younger, when he was very young and still a boy, was struck by a demon and paralysed all down his right side from head to foot. His father, who was called Aspébetus, spent huge sums, but to no avail. Now Aspébetus, though a pagan and a Persian subject, became an ally of the Romans in the following way.[109] At the beginning of the persecution that occurred in this time in Persia, towards the end of the reign of Yazdegard (I), king of Persia, the *magi*, in their desire to capture all the Christians, set the chiefs of the Saracens under them to guard the roads everywhere, to prevent any of the Christians in Persia from fleeing to the Romans. Aspébetus, who was then a tribal chief, witnessing the cruelty and inhumanity shown the Christians by the *magi* of the cities and taking pity on them, did not hinder any of the Christians from flight but on the contrary even assisted them, moved by sympathy, even though he had inherited from his forebears the practice of paganism. Denounced to king Yazdegard, he took his half-paralysed son (I mean Terebôn) and all his family and wealth, and fled to the Romans. They were received by Anatolius, then commander-in-chief in the East,[110] who bound them in treaty to the Romans and entrusted Aspébetus with the office of chieftain of the Saracens in Arabia who were in alliance with Rome.

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[104] Athanasius, *Ant.* 50–4 for Antony's defeat of demons in the wilderness and his miraculous discovery of water in the 'inner mountain'. Cf. Binns 1994: 229–31.

[105] On hagiography as a means of asserting Christian universalism, see Rousseau 2004.

[106] For discussion of the text in the context of the evangelization of the Arabs: Trimingham 1979: 109–11; Charles 1936: 40–2; For Cyril's background, see **5.7**.

[107] On St Euthymius see Binns 1994: 156–61.

[108] On these figures see *PLRE* II: 1058 (Terebon 1, 2). In spite of Cyril's assertions, the later Terebon did not equal the fame of his predecessors.

[109] *PLRE* II: 169 (Aspebetus *qui et* Petrus).

[110] *PLRE* II: 84 (Fl. Anatolius 10). Martindale notes the chronological confusion of Cyril here, and suggests that Anatolius was the *magister militum per Orientem* when Terebon, Aspebetos' son, was appointed phylarch. Anatolius kept this rank until *c*.446.

When accordingly they encamped in Arabia, the boy saw a vision in a dream, which he announced to his father. Without any delay he took the child together with a host of barbarians and many bodyguards and, spurred by faith, made his way to the place indicated in the dream, where dwelt the pious men Euthymius and Theoctistus. Most of the brethren were terrified at the sight of the barbarians; but the blessed Theoctistus, seeing his disciples' panic, climbed down to the barbarians and said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They replied, 'We are looking for Euthymius the servant of God.' Abba Theoctistus said to them, 'Till Saturday he will not see anyone, for he practises solitude.' Aspébetus took Theoctistus by the arm and showed him the boy in pain. At his father's bidding the boy said, 'I received this affliction in Persia some time ago. I have passed through all medical science and magic arts, and these have not helped me in any way but have rather increased the disorder. On reaching this state and reflecting on my condition in godly compunction, I said to myself one night, when tormented by this disorder, 'Terebôn, where now is the vanity of life and all medical skill? Where are the fantasies of our magicians and the power of our rites? Where are the invocations and invented myths of the astronomers and astrologers? Where are the incantations and the sophistries of sorcerers? For see, none of these have effect, unless God gives his assent.' On these reflections, (he said) I turned to prayer and besought God with tears, saying, 'O God, great and terrible, creator of heaven and earth with all their panoply, if you take pity on my sickness and rescue me from this dire disorder, I will become a Christian, renouncing all lawlessness and pagan worship.' On making this resolution in my mind, I suddenly fell asleep and saw a grizzled man with a great beard, who said to me, 'What are you suffering from?' When I had indicated my disorder, he said to me, 'Are you going to fulfil the pledge you have made to God? If so, he will cure you.' I replied, 'I will fulfil the promise I have made to God if I am freed from this disorder.' At this he said to me, 'I am Euthymius, who resides in the eastern desert twelve miles from Jerusalem in the gorge to the south of the Jericho road. If you wish to be healed, come to me without delay, and God will cure you through me.' On getting up, I recounted the matter to my father and, behold, putting everything else in second place, we have come to him, and beg you not to keep hidden the doctor revealed to me by God.' On hearing this, the blessed Theoctistus reported the matter to the great Euthymius in his solitude. Euthymius, judging it preposterous to oppose visions from God, came down to them. By praying fervently and sealing Terebôn with the sign of the cross, he restored him to health. The barbarians, astounded at so total a transformation and so extraordinary a miracle, found faith in Christ; and casting themselves on the ground they all begged to receive the seal in Christ. The miracle-working Euthymius, perceiving that their faith in Christ came from the soul, ordered a small font to be constructed in the corner of the cave—the one preserved even now—and after catechizing them baptized them all in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Aspébetus he renamed Peter; him he baptized first of all and after him one Maris, his brother-in-law, both men of exceptional intelligence and adorned with conspicuous wealth, and then likewise Terebôn and the rest. He kept them by him for forty days, enlightening and strengthening them with the

word of God, and then let them depart no longer Agarenians and Ishmaelites but now descendants of Sarah and heirs of the promise, transferred through baptism from slavery to freedom. Maris, the uncle of Terebôn, did not leave the monastery again, but renounced the world and remained there throughout his lifetime; he was greatly pleasing to God, and gave all his wealth, which was considerable, for the building and extension of the monastery. As the miracle that had occurred was noised abroad everywhere, many afflicted by various disorders came to the great Euthymius, and were all healed. And so in a short space of time he achieved fame in this place, with the result that his name spread through all Palestine and the surrounding provinces.

'Aspebetus' (Aspebetos) in this account has been presented as a proper name, but it is, in fact, a Persian title, *spāhbed* (commander of horse).[111] Though certainly presented with a series of hagiographic tropes that emphasize the piety of the Arab chief and the holy men (and the lineal and spiritual descendants of both men), it is essentially a story of political defection.[112] Yazdegerd, the Sasanian king (399–420), is presented as unjust and tyrannical for his persecution of Christians, not just according to the Romans, but even to a pagan like Aspebetos.[113] Aspebetos' defection is justified by a kind of natural law, which leads him to sympathize with the Christians even though he does not initially share their beliefs. Moreover, this sympathy for Persian Christians leads naturally towards Aspebetos' pilgrimage to Euthymius and his religious conversion, and to his political conversion at the hands of Anatolius: the narrative implicitly confirms the claims of the Roman emperor to be the protector of all Christians.[114]

Aspebetos' paganism is not described in detail, but it is notable that Cyril equates it to 'lawlessness' (cf. **6.5**): paganism is part of what makes Aspebetos a barbarian. Cyril puts forward an implied contrast with the Christian Romans, for Christianity is part of what distinguishes Romans from barbarians, and has become a marker of the civilized world.[115] In addition to this, Cyril also sees Christianity as an improving force, capable of overcoming the 'natural' destiny of men of barbarian descent. The 'total transformation' in which the boy is healed finds a parallel in the ethnic transformation of the Arabs, who leave 'no

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[111] *EIr*, s.v. 'Spāhbed' (R. Gyselen).

[112] Sartre 1982: 149–53 sees Aspebetos engaging in the same kind of contract as Mavia and Zokomos to defend the *limes* and fight the Persians, with the caveat that he is offered authority over *all* the Roman Arabs, an authority that is not inherited by his descendants. This defection probably occurred in *c.*420, shortly before the war of 421–2. See Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 36–48; Holum 1977.

[113] On these persecutions see Labourt 1904: 110–18.

[114] A claim dating from the time of Constantine: Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 4.9–13. See Fowden (G.) 1994.

[115] On the fusion of ethnographic and heresiological ideas in late antiquity see Maas 2003; *ODB* s.v. 'Ethnography' (M. Maas). On the earlier history of these ethnographic stereotypes see Shaw 1982 and Dauge 1981.

longer Ishmaelites' but 'heirs to the promise'.[116] Here the hagiographer invokes the idea of the Arabs' Abrahamic lineage to explain their barbaric condition. By right of their descent they are condemned to a life suited only to servitude, in a formulation that links the Old Testament story to Aristotelian ideas of the slavishness and irrationality of barbarians.[117] The Arabs had been associated with Sarah as well as Ishmael, and Cyril exploits the uncertain tradition of their Abrahamic descent to present their two different ancestries, one positive and one negative, as a choice between the old ways (and their natural destiny) and the promise of freedom that is made possible through baptism. Aspebetos' followers are therefore robbed of the negative epithets that had been attached to Arabs in the earlier ethnographic literature: they were barbaric Ishmaelites, but these Arabs are Saracens and Christians. Other Arab groups, however, including violent groups that we encounter later in Cyril's hagiography, are not granted this kind of promotion, which remains dependent on baptism (see **6.49–53**).

Conversion to Christianity may have helped to confirm the hierarchy within this Arab group. It is also notable that the hagiographer singles out Terebon and Maris as the first to receive baptism. If Aspebetos' defection to the Romans relied on Anatolius' confirmation of his status within the tribe, then so too the conversion of this Arab group confirmed the status of the chief's family by recognizing its internal hierarchy in the baptism. Christianity also allowed Terebon a new framework in which he could express his status through patronage, by spending wealth accumulated in the service of the Persian king on churches, which may have served as monuments to the Arabs' new political and religious status, as well as the power of their leaders. Indeed, the fact that Cyril claims to have received this story some three generations later gives the impression that the conversion and defection of this Arab group continued to play a major role in their self-identity, in which they celebrated a relationship with Euthymius' spiritual descendants in the monasteries of Palestine by recalling his baptism of Terebon.[118] Cyril continues:

Aspebetos
[**6.14**] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of St Euthymius* 15 (trans. Price, pp. 20–1)
Aspébetus, also called Peter, on hearing that the great Euthymius had eventually returned, came to him with a great number of Saracens, men, women, and children, and begged him to preach to them the word of salvation. The holy elder catechized them all and received them into the lower monastery, where he baptized them. After remaining with them for the whole week, he then ascended with them to his own cave. Peter brought along skilled workmen and constructed

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[116] Similar ideas of ethnic transformation are attached to the figure of Esau: Garnsey 1996: 43–5.
[117] On Aristotle and the natural slave note the discussions by Cartledge 2002: 53–7; Hall 1989.
[118] For the development of Judaean monasticism see Binns 1994.

the great cistern with two openings that has been preserved in the garden till now; nearby he built a bakehouse and for the holy elder constructed three cells and an oratory or church in the middle of the cells. Moreover, these men who had formerly been wolves of Arabia but had then joined the rational flock of Christ begged to remain near him. Out of his devotion to the solitary life Euthymius did not agree to this because of the disturbance involved, for he keenly loved solitude. But taking them to an appropriate spot he said to them, 'If you want to be very near me, settle here.' This spot lies between the two monasteries. Marking out a church for them and tents round it, he told them to build the church and settle there. He frequently made visitations to them, until he assigned them a priest and deacons. Those who had already been baptized came and settled there, and others too who arrived gradually were baptized by him. Since in consequence they became extremely numerous and spread out to form various encampments, our great father Euthymius wrote to Juvenal patriarch of Jerusalem requesting the ordination of a bishop and, when he consented, sent him Peter the father of Terebôn, as most capable of drawing souls to salvation. So it was that Peter was the first to be ordained in Palestine bishop of the Encampments. One could witness a multitude of Saracen barbarians coming to the great Euthymius, receiving baptism and being taught to worship the one who is God over all.

This section is placed slightly later in Cyril's *Life of Euthymius* and continues the themes of the first scene: the Arabs leave behind their violent ways on converting to Christianity. Catechism by local monks is followed by the ministrations of regular clergy and then the ordination of an 'indigenous' episcopate in 427.[119] Again, Aspebetos–Peter is given a prominent position, becoming the first bishop of the 'Parembole' of the Arab encampments in Palestine; he would also attend the Council of Ephesus in 431.[120] Here it seems to have been possible for Peter to combine his role as tribal chief with his new role as bishop, and the Arabs who flocked to be converted by Euthymius may also have become clients of Peter.[121] At the very least, Peter's position within the Parembole must have emphasized his close, prestigious connection to the Romans, which was remembered by his descendants, such as Cyril's inform-ant, in an era when the Romans had entered into other relationships with more recent arrivals from Arabia and when other, more hostile Arab groups had entered Palestine (**6.16**).

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[119] Trombley 1993: 171.
[120] On the bishopric of Parembole note *DHGE* s.v. 'Arabie' (D. Aigrain); Charles 1936: 42–3; and the reconstruction of the episcopal succession at 181–3. Hainthaler 2007: 58–9 (following Vailhé 1900) suggests the existence of another 'Saracen episcopate' based in *Phoenice Secunda*, on the basis of the signature of one Bishop Eustathius of the 'gens Saracenorum' at Chalcedon: *ACO* 2.5.46. Also note Vailhé 1899 and Trimingham 1979: 111 and 118–20 (though his identification of 'Arab bishops' is rather broad and based on onomastics).
[121] Fisher 2011a: 42 suggests that the settlement of the elite may trigger the later settlement of a wider portion of a nomadic population.

The process of catechism is also associated with settlement. Euthymius selected a site that emphasizes the Arabs' connection to his monastic foundations by placing it between his monasteries, and orchestrated the construction of monastic cells, a bakery, and a church (which may have been built on the same site as the church already constructed by Peter). Here, then, was a fixed point with a holy man, a church for public assembly, devotion, and communication, and also water: the installation of a cistern was particularly important in an area of low rainfall like Palestine, and both Peter's Arabs and Euthymius' monks were essentially colonizing an area that had previously had relatively little permanent settlement.[122] Though the text does not make it explicit, it is plausible that Cyril's emphasis on the new-found peacefulness of the Arabs may be connected to their willingness to settle, which may have made them more susceptible to political and religious control. There are parallels with the Syriac *Life of Symeon*, who encouraged Arabs to build 'churches among their tents'.[123] Such constructions present an idea of a permanence in organization, but are likely more figurative than real.

The two scenes we have just encountered are constructed around the close relationship between the Arabs of the Parembole and the monks of Euthymius' monasteries. Still, we should not imagine that the relationship between these Arabs and both secular and ecclesiastical Roman institutions was actually this simple in practice. For one thing, the authority of tribal chiefs was probably quite fragile, and depended on their ability to distribute rewards and defeat internal opponents. In common with the Jafnids (see section 'The Jafnids'), a relationship with both the Roman state and the Christian church helped to confirm Peter's position. It was also possible, however, for other Arab leaders to seize the initiative, and establish their own independent relationships with different Roman actors.

Terebon captured and released
[**6.15**] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of St Euthymius* 34 (trans. Price, p. 49)
Terebôn the Saracen and Saracen tribal chief, on going to Bostra on necessary business that had arisen, fell victim to a plot. As the result of the machinations of an assistant tribal chief, he was arrested by the governor there and held under guard for a time. On learning this, the great Euthymius wrote to the thrice-blessed Antipatrus, who at that time directed the church of Bostra and emitted in all directions the beams of his knowledge of God, asking him to exert himself to obtain Terebôn's release from captivity; he sent Gaianus, the brother of Bishop Stephen of Jamnia, with the letter. On receiving the letter of the great Euthymius, the sainted Antipatrus obtained Terebôn's release from every entanglement and, providing him for the journey, sent him to the great Euthymius. Gaianus, however, he detained, in his desire to have with him one of Euthymius' stock, and ordained him bishop of the city of Medaba [Madaba].

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[122] Binns 1994, esp. map at 116–17.   [123] *V. Sim. Syr.* 77 (trans. Doran).

Here an anonymous rival conspires with an unnamed Roman in Bostra to have Terebon arrested. These events occurred in *c*.458, after the death of Aspebetos–Peter. The purpose of the story is to celebrate the relationship between Euthymius and Terebon, and the former's ability to provide patronage and rescue the latter from his rivals. Though we cannot identify them, the beginning of the extract points to other actors in this scenario, to other relationships between Romans and Arabs that were overcome by Terebon, and mostly suppressed in this account.

This extract is also one of the first occasions on which the city of Bostra reached prominence in Arab–Roman relations. The capital of *Provincia Arabia*, Bostra housed a number of substantial churches, and it may have provided an important religious centre for the inhabitants of the province, settled and non-settled. Foss suggests that it was a major site where Roman power could be displayed to Arab leaders, where religious services could be held for a non-settled population, and where deals could be struck (including the unnamed 'business' that Terebon has in the city).[124] In addition, the cisterns of Bostra would have also allowed large troop concentrations to be maintained in this desert environment, able to sally out and punish uncooperative Arab groups or other invaders.[125] As a site from which grain, water, and weapons could be distributed to Rome's Arab clients, Bostra was a centre from which Rome could reinforce its political posturing with military might, and attract Arab pilgrims to the shrine of St Sergius there.[126]

> The devastation of the tents
> [**6.16**] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of St Euthymius* 46 (trans. Price, p. 66)
> In the time of the emperor Anastasius the tents of the Saracens set up by our father the sainted Euthymius were devastated by barbarians, and the principal Saracens in them erected other tents near the monastery of Abba Martyrius, where they founded a church. But there also the barbarians attacked them, killing some and taking others prisoner; the remainder were scattered round various villages. There occurred at this time great and terrible disruption in this region, with the barbarians making incursions with impunity.

Anatolius had originally orchestrated Aspebetos–Peter's transfer of allegiance through a treaty that almost certainly obliged the Arabs to perform military service. Though it is never explicit, we may assume that they continued to perform this service even after they were settled. However, Terebon's group failed to retain a monopoly of violence in the area in the face of other, more

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[124] Foss 1997: 251–4 and, in general, Sartre 1985.

[125] Compare the association between fortresses and cisterns on the Mesopotamian frontier, such as at Dara: Croke and Crow 1983. Cisterns allowed large troop concentrations in difficult terrain where supply was difficult and high temperatures common.

[126] For the distribution of grain and weapons from Bostra see Foss 1997: 251 and Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.3.42/p. 177. On the cult of St Sergius, see section 'The Jafnids and St Sergius'.

hostile Arabs who arrived in the area at the end of the century. It is the presence of these hostile Arabs that may explain the phrasing of Cyril's earlier accounts of Aspebetos' conversion, which is keen to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' Arabs. We might speculate that Terebon's group lost some of its martial prowess after settlement, when their fighting skills were less regularly honed through raiding.[127]

Subsequent biographies in Cyril's collection give a much less prominent position to the Arabs as allies of the monks. They continue to be a feature of the hagiography, but chiefly as foils for holy men, rather than major actors in the story in the manner of Terebon. By this stage, the hostile Arabs chiefly appear as witnesses to miracles or as challenges of the wilderness, as in Cyril's biography of Saba, a monk born in *c*.439 in Cappadocia. At one point in the narrative, Cyril describes how, faced with six Saracens, 'barbarous in character and mischievous in intent', the holy men with Saba prayed earnestly for help. 'Instantly', Cyril narrates, 'the earth opened and swallowed the barbarian intending to test them, at which the rest, on seeing the terrifying miracle, fled panic-stricken.'[128] The story recalls the characterization of the Arabs presented by Isaac of Antioch (Ch. 1), and while the holy protagonists of the story and the location in which they lived are clearly described, the faceless Arabs appear from nowhere, and one even disappears to nowhere—punished by divine vengeance. The miraculous way in which the Arabs are dealt with recalls the divine intervention represented by the lioness who saved Malchus (**6.3**), and a similar story appears in the *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschus, where a Saracen, drawing his sword to kill a certain Ianthos, is devoured by the ground after a desperate prayer from the beleaguered monk.[129]

After Euthymius' death, his successors seem to have failed to establish the kind of close, symbiotic relationships with other Arab groups that they had enjoyed with Terebon. Even Roman federates might cause considerable destruction in the course of their rivalry, and their response to the problems posed by climate and environment (cf. **5.1**). Cyril complains that, during a time of drought, two Arab chiefs allied to Rome fell into a feud with each other, resulting in the spread of anarchy and depredation throughout the desert (and the attempted theft of water from the monks' cisterns).[130] The arrival of new groups of Arabs from Arabia, such as the Jafnids, their installation as allies, and the subsequent organization of phylarchs over a larger territory removed the political power of Terebon's successors in this

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[127] On the reduced military capability of nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples after settlement see Sartre 1982: 151; Trimingham 1979: 115. On the collapse of the once beneficial relationship with the Arabs see Binns 1994: 112–13, which he ascribes to the monasteries' growing size, and the greater demands they came to make on their environment.

[128] Cyr. Scyth. *Vit. Sab.* 14.   [129] Moschus, *Prat. Spir.* 99.

[130] Cyr. Scyth. *Vit. Euth.* 51; see Fowden (E. K.) 2013: 398.

local phylarchate and destroyed the close symbiosis that had been possible with local power brokers such as the monasteries of the Judaean desert.[131]

Philip Wood

Arabs and Martyria

A clutch of early inscriptions from martyria complement the literary evidence for Arabs and Christianity, prior to the sixth century, discussed here. The benefactions and dedications on these martyria suggest the assumption of community leadership roles by Arab Christians, complementing (for example) the position of Aspebetos–Peter. Two sixth-century martyria from Zabad and Ḥarrān, reflecting the continuation of this process in the sixth century, are examined below (**6.33–4**). Having said that, it should be made clear that any 'Arab' identity of these early examples is by no means certain.

The first example is a martyrion of St John, from al-Ramthāniye in the Golan. Dated to 377, the inscription mentions a certain *illustrius ordinarius* (i.e. a middle-level senatorial rank) named Flavius Naʿamān (Nuʿmān).[132] The name, found throughout the onomasticon of the individuals discussed in this volume, suggests that the sponsor was an Arab; he has even been connected with Ghassān, although this is hypothetical.[133] Archaeological analysis of the remains at al-Ramthāniye has also suggested that the location was frequented by, or perhaps even partly designed to be used by, nomads, also implying that it might be associated with some of the nomadic Arabs in the area.[134] Certainly, as a place with a religious focus, an assortment of buildings and enclosures for animals, and a water source, al-Ramthāniye could certainly have served as a 'fixed point'. Much about this intriguing site remains speculative.

Two other early examples are both from Anasartha, in northern Syria:

A martyrion of St Thomas
[**6.17**] (trans. Bevan)
†] From the female sex Mavia, a wonderful gift, renowned for her moderation, her piety, and her love for her husband, built this martyrion of Thomas, in the 10th year of the indiction [begins 22 September 426], in the year 737 [begins 1 October 425].[135]

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[131] Cf. Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 62ff., 166–8 (on the presence of older Arab groups in Sinai and Palestine).

[132] For the different grades, see Jones 1964.

[133] Dauphin 1995; Dauphin et al. 1996. See Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 136–7, who is sceptical.

[134] See discussion in Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 146–9 and Fisher 2011a: 48–9.

[135] I.e. 23–30 September 426. The date of the start of the indiction year was not fixed as 1 September until the second half of the fifth century. See Feissel 2002: 207.

This inscription, from a martyrion of St Thomas (425/6), has attracted considerable attention due to the appearance of the 'Arabic' name Mavia, both in terms of a possible 'ethnic' identification of the sponsor, as well as the possibility that it may be the same Mavia who rebelled against Valens, before coming to fight for the empire in 378 (**1.26**). The inscription is, however, likely far too late for this to be the case.[136]

> A martyrion from Anasartha
> [**6.18**] *IGLS* 2.297 (trans. Bevan).
> To the martyrs celebrated in many hymns[137] he dedicated a temple to be much visited by suppliants, large under its porticos and well built in its walls,[138] the *lamprotatos* (*clarissimus*) Silvanus, forever powerful among the *Eremboi* (i.e. Arabs). He did everything at the urging of his child[139] who has now passed (i.e. deceased), she who was renowned for every sort of virtue, Chasidathe, the young bride of a phylarch, whom the emperors[140] joined in marriage. She also put an end to her husband's grief;[141] she did not urge him to obtain the reward that does not come without tears through a bloody act of daring, (but . . .) by psalms and by prayers . . . the holy Scriptures.

The inscription is undated, but probably belongs to the fifth century.[142] The reference to Silvanus' power in 'Eremboi' has been interpreted as an analogy to the *Odyssey*, referring to the Arabs, and hence this martyrion is usually seen to have an 'Arab' connection; Shahîd also suggested that Chasidathe was the daughter of Queen Mavia.[143] The appearance of a phylarch strengthens the possible association with Arabs, but nothing is known about Silvanus himself: a Roman officer? A phylarch? Despite determined efforts to answer this question, no clear answer has emerged.[144]

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[136] Mouterde 1945, vol. 1: 194–5; Shahîd 1984b: 222–4; Feissel 2002: 205–9; Fisher forthcoming; Liebeschuetz 2007: 144.

[137] Cf. Feissel 2002: 213, who translates this phrase as 'Aux martyrs que chantent les hymnes . . .'.

[138] Or 'porticos'. The architectural terminology is Homeric, and rather imprecise for a Roman church.

[139] I.e. his child bride.

[140] The Homeric term 'lords', as Feissel points out (2002: 215), is used almost exclusively in late antique epigraphy for the emperors, or the imperial couple.

[141] Lit. 'father's grief', but the relation of father and child is here Silvanus and his child bride. This 'grief' is presumably not Silvanus' grief over his wife's death, but his paganism, which his wife ended by encouraging him to convert to Christianity.

[142] Feissel 2002: 105.

[143] Feissel 2002: 213–14; Shahîd 1984b: 230.

[144] Mouterde 1945: 193; Shahîd 1984b: 230–8; Fisher forthcoming; Feissel 2002: 213, 202–20 for a detailed discussion.

ROMANS, PERSIANS, ARABS, AND CHRISTIANITY
IN THE SIXTH CENTURY

The sixth century bears witness to an elevated role for the Arab allies of Rome and Persia—one that was quite different from the preceding period. One reason for this was the emergence of the Jafnid al-Ḥārith as a type of 'super-phylarch', combined with the prominent position of his enemy, the Naṣrid leader al-Mundhir (Ch. 5). This change in function and status is mirrored, too, in ecclesiastical affairs, particularly after the end of the fifth century. For while the Arab convert Aspebetos–Peter had attended the Council of Ephesus in 431 as a delegate, it was left to the Jafnids to assume a much wider and more active role in Christian affairs than any other group of Arab leaders before them. The Jafnids did not themselves become priests or bishops, but they took a high profile in the unsettled realm of ecclesiastical politics within the Roman empire, emerging as supporters of the Miaphysites, mediators between war-ring parties, and also as patrons of the martyr cult of St Sergius. These pursuits enabled the family to expand further their political influence in the rural areas of *Provincia Arabia*, *Phoenice Libanensis*, and even as far away as *Euphrate-sia*.[145] In the east, the Arab 'Naṣrid' clients at al-Ḥīra, who steered a middle course for much of the sixth century, still became entangled in the politicized climate surrounding Christian confession, and were also embroiled in the fallout from the massacre of Christians at Najrān. Meanwhile, Miaphysite bishops in the Persian empire, such as Aḥūdemmeh, continued efforts to convert the Arabs of the Jazīra.

The Jafnids

In an article published in 1875, the great German scholar Theodor Nöldeke drew parallels between the power of the Jafnid (Ghassānid) leaders and what he termed the 'church province' of Arabia, seeing a close link between the two.[146] The power of the Jafnids was, though, by no means confined to Arabia, and Nöldeke's position has been repeatedly scrutinized.[147] It is clear, however, that the manner in which the Jafnids exercised their power, and developed and maintained their political standing, had a very close link to Christian sites concentrated throughout *Provincia Arabia* and its environs. The churches and monasteries—overwhelmingly rural—constituted a web of fixed points where the Jafnid elites could be celebrated on inscriptions (**6.24**; **6.29–32**) where they might treat with Roman diplomats and aristocrats (**5.30**), broker agreements

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[145] Hoyland 2009a: 129.   [146] Nöldeke 1875: 420.
[147] For the most recent analysis, see Millar 2009 and Hoyland 2009a.

between rival Miaphysite clergy (perhaps **6.28**, but also in Constantinople), and perform their functions as tribal leaders (**6.29**). Speaking in more general terms of the link between Arab leaders and religious sites, Elizabeth Fowden has phrased the phenomenon in terms of the 'slow construction of a supra- or para-tribal identity . . . focused on Christian buildings', showing how a church might be used as 'the rallying point for its patron's, or patronal family's, authority'.[148] This perspective recalls the fifth-century conversions of Arabs and their concentration around the Parembole (see section 'The monks of Palestine') as well as the missionary activity carried out by Aḥūdemmeh (see section 'Miaphysite missions in the Jazīra: The *Life* of Aḥūdemmeh'), and reflects the compatibility of Christianity with patterns of life in the country-side. The tiny number of inscriptions reflecting the relationship between other, unknown Arabs and Christian sites, which include two of the three earliest examples of the Arabic script, suggests that the high-profile actions of the Jafnids in fact reflected, or even triggered, a wider trend (**6.33–4**).[149]

The Jafnids and the Miaphysites

The sources for the Jafnids as Miaphysite Christians and Christian elites comprise a handful of Greek inscriptions (below), and literary texts mostly produced at the end of the sixth century by hagiographers writing in Syriac. The discussions of Jafnid Christianity by Syriac writers may be considered by-products of the struggles over Christology in the Roman church at this time, when Miaphysite Christians, whose theology failed to win permanent recognition as an imperial orthodoxy, sought to emphasize whatever support they could muster and present themselves as a suitable 'orthodoxy in waiting' for the empire as a whole.[150] Such sources had a vested interest in presenting the Jafnids as 'good' Miaphysites, and so might suppress a diversity of religious opinion among the Jafnids, and those associated with them.

One of the main sources for the Jafnids is John of Ephesus, who focuses on al-Ḥārith (529–68/9) and al-Mundhir (569–82).[151] (Jabala, al-Ḥārith's father, plays no role in any of the surviving texts discussing Jafnid Christianity, suggesting perhaps that it was only with al-Ḥārith that the Jafnid elite was able to start building the family prominence in ecclesiastical politics.) In addition to the *Ecclesiastical History*, John wrote a major hagiographic collection in the 570s—the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*—which reflects on the earlier period, as well as on the role of the Jafnids in promoting Miaphysite

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[148] Fowden (E. K.) 2013: 402. The quote is from the unpublished English version of this article.
[149] Fisher forthcoming.   [150] Menze 2008: 247–67; Wood 2010a: 174–5.
[151] See the discussion prior to **5.28** for a brief biography.

missionary activity in the borderlands between Rome and Persia.[152] His particular focus is the missionary Jacob Baradeus, who consecrated new 'Jacobite' bishops and played a major role in developing Miaphysite structures that were independent of the Chalcedonians, who, by then, represented an imperial orthodoxy.[153]

Al-Ḥārith and Jacob Baradeus
[**6.19**] John of Ephesus, *Life of Jacob and Theodore* (*PO* 19, pp. 153–4; trans. after Brooks)
When a lack of priests, and especially of bishops had arisen in the lands of the east and west [after the death of John of Tella], the glorious Ḥārith Bar Gabala, the great king [MLKˀ] of the Saracens, with many others asked the Christ-loving queen Theodora to give orders that two or three bishops be sent to the orthodox [i.e. Miaphysites] in Syria. And since the believing queen wanted to further everything that would assist the opponents of the synod of Chalcedon, she gave orders and two blessed men, well-tried and holy, named Jacob and Theodore, were chosen and installed, one for Ḥīrtā of the Ṭayyāyē, who was Theodore, and Jacob for the city of Edessa. And Theodore exercised authority in the southern and western countries and the whole of the desert and Arabia and Palestine . . .

This notice describes the situation after the death of the missionary bishop, John of Tella, who had ordained priests sympathetic to the Miaphysite cause along the Roman eastern frontier.[154] Here John of Ephesus identifies the role of Justinian's wife Theodora and al-Ḥārith in sending bishops to Miaphysite groups in the borderlands in *c*.541/2. We should not assume, however, that all Miaphysites necessarily shared the vision of Miaphysite 'orthodoxy' promoted by John, and supported by the powerful lay intercessors he lauds in this extract. Even within John's hagiography, Theodora is treated rather suspiciously in other scenes, suggesting his reluctance to trust the imperial couple to act as sponsors of both Chalcedonians and Miaphysites.[155] Similarly, John's first account of Jacob Baradeus made no mention of the Jafnids: perhaps the role of al-Ḥārith has been added here in response to the increasing political prominence of his son al-Mundhir later on, an idea which is further reflected in John's *Ecclesiastical History* (below). The account that John gives here may also be coloured by the positive posthumous reputation of Theodora in Miaphysite circles, and the support given to Jacob in his old age by al-Mundhir: at the time, the importance of Theodora and al-Ḥārith may have been much less obvious.[156]

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[152] Van Ginkel 1995; Harvey 1982.
[153] Wood 2010a: 168–70; Menze 2008: 260–2 and 274–5; Trimingham 1979: 156–7; Bundy 1978; Frend 1972: 285–8; Honigmann 1951: 168–77; Charles 1936: 68–70.
[154] Menze 2008: 175–86; Menze 2006; Trimingham 1979: 165–6.
[155] Menze 2008: 208–28.   [156] See Hoyland 2009a: 128.

The 'Ḥīrtā de Ṭayyāyē' is not the Naṣrid capital of al-Ḥīra, which is referred to by the same name, but probably the presumed Jafnid centre of al-Jābiya in south-western Syria.[157] In assigning Theodore to an Arab camp, the authorities may have followed the same model used at the Parembole, mapping episcopal structures onto nodes of Arab authority to project a bishop's ministry deeper beyond the zone of urban settlement, and thereby providing a 'fixed point' that could be exploited for political purposes.[158] Brooks plausibly suggests that 'western' is a mistake for 'eastern', which would see Theodore ministering to *Provincia Arabia*, a region without any firm southern or eastern borders and where bishops had often been based in clusters of villages, rather than in cities.[159]

The role of al-Ḥārith as a close sponsor of Miaphysite missionary activity receives even greater emphasis in an anonymous *Life of Jacob Baradeus* that has circulated with John's collection. John's account had emphasized the role of Theodore as Bishop of al-Jābiya, but, of the two bishops who were ordained for the Miaphysites, it was undoubtedly Jacob who won greater fame as a missionary and as a charismatic figure. Indeed, Jacob may have been one of the few bishops respected across the Miaphysite communion as a whole, as the confession underwent numerous internal schisms in the last three decades of the sixth century. This *Life*, then, seeks to emphasize the connections between al-Ḥārith and Jacob and may reflect a later point of composition than John's *Life*, when Jacob's reputation had been more clearly established.

The health of the Arabs threatened
[**6.20**] *Spurious Life of Jacob Baradeus* (PO 19, pp. 233–5; trans. after Brooks)
The bands of Christian Tayyaye attached to the Romans, having been attacked by insanity, heard about this man's holiness, and sent their king, whose name was Harith bar Gabala, with their magnates to him, so that that God might visit them through him. And Harith took gold with him with offerings to give the saint if God would visit them through his prayers. But the whole affair was revealed to Jacob by God, and when they crossed the Euphrates to come to his monastery, the saint appeared to Harith in his monastic robe (*schēma*) at full morning and said to Harith 'O barbarian, why did you doubt the gift of God? Return to your land and your magnates and release the man from Sinai whom someone is detaining in your camp and you will be delivered immediately from distress: for it is thanks to him that you have been afflicted. Henceforth Satan will not be permitted by the Lord to work destruction among you, until you enter the camp. Take your money with you, for we do not want to possess anything apart from God.'

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[157] For the identification with al-Jābiya see Honigmann 1951: 161–2 and Nöldeke 1887: 48. Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 756–8 attempts to locate this 'Ḥīrtā' and compares it to the use of *castra* in Latin, implying that it may reflect a permanent town. Joh. Eph. *Vitae* (PO 19, p. 238) claims that Theodore was based in Bostra, but this seems unlikely as it was a major Chalcedonian centre in the region (though it could have been his titular see). See n. 181.

[158] It is possible that the 'John, bishop of the Ṭayyāyē' purged under Justin I in 518 also reflects a similar model. See Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 9.13/p. 267.

[159] Joh. Eph. *Vitae* (PO 19, p. 154), line 4 of the Syriac, with note 2.

At this open vision, Harith and his magnates marvelled. He went back to his camp and found that from the hour that the blessed one said to him 'the devil shall not work any destruction in your camp', from that very hour, on that very day, they were cured. And they asked and enquired around the whole camp until they found a certain man bound in a tent. And he released him and sent him to Sinai, and slew the man who had bound him in his tent with the edge of his sword. And day by day, Harith yearned to see the saint.

Unlike John's *Life of Jacob and Theodore*, this text follows the tropes of the classic 'barbarian' conversion narrative much more closely. The Arabs' barbarity is shown by a propensity for madness and sickness, caused by demonic activity, which can only be cured through the intervention of a saint. In Cyril's *Life of Euthymius*, Terebon's sickness had been associated with his former pagan state, but here the association is rather less clear, perhaps because al-Ḥārith's followers were nominally already Christians. Instead, Jacob's willingness to cure the Arabs is dependent on their inclination to abstain from taking monks captive, and obeying al-Ḥārith's authority. There is the same connection between health, intercession by a holy man, and lawful behaviour that we see in Cyril of Scythopolis, but there is no simple role for conversion in assuring the Arabs' good behaviour. Instead it is al-Ḥārith himself and his authority that guarantees the health of his followers and their good relationship with Jacob.

This *Life of Jacob* gives a special role to al-Ḥārith, and it functions as a kind of prologue to al-Ḥārith's requests to Theodora for the ordination of bishops, an explanation of his particular attachment to Miaphysitism, and to the person of Jacob in particular. In addition, the *Life* also champions the extent of al-Ḥārith's authority, which stretches from the Euphrates to Sinai. In a sense, then, the text asserts al-Ḥārith's role as a 'super-phylarch', an obvious target of intercession in any problem relating to the Arabs.[160] At the same time, in emphasizing al-Ḥārith's relationship with Jacob, the text also implies that it is the Miaphysite bishops—Jacob, his allies, and successors—that enjoy a privileged relationship with this super-phylarchate, that is, with al-Ḥārith's son, al-Mundhir.

A vignette offered by Michael the Syrian also reflects the prominent role accorded to al-Ḥārith as a supporter of the Miaphysites.

Al-Ḥārith and Ephrem
[**6.21**] Michael the Syrian, *Chron.* 9.29/pp. 246–7 (trans. after Chabot)
Ephrem the Jew,[161] from Antioch, was sent to [Ḥārith], before his death, by the emperor [Justinian]. [*After a discussion about theology, the Jafnid leader said to Ephrem*]: 'I am a barbarian and a soldier; I do not know how to read books,

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[160] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 95–109 (on the office of al-Ḥārith); Sartre 1982: 170–2.
[161] A pejorative term used by Miaphysites: Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 753.

however, I offer an example for you: when I command my servants to prepare a feast for my soldiers, to fill the meat pots with pure mutton and beef, and to cook it, if a tiny rat is found in the pots—by your life, patriarch! All of that pure meat, is it soiled by the rat—yes or no?' [Ephrem] replied, 'Yes'. Ḥārith went on, 'If a great load of flesh is corrupted by the infection of a tiny rat, how can all of the assembly of those who have adhered to the impure heresy not be soiled? Because all have given in writing their support to the *Tome* of Leo—the infected rat.' [. . .] Ḥārith said to [Ephrem]: 'Today, join us for a feast.' And he commanded his people . . . to only bring camel meat to the table. When this had been brought over, Ḥārith said to Ephrem, 'Bless our table.' He was troubled, and did not do so. Ḥārith ate according to his custom. Ephrem said: 'You have soiled the table, because you have brought before us the meat of the camel.' Ḥārith replied, 'Why do you force me to take the Communion, seeing that you believe yourself defiled by my food? You must understand that your Communion is more contemptible for us than the camel meat is to you, which we eat; because in it [the Communion] we find hidden apostasy and the abandonment of the orthodox [Miaphysite] faith.' Ephrem blushed and then left, without managing to seduce Ḥārith.

The date of this rhetorical contest is not known, although Ephrem (cf. **5.20**) died in 545. This story says more, perhaps, about Michael's own time, when reconciliation between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites was a distant memory; indeed, al-Ḥārith's victory in the face of such a powerful figure as Ephrem was a salient example for twelfth-century Miaphysites of how the 'orthodox' had always triumphed under pressure from outsiders.[162] The appearance of an association between certain foods and barbarism is once again of note (see e.g. **6.3**, **6.12**), carrying with it the idea that certain dietary prohibitions might have been followed by Arabs in this period. Its seems equally possible that it also appears as a device to accentuate the divisions between the two sides, or, as others note, that camel meat was seen, with prejudice, to be a culturally inferior food of the desert 'barbarians' and not something that urbane people such as Ephrem should eat.[163]

As part of (and in addition to) their function as Miaphysite patrons, the Jafnids played an important role as mediators between several different elements of the Roman Christian community in the East. Such intercession took a number of forms, including the (perceived) request for Jacob Baradeus, as well as more direct forms of negotiation between disputing Miaphysite factions. The access that the Jafnids enjoyed to the Miaphysite spiritual hierarchy, their ability to provide generously to those under their control by

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[162] Fisher 2011a: 56; Shahîd 1995–2012, vol. 1: 746–55; Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 142–3; van Ginkel 1998; Segal 1984: 121–2.

[163] Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 143 and n. 44; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 753 suggesting, equally plausibly, that 'perhaps it was the kind of food that certain ecclesiastics considered "bad food" in the *Provincia Arabia* when they visited it, and stayed with the Ghassānids.' See Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 746–55 for further discussion and Segal 1984: 121–2.

accessing the resources of the state, and their talent for resolving disputes highlighted their ability to bridge different sorts of divisions. From this perspective, they resembled the holy men discussed earlier in this chapter, who were also able to deliver a range of solutions to earthly problems. More obviously, perhaps, the Jafnid prominence in frontier regions and the esteem they had won amongst the Miaphysites simply made them a natural choice for mediation.[164] Other Arab leaders before the Jafnids had also broadly acted in this capacity: Mavia (**1.26**) had won a bishop for her people, while both Terebon and Aspebetos–Peter and Zokomos had negotiated the inclusion of their own groups into the Roman Christian commonwealth. It is with the Jafnids, however, that Arab leaders emerged as high-profile mediators whose work stood to benefit a broader set of stakeholders, including the Miaphysite population as a whole as well as the imperial establishment.

A collection of Miaphysite documents and letters, edited and published by J.-B. Chabot in Syriac (1907) and Latin (1933) under the title *Documenta ad origines Monophysitarum illustrandas* (henceforth, *Documenta*), compiled at the end of the sixth or at the beginning of the seventh century, contains several examples of the Jafnids acting as arbitrators.[165] Several documents within the collection (25–41) address the Tritheist heresy (see n. 16) and, in particular, two bishops, Conon of Tarsus and Eugenius of Seleucia, who had been swayed by it and were subsequently condemned in 569.[166] Efforts were made, through the Jafnids, to correct their 'errors'. Document 39, for example, records that Conon and Eugenius had been approached through the agency of 'the Christ-loving and glorious *patrikios*' al-Ḥārith;[167] the same letter later notes that al-Ḥārith had attempted to convene a conference in *Provincia Arabia* to solve the dispute.[168] The letter appears to date to the year 569, the year in which al-Ḥārith died and was succeeded by his son, al-Mundhir.[169] Another document (40) suggests the presence of al-Ḥārith in Constantinople, again attempting to bridge the divide between the Miaphysite clergy and the wayward Conon and Eugenius.[170] The collection also includes a letter (23) which purports to be from al-Ḥārith to Jacob Baradeus. The main issue being discussed is not clear, but it again offers an indication of the close links between the Jafnid family and senior Miaphysites.[171]

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[164] Fisher forthcoming for a full analysis.

[165] Most recently, see Millar 2013b: 82–5; Millar 2009; van Roey and Allen 1994: 267–303.

[166] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 805–24. See van Roey and Allen 1994: 281. The numbering of documents follows van Roey and Allen (also used by Millar); the numbering of the subscriptions to document 41 follows Millar 2009.

[167] Trans. Millar 2009: 106.   [168] Millar 2009: 106.

[169] The opinion of Honigmann 1951: 185, cited by Millar 2009: 106.

[170] Millar 2009: 106–7.

[171] See van Roey and Allen 1994: 280; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 782–8; Segal 1984: 121.

'The Letter of the Archimandrites' (41; the *Letter*) is perhaps the best-known document in the collection. It was written in 569/70 to Jacob Baradeus and 11 other bishops from 'all the humble orthodox archimandrites of the province of Arabia'[172] to confirm the faith of the Miaphysite clergy in the face of Tritheism, and is followed by 137 subscriptions containing a wealth of information.[173] The subscriptions are derived not only from archimandrites in *Provincia Arabia*, but also some from the neighbouring province (to the north) of *Phoenice Libanensis*. In the subscriptions, we might note:

> Subscription 121 from the *Letter*
> [**6.22**] Letter 41, Subscription 121 (trans. Millar 2009: 112)
> I Sergios, presbyter and head of monastery of the monastery of ʿWQBTʾ, have subscribed by the hand of the presbyter Mar Eustathios, my deputy, who is presbyter of the church of the glorious and Christ-loving *patrikios*, Mundhir.

The subscription is one of a number of references to the honorific title of *patrikios* held by al-Mundhir, and confirms his importance amongst the Miaphysites. This reference to a church 'of' al-Mundhir presumably refers to a physical structure rather than an organization.[174]

   Another of the subscriptions, 119, refers to a monastery called ḤLYWRM. Haliarum, or Heliaramia from the *Peutinger Table*, is likely to be identified with Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (**4.6**).[175] The lintel found during excavations at the site features two references amongst its five inscribed panels to the Jafnid leader al-Ḥārith, and is one of numerous epigraphic testimonies to the family discussed here. (See Fig. 6.1 for a map showing the sites discussed here which provide epigraphic evidence connected to the Jafnids.)

> Inscriptions from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (Figs 6.2–3)
> [**6.23**] *IGLS* 5.2553 B, D (trans. Genequand, rev. Gatier 2014)
> B (panel 4): [under] the archimandrite and the very pious deacon Anastasios and when the *endoxotatos* [*gloriosissimus*] Arethas the *stratēlatēs* was phylarch, so that the Lord God . . .
> D (panel 1): [To Flavius] Arethas, *patrikios*, many years, life! Great, beautiful, you arrived! [How much] beautiful, you arrived, O Arethas (?), the year . . .

For some time the year 870 AG (= AD 559) was read at the end of inscription D. Gatier has cast doubt on this, and it is now preferable to leave the text undated. Gatier has also suggested that *stratēlatēs* (= *magister militum*) should be read in inscription B, held by al-Ḥārith as an honorary title, compatible

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[172] Trans. Millar 2009: 107.
[173] Millar 2009: 109–13 provides the first English translation of the 137 subscriptions. A previous version in French was published in Lamy 1898.
[174] Millar 2009: 114.
[175] Genequand 2006: 70. See most recently Millar 2013a: 20 and Hoyland 2009a: 138, supporting this identification; also proposed by Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 833.
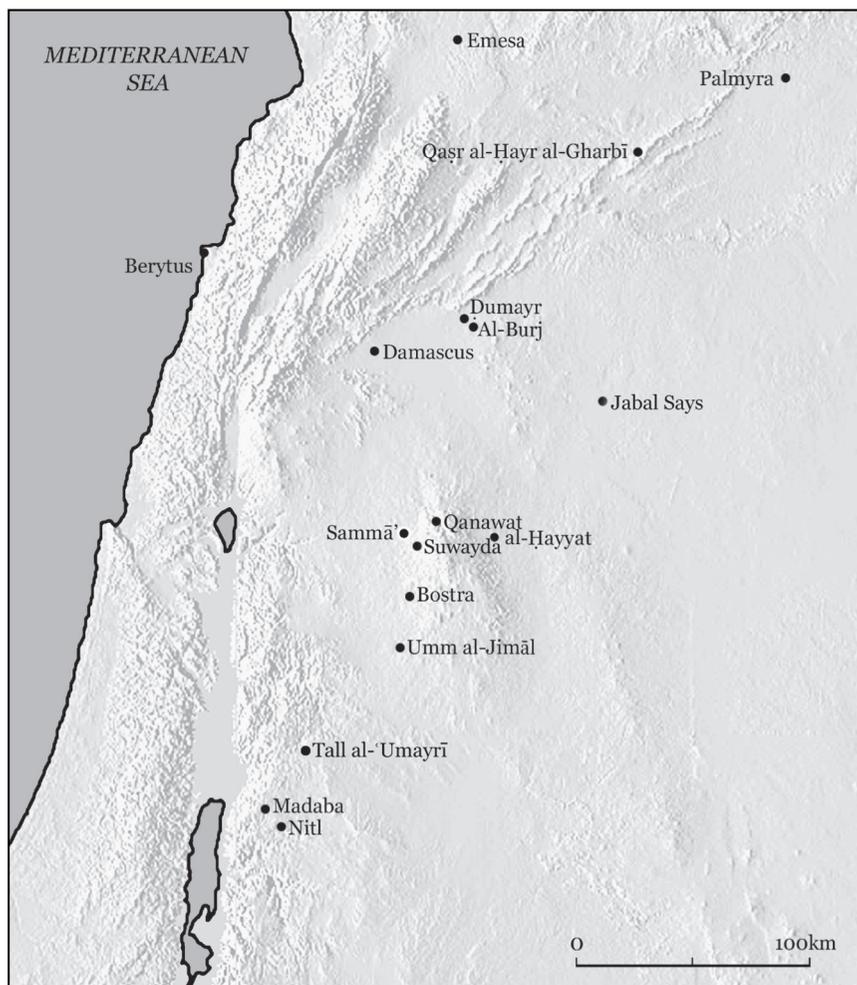
Fig. 6.1. Map showing the sites which provide epigraphic evidence connected to the Jafnids. Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (**4.6/6.23**); al-Burj (**4.2/6.32**); Sammāʾ (**6.24**); Tall al-ʿUmayrī East (**4.8/6.31**); and Nitl (**4.5/6.30**). Note also Jabal Says (**4.4/7.6**) and al-Ḥayyat (**4.1**). Ruṣāfa (**4.7/6.29**) is off the map to the north-east. Map amended by Aaron Styba and Carla Russo, from an original by Mat Dalton.

with his position as phylarch and making possible his tenure of *patrikios*, held since at least 563/4 (**5.27**), and which appears in letter 39 of the *Documenta* (above).[176] The rank of *endoxotatos* recorded here placed the Jafnid leader (and his brother, Abū Karib; see **6.24**) in the *illustres*, the top ranks of late

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[176] Gatier 2014: 196–201. The patriciate had been revived by Constantine, and carried great distinction. See Jones 1964: 528.
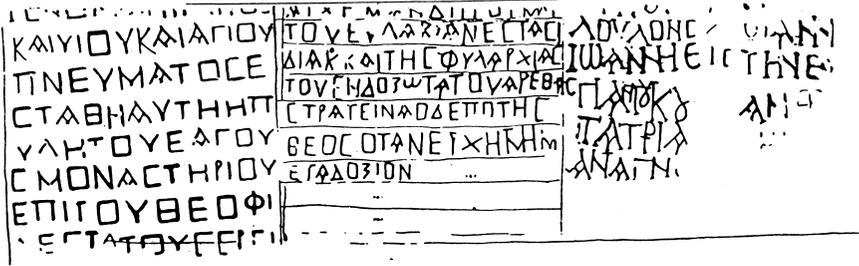
Fig. 6.2. Part of the inscribed lintel from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, indicating Panel 4 (centre: *IGLS* 5.2553B) from Schlumberger 1986: 26. Used with permission of the Institut Français du Proche-Orient (Ifpo).
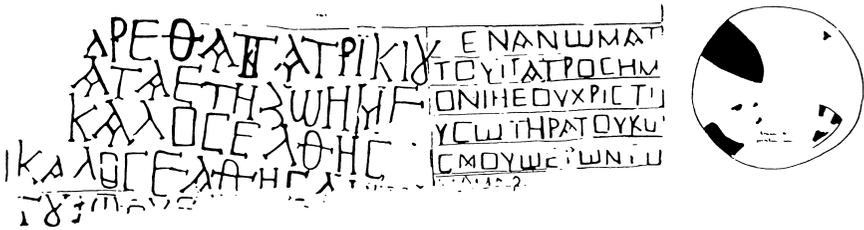
Fig. 6.3. Part of the inscribed lintel from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, indicating Panel 1 (far left: *IGLS* 5.2553D) from Schlumberger 1986: 26. Used with permission of the Institut Français du Proche-Orient (Ifpo).

Roman society, but, nevertheless, al-Ḥārith was below the 'titled' officers holding the rank of *magister militum*, such as the *magister militum per Orientem*, under whom al-Ḥārith served.[177]

Inscription B uses al-Ḥārith's tenure as phylarch, rather than the time in office of the emperor, for dating purposes. Rather than a suggestion that the Jafnid leader was acting independently of the emperor, this intriguing reference to al-Ḥārith might instead be better read as a reflection of his deep integration into the imperial administrative and military hierarchy.[178] Such an interpretation is not at all incompatible with the fact that the inscriptions demonstrate al-Ḥārith's local prominence, and 'une certaine concordance entre le phylarque et les autorités monachiques'.[179]

How exactly should the relationship between the Jafnids and the monasteries be understood? The list of subscriptions in the *Documenta* has been intensively examined in an effort to shed light on this question, as well as others—

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[177] Gatier 2014: 199; Jones 1964: 529, 543–4.   [178] Gatier 2014: 199–201.
[179] Gatier 2014: 201; ; Genequand 2006: 70; Fisher 2011a: 57–9; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 779; Millar 2013a: 25.

monastic topography, ecclesiastical structures, and the use of Greek and Syriac.[180] A recent examination has highlighted the role of the monasteries in a growing rural Miaphysite alternative to the urban-based Chalcedonian hierarchy, and it is clear that the Jafnids were associated with the emergence of this 'alternative'—but the exact nature of any contribution they may have made to monasticism is less obvious.[181] For example, it has been suggested that preserved in the list are a 'monastery of the Ghassānids' and a 'monastery of Jafna', evoking for some a deliberate Jafnid policy, perhaps, of promoting monastic activity.[182] This view has not won broad support.[183] Yet the large number of Miaphysite archimandrites subscribing to document 41 underscores the significant concentration of the Miaphysite monasteries in and around *Provincia Arabia*, and the prominence of the Jafnids amongst the Miaphysites gave them a de facto link to these important community institutions that 'were tightly woven into the social fabric of steppe and village life'.[184] So while there is no evidence to suggest that the Jafnids founded monasteries or deliberately promoted them, they do seem to have acquired a position of community leadership, connected to the monasteries, by virtue of their relationship with the different levels of Miaphysite leadership, including the archimandrites—and Jacob Baradeus himself. Such community prominence, far from the capital, ran parallel to the role of the Jafnids as the preferred Arab clients of the Roman empire, supported directly from Constantinople. The bifurcation of the family's actions was a powerful way to link together their activities in the urban centre, and rural periphery, of the Roman state.

Al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir (on whom more below) were not the only members of the family to attain prominence. Al-Ḥārith's brother, Abū Karib, who held the phylarchate of Palestine and administered the 'Palm Groves' of north-western Arabia (**5.19**), and who was involved in the embassy to Abraha of Ḥimyar in 548 (**3.21**), served in *c*.574 as a mediator in a financial transaction in Petra.[185] He also appears in two explicitly Christian contexts;

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[180] See Nöldeke 1875; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 735–88; Millar 2009. Hoyland 2009a: 121–5 offers a valuable reconsideration of Nöldeke's topographical explorations, supported by field research in Syria.

[181] Hoyland 2009a: 121–5 and 128 on the disassociation between Miaphysite bishops and their assigned sees, with monasteries as an occasional alternative. Jacob and Theodore, for example, did not live in Bostra and Edessa (to which they were assigned); Peter of Callinicum used a monastery (Gubba Barraya) as his seat.

[182] See Nöldeke 1875, discussed by Millar 2009: 107; see too Millar 2013a: 31 (note of caution). For the Jafnid/Ghassānid 'monasteries' see Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 183–219.

[183] See Fisher 2011a, esp. ch. 2, and extensive discussions in Millar 2009 and Hoyland 2009a.

[184] Fowden (E. K.) 2013: 404 on the large number of monasteries concentrated in this small area; quote from Fowden (E. K.) forthcoming. Cf. Millar 2009: 113, noting that the list of subscriptions 'mentions not a single bishop, and refers at the most to one or two cities . . . it is a vivid and detailed reflection of the life of monasteries located in villages'. See also Hamarneh 2003.

[185] *P. Petra* IV.39; Millar 2013a: 25; Kaimio 2001.

Fig. 6.4. *SEG* 43.1089. Photograph by Maurice Sartre.

the first is an inscription from the village of Sammāʾ, north-west of Suwayda, in Syria. The archaeological context of this inscription is discussed in Ch. 4.

> Abū Karib at Sammāʾ (Fig. 6.4)
> [**6.24**] *SEG* 43.1089 (trans. Bevan)
> †Lord God of St George †Protect the most glorious phylarch Abu-Chirib [*ABOYXIPIB*]

The text is derived from Psalm 120.8, using a formula known from other examples.[186] The inscription illustrates the senior rank of *endoxotatos* (*gloriosissimus*) accorded to Abū Karib, also held by his brother. Note the absence of the honorific *patrikios*, which seems to have been retained for the very top rank of the family.

The second mention of Abū Karib is in a codex from a monastery near Palmyra, which refers to 'the days of the holy and devout bishops Mar Jacob and Mar Theodore' and asks that 'Our Lord might show his compassion to King Abokarib (MLKʾ ʾBWKRYB) and to all their Christian brothers, and that as regards their errors the Lord might lead them back to true knowledge.'[187] The appearance of Jacob (Baradeus) and Theodore gives a date before 578, when Jacob died. While the exact location of the monastery is not known, the codex says that it is 'near TWDMR (Palmyra)'—consistent with the distribution of epigraphic and literary material covering the activities of the Jafnid family (Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, for example, is not far to the west of the oasis). Abū Karib is attested here in Syriac as MLKʾ, 'king'. (As with other appearances of this title (al-Ḥārith: **6.19**; Ar. *malik*, **7.6**; al-Mundhir, **6.26**; Ḥujr, **3.10**) the title should be read as a reference to elite status.) One question raised by the text concerns the 'errors' which appear to have afflicted Abū Karib (and possibly others), suggesting perhaps that his (or their?) dedication to the Miaphysites was less sincere than that displayed by al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir; we cannot know either way.[188] These two witnesses to Abū Karib's activities do furnish, however, further evidence for the prominent public connection between the family and (in the latter case Miaphysite) Christianity.

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[186] Sartre 1993: 151, listing *IGLS* 13.9037, 9038.
[187] Millar 2013a: 23.   [188] Millar 2013a: 25.

The actions of both al-Harith and Abū Karib anticipated the much greater role played in both political and ecclesiastical circles by al-Mundhir, as reported by John of Ephesus. Tritheism had threatened the unity of the Miaphysites in the late 560s; a decade later a bitter internecine struggle arose, prompting the Roman emperor Tiberius II to turn for help to al-Mundhir. This convoluted episode is noteworthy not only for its illustration of the immense prestige accorded to the Jafnids, but also because it laid part of the foundation, alongside the disastrous expedition across the Euphrates (**5.31–2**), for al-Mundhir's subsequent arrest and exile.

Jacob, Paul, and the Arabs
[**6.25**] John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.4.36/pp. 216–17 (trans. after Brooks)
All of the tribes of the Ṭayyayē initially supported the blessed Jacob. But when the elderly Ḥārith was alive, and Paul had gone there [to the tribes] and concealed himself amongst them, they were enthralled by him, and his moderation, his *gravitas*, and his learning. After Ḥārith died, they became more greatly enthralled [by Paul] when both parties would come together amongst them and would receive one another amicably. There in the camp of the Ṭayyayē everyone respected Paul and Jacob equally.

   Later, when Satan placed hatred between them [i.e. between Paul and Jacob], the Ṭayyayē became greatly upset—especially their king, Mundhir, together with his brothers and his sons. They implored the elderly Jacob to unite and reconcile the one [himself] with the other [Paul]. But he did not follow their wishes to receive [Paul] and unite with him, pleading the Alexandrians as his reason. 'If they will not take him in, then I will not receive him either.' All of the Ṭayyayē were unsettled and disturbed by this; and whenever Paul went to them, they would welcome him and receive the communion from him. And when Jacob went to them, they did the same thing, until Jacob forbade them to take the communion from him [Paul]. Therefore, until the death of the ageing Jacob they remained angry, in torment, and in turmoil. After his death, a large part of them followed the party of Jacob, and the other, Paul; still another group continued to accept both. All were equally saddened and vexed by this discord and division which had arisen between them. King Mundhir was especially saddened, for he was continually trying to conciliate both parties.

Here John of Ephesus provides part of the background to the problems faced by the Miaphysites around the time of Jacob's death in 578. The consecration of new bishops by Jacob and Theodore after 542 had promised a bright future: a new company of Miaphysite clergy might match that of the Chalcedonians, strengthening the Miaphysite claim to be the 'orthodox'. Now, though, new discord endangered the unity so crucial to any future success, and also enfeebled the Miaphysites in the face of any future persecution.

   The row had deep-seated, complex origins. Some time after Sergius, patriarch of Antioch, had died (*c*.563/4), the Miaphysite patriarch of Alexandria, Theodosius, ordered that Sergius' replacement should be the Alexandrian Paul 'the

Black'—the same Paul who appears in the text above.[189] Paul was later deposed by Peter, who had succeded Theodosius in Alexandria in 566. Paul was deposed because of his support for the unpopular Theodore, an unsuccessful candidate for Peter's position; as a result, enmity had arisen between Peter and Paul.

Eventually, Jacob Baradeus, who had consecrated Paul as patriarch of Antioch, reluctantly accepted this turn of events, and consequently aligned himself with Peter against Paul. As a result, Paul's supporters turned on Jacob, and a gulf emerged between those who supported Paul ('Paulites') and those who supported Jacob ('Jacobites'). Jacob and Peter died in 578. Peter's successor in Alexandria, Damian (578–606), and Paul's successor in Antioch, confusingly named Peter (of Callinicum, 581–91), kept the dispute between Alexandria and Antioch smouldering.[190] Damian, in particular, would emerge as one of the main obstacles to resolving this quarrel.

As John implies above, al-Mundhir was persistent in his efforts to bring a settlement between the two parties. However, by 580 the dispute was serious enough to threaten imperial efforts to ensure stability and peace in the eastern provinces; it attracted the attention of Tiberius II, who invited al-Mundhir to Constantinople to arbitrate the disupte, with his personal backing.

Al-Mundhir in Constantinople
[**6.26**] John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.4.39/pp. 218–20 (trans. after Brooks)
The furnace of the Babylonians was blazing hotter than ever between the two factions of the Paulites and Jacobites . . . [. . .] the illustrious patrician Mundhir, summoned to come to the emperor, was received there magnificently . . . [and he] laboured with zeal and strength to end all these evils which lay between those who were the same in faith and the same in communion. After assembling both sides, Mundhir admonished, blamed, and reproached them for all of these evils, the discord, and the controversy which had arisen between them. He urged them to desist from [their] quarrels, and to abstain from future struggles and disputes, and to find peace amongst themselves—especially since they were of the same faith. [. . .] The visit of the illustrious Mundhir was made on the eighth day of the month of *shēbāth* [February] in the [Seleucid] year 891 [580]. He was received with great pomp and infinite honours by the merciful king Tiberius, who honoured him with great gifts and presents and offerings and did whatever [Mundhir] wanted. He even gave ranks [or titles] to the two sons who had accompanied him, and acknowledged him with a royal diadem.

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[189] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 782–4 suggests that al-Ḥārith was involved in Paul's consecration, which would help to explain Paul's decision to take refuge with the Jafnid leadership, as John relates. Documents 8–17 in the *Documenta* contain correspondence related to Paul's consecration. Al-Ḥārith does not appear in those letters, but it is suggested in letter 23 that al-Ḥārith is aware of the consecration, since it may be the matter he is discussing with Jacob. See van Roey and Allen 1994: 274–8 and 280.

[190] Allen 2000 outlines this complex affair in some detail; see also van Rompay 2005: 252, whose succinct version is the basis of the summary above. See too Frend 1972: 324–9; Shahîd 1995–2010 vol. 1: 876–906.

John does not describe the titles given to al-Mundhir's sons. They may have been military positions, but the martyrion from al-Burj (**6.32**) lists his sons as *endoxotatoi* (*gloriosissimi*), and it is possible that the Burj inscription reflects the passage of events in Constantinople. The reference to al-Mundhir as 'the illustrious' is interesting; Shahîd sees in this an equivalence to the rank of *paneuphēmos*, senior to that of *endoxotatos* held by his father, al-Ḥārith.[191] Much has been written about the diadem (or crown) which John mentions. It is clear that it honoured al-Mundhir, but it also reinforced Tiberius' expectations.[192] The implications of this text, and the others discussed here, for our understanding of the ranks and titles given to the Jafnids are considered further below, after **6.31**.

John goes on to note that the formal meeting (which he attended) took place a little later, on the second day of March 580. He relates a lengthy debate between the various factions, chaired by al-Mundhir. A compromise was reached, he says, and a 'formal deed of union', sealed by prayer, was arranged that would end division and quarrel. Nevertheless:

> [**6.26**, cont.] John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.4.40/p. 221 (trans. after Brooks)
> There were, however, unruly and treacherous men, filled with the filth of injustice, and who were greatly displeased with the peace which had been brought about. The conference with Mundhir had been made [only] with the most important of the men, and the chiefs, and not the multitude of the people. On this pretext . . . several in the opposing party changed their minds and strove to destroy what had been done [agreed on]. After gathering themselves for discussion, they wrote letters, and made demonstrations, in Syria and in Alexandria. They confused many and [urged them to] stand against what had been done, and not to accept it or submit to it . . . [meanwhile] the meeting [in Constantinople] had ended in peace and joy.

The juxtaposition of the subterfuge by those who felt left out of the process, and the successful conclusion of the meeting, anticipates John's moral outrage at what is to come. Still flush with success, and unaware of betrayal building against him, al-Mundhir dealt with some further business, including gaining a pledge from Tiberius that persecution against the Miaphysites would end. Tiberius dismissed him with further gifts and honours, and John again mentions the diadem (or crown), presumably the same one described earlier. John adds the note that this honour had never before been allowed to a king of the Ṭayyāyē, a reflection once more of the weight of expectation placed on al-Mundhir, as well as his family's privileged relationship with the Roman emperor.[193]

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[191] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 517.   [192] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 398–406.
[193] Joh. Eph. *HE* 3.4.42/p. 224.

Al-Mundhir subsequently left Constantinople, but away from the capital he lost his direct influence over the troublesome patriarch of Alexandria, Damian.

Damian and al-Mundhir
[**6.27**] John of Ephesus, *HE* 3.4.43/pp. 225–6 (trans. after Brooks)
The imperious Syrian Damian . . . returned to Alexandria and [found himself] blamed because of Paul. Then, just like one [wishing to] please men, rather than being eager for the peace of the church, or to please God, he broke his word and his promise to the illustrious Mundhir and to the other faithful from both parties who had entreated with him. He [thus] changed his mind, and turned on Paul. He wrote anathemas against him, and bitter insults and abuse.

Damian followed up with an encyclical condemning Paul that he sent out to the surrounding dioceses. This turn of events, and the collapse of the agreement, helped to weaken al-Mundhir's position in Constantinople shortly before he embarked on the doomed mission with Maurice (**5.31–2**). It was little matter that the collapse of what had seemed to be a successful negotiation was the fault of Damian, rather than al-Mundhir himself; rather, the faith placed in the Jafnid leader by the emperor could now be perceived as bad judgement—and an embarrassment. The Jafnid leader rapidly lost control of the situation, as allegations made by Maurice about al-Mundhir's duplicity and treachery surfaced in Constantinople. The origins of al-Mundhir's ousting thus lie in the dispute between the Jacobites and the Paulites, and were made worse by events which subsequently took place hundreds of miles away in Iraq. The narrative of al-Mundhir's demise considered in Ch. 5 makes it clear that he was still very much an 'outsider' in the labyrinth of court politics in Constantinople.[194]

Several years after al-Mundhir's ouster, schisms between rival Miaphysites continued to fester. A phylarch once again was called in to intercede between Damian and Peter of Callinicum.

Jafna, Damian, and Peter
[**6.28**] Michael the Syrian, *Chron.* 10.22/pp. 383–4 (trans. after Chabot)
[*Following a failed attempt to convene the disputing parties*]. Under pressure from us [Peter et al.] and from the glorious phylarch [presumably the individual named earlier in the text as a certain 'Jafna'] they [Damian et al.] came together with us for the second time in the church of St Sergius, at Gabitha . . . . [eventually] the phylarch and those with him were not able to impose order, and the dispute continued. They understood that they were stirring up trouble in order to conceal their own weakness. The phylarch was in a rush to return to his own troops. He said: 'Does it please you to return to a place determined by us? If not, then let me leave.' Then the patriarch [i.e. Damian] looked for pretexts about the various

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[194] Fisher 2011a: ch. 5.

people. The phylarch replied, 'It is not right for you to be corrected by layfolk such as us.' As the patriarch did not allow himself to be persuaded, and did not accept the note which was written concerning the meeting place, the phylarch left, irritated.

Michael reports here a letter by Peter of Callinicum—biased, due to his enmity against Damian; the events seem to have taken place in *c*.590. The identity of the phylarch Jafna is unknown, but the 'church of St Sergius, at Gabitha' appears in subscription 24 of letter 41 in the *Documenta*.[195] Gabitha, or al-Jābiya, has been given a certain prominence with regard to the Jafnids in some modern scholarship (see Ch. 4) and together with 'Jafna' here it is tempting to see a revival of the privileged position of the Jafnids in the aftermath of al-Mundhir's arrest. Such a view is unsupported by the evidence, however, and in any case it is not necessary to interpret Michael's text as a restoration of the formal alliance with the empire.[196] There is no indication here of imperial involvement, and the numerous connections between the family and senior Miaphysites suggest the likelihood of those family members and associates not caught up in the purge perhaps retaining their status amongst (and utility for) the Miaphysite leaders—especially as the dispute with Damian dragged on. The positive tone taken by Peter of Callinicum towards Jafna suggests that this might be the case.

Another possibility is that this individual might be identified with the Abū Jafna Nuʿmān b. al-Mundhir who acted as a mediator between Maurice and Khusrau II at about the same time (**5.34**). While none of these associations can be proven, it is noteworthy that it is once again a phylarch who is the locus of mediation, and also that it was apparently Damian's refusal to compromise that scuttled proceedings. The two patriarchal sees of Antioch and Alexandria would, in the end, only be reconciled in 616, a decade after Damian's death.[197]

The Jafnids and St Sergius

The Jafnids won a reputation in the Miaphysite communities of the East, but they also earned credibility through their links to the cult of St Sergius. This further promoted their visibility amongst the village churches of *Provincia Arabia*, and at the centre of the cult at Ruṣāfa in *Euphratesia*. Importantly, since the cult was not explicitly connected either with Chalcedonians or Miaphysites, Jafnid involvement with it allowed them to extend their influnce

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[195] Beth Mar Sergios of GBYTʾ: Millar 2009: 109.
[196] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 925–35. Millar 2013a: 30 notes the correlation of Gabitha and al-Jābiya, the site usually associated with the Jafnid family, although noting that there is no clear basis for preferring Gabitha/al-Jābiya as 'the "camp" of a "Ghassanid" phylarch'. See Ch. 4.
[197] Van Rompay 2005: 252; see Hoyland 2009a: 129.

into those Christian communities which were not necessarily aligned with the Miaphysites.[198]

Sergius had been a senior military officer close to the emperor, who, along with Bacchus, a colleague only slightly his junior, was executed after refusing to recant the Christian faith.[199] Their *Passio* records the martyrdom and burial of Sergius at Ruṣāfa, and the site became the main focus for a cult which spread rapidly throughout the East, and which was especially popular with Arabs.[200] Literary sources (e.g. **5.30, 6.28**) show the relationship between Arab leaders and the cult, and the mediatory function of centres associated with it. Epigraphic evidence, and a discussion of the mosaics uncovered during excavations at the churches of St Sergius at Nitl and Tall al-ʿUmayrī East—both linked with the Jafnids—offer further insight into the prominence of the family in the rural communities of the East.

Ruṣāfa: The 'al-Mundhir' Building

See **4.7**. The inscripion inside the 'al-Mundhir building' reads as follows.

> The inscription from Ruṣāfa (Fig. 6.5)
> [**6.29**] *SEG* 7.188.
> † The fortune of Alamoundaros triumphs.

The so-called 'al-Mundhir building' was positioned outside the city's northern gate, near the presumed spot of Sergius' martyrdom, to tap into the movement of people, news, and intelligence that coalesced around Ruṣāfa, a site that lay at the intersection of major communication routes in the region and held an honoured place in *Euphratesia* as the home of the Sergius cult. The building was clearly designed for communication and patronage, while the inscription itself offers a slightly clichéd formula found elsewhere in the region (it can be interpreted as 'long live al-Mundhir').[201] Together these elements confirm 'al-Mundhir's skilful adoption of the cultural language of Rome',[202] but contrived in such a way as to delineate clearly his political authority in the borderlands between Rome and Persia. The diverse influences fused in the building are illuminated by Whittow's suggestion that 'one might interpret it as the

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[198] Wood 2014; Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 156.

[199] Fowden 1999 (E. K.): 12–13 on the identity of the emperor—Julian, Maximinus Daia, or perhaps Galerius.

[200] Fowden 1999 (E. K.): 38–44 in particular on the idea of Sergius as a guardian saint on horseback, well suited to the 'potentially hostile environment of the steppe' and thus offering a compatibility with those who lived there. For links specifically with Arabs see too Proc. *BP* 2.20.1–16, Theoph. Sim. *Hist.* 5.1.7 (n. 25 above) and Severus of Antioch, *Homilies* (*PO* 4, p. 93).

[201] For the most recent examination, see Gatier 2014: 206–8.

[202] Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 159–60. Gatier 2014: 207: 'l'assimilation au modèle impériale est implicite'.

Fig. 6.5. *SEG* 7.188. Photograph by Cyril Mango. Reprinted by permission of Cyril Mango and Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, D.C.

equivalent of a great shaykh's seven-pole tent, but built in stone and in a Roman idiom'.[203] The building also constitutes another fixed point in the landscape—a (Roman) church, as well as a space for mediation between tribe and state, interaction with travellers during the pilgrimage to the shrine of St Sergius, and a demonstration of the importance of the Jafnid leader in the region.[204] The date of the inscription is not clear, although the honours granted to al-Mundhir by Tiberius II in 580, at the apex of al-Mundhir's power, offer one possibility.[205]

Nitl and Tall al-ʿUmayrī East: The Inscriptions Mentioning the Jafnids

The churches of St Sergius at Nitl and Tall al-ʿUmayrī East both provide epigraphic evidence for the Jafnids, although the identification of the individuals at the former is less clear than that of al-Mundhir at the latter. In

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[203] Whittow 1999: 222.
[204] For detailed analysis, see Sauvaget 1939a; Brands 2011; Brands 1998; Fowden (E. K.) 2000; Fowden (E. K.) 1999: Fisher 2011a; Fisher forthcoming; Genequand 2006.
[205] Gatier 2014: 208.

combination with the rich mosaic finds, especially from Nitl (below), these sites provide additional indications of the footprint of the family in *Provincia Arabia*. As rural 'fixed points' in the landscape, they also reinforce the impression of Jafnid patronage away from the urban centres, discussed above.

Nitl

(For the archaeological context and a plan of the complex, see **4.5**.) The mosaic inscriptions from Nitl offer numerous prayers for the artisans, and offerings from imperial officials, as well as a prayer for the health and safety of a phylarch, Thaalaba (Thaʿlaba), a name linked in various sources with Arabs allied to Rome (**3.14**, **5.4**, **5.6**). The rank of *lamprotatos* was, by the sixth century, low in status by comparison with that of *endoxotatos*.[206] A recently published graffito from near Eilat refers to another Thaʿlaba, whom Robin identifies as a king of Ghassān.[207] However, the identity of the Thaʿlaba from Nitl is unknown, even if a Jafnid link is likely.

> Mosaic inscriptions from Nitl
> [**6.30**] (Piccirillo 2001: 282) (Fig. 6.6)
> For the salvation of the most illustrious [*lamprotatos*] Thaalaba the phylarchos (son) of Audelas (?)
>
> Oh Eretha son of Al-Aretha

Fig. 6.6. The mosaic inscription from Nitl referring to Thaʿlaba, from Piccirillo 2002b: 216. © Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem.

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[206] Jones 1964: 529.   [207] Avner et al. 2013; cf. Genequand 2006: 79.

ΚΕΠΡΟCΔΕΖΕΤΗΝΠΡΟCΦΤWΠΡΟCΕΝΕΚΚΟΝΤΙΚΑΙΤWΓΡΑΨΑΙ   CYMOYCHΛIWMETATEKNUN·
ΚΕΚΧCΟΘCΤΟΥΔΓΙΟΥCΕΡΓΙΟΥΔΙΛΦΥΛΑΖΑΝΤΟΝΜΕΤΑΛΑΠΡΑΛΜΟΥΝΔΑΡΟΝΚΟΙ
ΟΘCΤΟΥΔΓΙΥCΕΡΓΙΟΥΕΥΛΟΓΗCΟΝΤΟΝΔΟΥΛΟΝCΟΥΕΥCΕΒΗΝΜΕΤΑΤΕΚΝ
ΟΘCΤΟΥΑΓΙΟΥCΕΡΓΙΟΥΕΥΛΟΓΗCΟΝΤΟΝΔΟΥΛΟΝCΟΥΙWΑΝΝΗΝΜΕΤΑCΥΝΒΙΟΥΚΑΙΤΕΚ
ΟΘCΤΟΥΑΓΙΟΥCΕΡΓΙΟΥΕΥΛΟΓΗCΟΝΤΟΝΔΟΥΛΟΝCΟΥΑΒΔΑΛΛΑΚΑΙΔΙΑΝΥCΗΝΚΑΙC
ΡΕΠΙΤΟΥΘΕΟΦΙΛΕCΤΑΤΟΥΠΟΛΥΑΚΤΟΥΕΠΙCΚΕΨΕΦΩΘΗΤΟΑΓΙΑΝΜΑΡΤΥΡΙΟΝΤΟΥΑC
ΤΟΥΔΗΜΑΡΙΡΑΒΒΟΥΕΥΛΑΒCΠΡΕCΒΚΑΙΓΕWΡΓΙΟΥΔΙΑΚΚΑΙCΑΒΙΝΟΚΑΙΜΑΡΙΑCΕΝΜΗΑΠΡΙΛΙWΧΡΟΝ

Fig. 6.7. The mosaic inscription from Tall al-ʿUmayrī East, drawn by Aaron Styba.

Scholarly consensus suggests that the al-Aretha mentioned here (Plate 7) is likely, beyond reasonable doubt, to be al-Ḥārith.[208] The identity of Eretha, though, is less clear. Other than al-Mundhir, and also two others—a Gabala, killed in action in 554 (**5.23**), and an unnamed son killed in 545 (**5.22**)—nothing is known about the children of al-Ḥārith.

Tall al-ʿUmayrī East

The appearance of al-Ḥārith, and the link with St Sergius, had long made a Jafnid association with Nitl preferable; this has now been strengthened by the new discovery from Tall al-ʿUmayrī East, a short distance away. The archaeological context of this newly discovered church is discussed under **4.8** (see Plate 9).

> The inscription from Tall al-ʿUmayrī (Fig. 6.7)
> [**6.31**] *BÉ* 2012: 488 (trans. Bevan)[209]
> Lord, receive the offering of the donor and the one who has created (this mosaic), [your servant] Mouselios along with his children.
> Our Lord Jesus Christ, God of Saint Sergius protect the *megaloprepestatos* (*magnificentissimus*) Almoundaros, the *comes*.
> God of Saint Sergius, bless your servant Eusebius along with his children.
> God of Saint Sergius, bless your servant Ioannes along with his wife and children.
> God of Saint Sergius, bless your servant Abdalla and Dionysios and S. . . . ..
> In the time of the bishop Polyeuktos, the most beloved by God, the holy Martyrion of Saint Sergius was decorated with a mosaic floor
> by the zeal of Mari, son of Rabbos the most devout priest, and Georgios the Deacon, and Sabinus and Maria in the month of April at the time of the.. [indiction]

A complete discussion of the inscription can be found in Gatier 2014 and Bevan et al. 2015; here several principle elements can be highlighted. While 'Almoundaros' is not explicitly stated as al-Ḥārith's son, the family links

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[208] Feissel *BÉ* 1993; cf. Gatier 2014: 196–201 Fisher 2011a: Millar 2010b: 215.
[209] Unfortunately no colour photograph is available of this inscription; see al-Shami 2010.

with the cult of St Sergius and the proximity of Nitl make such an identification relatively certain. One noteworthy element of the inscription is al-Mundhir's rank. *Megaloprepestatos* (*magnificentissimus*) is junior in the *illustres* to the rank of *endoxotatos* held by Abū Karib and al-Ḥārith, and, combined with the (presumably honorary) office of *comes*, indicates a status comparable to a provincial governor.[210] Nowhere else is al-Mundhir known as a *comes*, and indeed only one other *comes* is known from the epigraphic record relating to the Arabs.[211] Elsewhere al-Mundhir appears with the very senior rank of *paneuphēmos* (*famosissimus*), placing him on the same level as consuls and *duces*,[212] and underwriting his tenure of the title *patrikios*.[213] The intermediate rank of *megaloprepestatos*, and the absence at Tall al-ʿUmayri East of the title of *patrikios*—which al-Mundhir holds in letter 41 of the *Documenta*, dated to 569/70 (above) and again at al-Burj (below)—suggest that the Tall al-ʿUmayri inscription should be dated prior to 569.[214] Unfortunately, even before the recent incidence of vandalism at the site, the mosaic was damaged in the exact spot where one would expect to find the indiction cycle, and the precise dates of the tenure of the bishop Polyeuktos (the bishop of Philadelphia) are unknown.

Al-Mundhir's rank at Tall al-ʿUmayrī East offers a rare glimpse into the structure of the Jafnid phylarchate and, perhaps, the procedure for imperial confirmation of the Jafnid leaders. Imperial recognition via titles, the award of senatorial rank, financial support, and other means was of course an important component of the way that Rome managed her allies, including Arab phylarchs. The intermediate rank accorded to al-Mundhir here might reflect a snapshot of his preparation to take over from his ageing father, who, as *patrikios*, and, depending on when the inscriptions from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī should be dated, as *endoxotatos*, had visited Justinian in 563 to gain his approval for the succession (**5.27**). At al-Burj, al-Mundhir's sons hold the rank of *endoxotatos*; al-Nuʿmān, a son of al-Mundhir, is both *stratēlatēs* (presumably honorary, as with al-Ḥārith at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr) and *endoxotatos*.[215] Abū Karib, al-Mundhir's uncle, also held the rank of *endoxotatos*.[216] These examples illustrate a logical hierarchy of ranks and titles given to the Jafnid family, with the leadership designated *patrikioi*, and senior members, including al-Ḥārith, as *endoxotatoi*. The more senior rank of *paneuphēmos* given to al-Mundhir might be understood within the context of his visit to Constantinople (**6.26**). Prior to the fortuitous discovery of the inscription at Tall

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[210] Jones 1964: 526–30; di Segni 1997: 96–100; cf. Sartre 1982: 108–13.

[211] Flavius Kathelgouos, from 350: see Sartre 1993.

[212] E.g. *PUAES* IIIA nos 22–3 (Qaṣr al-Ḥallābāt, AD 529).

[213] Al-Mundhir as *paneuphēmos* see *Wadd.* 2562c (al-Burj) and 2110 = *IGLS* 16.628 (al-Ḥayyat). See **6.31, 4.1/4.3**.

[214] Bevan et al. 2015; *BÉ* 2012: 488 (D. Feissel).

[215] *IGLS* 4.1550, from Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān.   [216] *SEG* 43.1089: Sammāʾ.

al-ʿUmayrī East, there was no clear example of a Jafnid leader holding a junior/intermediate title such as *megaleprepestatos*, and all together this evidence suggests perhaps that the system of assigning titles, and preparing the different Arab elites for service in alliance with the empire, was far more complex than previously thought.[217]

George Bevan, Greg Fisher, and Philip Wood

The Mosaics at Nitl and Tall al-ʿUmayrī East

The appearance of the Jafnids al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir on the inscriptions at Nitl and Tall al-ʿUmayrī illustrates, once again, the association between the family and public expressions of piety in the villages of *Provincia Arabia*. The prominence of this association is highlighted by evidence for the disposition of wealth, especially at Nitl, represented by the quality and craftsmanship of the mosaics.

Of the two parallel churches at Nitl, the south church was probably the main church of the complex. It was floored by an elaborate mosaic covering the entire surface of the nave. However, several missing parts and areas repaired either with small coloured tesserae or with larger patches of limestone cubes are noticeable.[218]

Nitl: The Mosaics of the South Church

The *presbyterium* mosaic consisted of a geometric border formed by a semicircular three-stranded guilloche,[219] which followed the architectural shape of the *synthronon*, its inner field displaying two heraldic lambs which flanked a multibranched tree, while the remains of a frame of swastika meander decorated the area in front of the altar.[220] Two passages leading to the side rooms are decorated with a simple pattern of squares and diamonds, also repeated in the narthex, as well as in the parallel north church.[221] Of the lateral service rooms, there remains only the southern one decorated with a Greek inscription of very poor quality,[222] and a limited portion of a three-stranded guilloche border.

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[217] Cf. Delmaire 1984.

[218] Repair using small tesserae was made intentionally after the removal of images of living creatures during an iconophobic phase generally dated to the eighth century. The second repair using large limestone cubes was probably carried out to fix normal wear and tear, or through natural causes. The unrepaired areas were a result of the abandonment of the building, and natural causes. See Piccirillo 1996; Bowersock 2006: 98–103.

[219] A pattern formed by a twisted-rope design often used in borders and to frame elements of mosaics. Polychrome guilloches of type B4 (according to Avi Yonah's classification) were widely employed in the mosaics of *Arabia*.

[220] The mosaic was first published by Piccirillo 1989: 263–5.

[221] This confirms that the mosaic pavements were laid over the entire area of the complex in a limited chronological span.

[222] The inscription was included in a *tabula ansata*, but its poor conservation did not allow.

The Nave Mosaic

(This section should be read with reference to Plate 8.) The nave of the church was richly adorned with mosaics mostly inspired by the tradition of the diocese of Madaba.[223] Surrounded by a wide border, the main ground was divided into two sections decorated with geometric elements, plants, and human and animal figures. The border framing the entire mosaic carpet included, and also separated, the two panels. On a black background, foliate masks are highlighted in the corners and in medallions of acanthus leaves, some tightly enclosing scenes of human and animal combat: hunters on foot face lions, tigers and wild boars; other acanthus *rinceaux*[224] are devoted instead to animal chases with dogs and gazelles, all moving in a circular direction.[225]

The first panel, which extends from the chancel step to the sixth pillar, consists of a large rectangular field with four vases in the corners set diagonally and vines laden with grapes elegantly springing from each *kantharos* (Fig. 6.8).[226]

Stems form circular compartments asymmetrically framing pledging inscriptions of benefactors:[227] three in the first row,[228] one in the second,[229] and two in the fifth.[230] Other *rinceaux* display a variety of animals, birds, plants, vines and baskets full of grapes, elements of local fauna (Fig. 6.9), and the activities of daily life.[231]

It is worth pointing out that the mosaic decoration is perfectly set around the rectangular opening of the *hypogeum*, covered by a stone with metal hooks

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[223] The main parallels for the iconographic themes displayed are to be found in the pavements of the diocesan see and its surrounding districts (see below).

[224] An ornamental motif consisting essentially of a sinuous and branching scroll elaborated with leaves and other natural forms, such as the acanthus or vine.

[225] See also Merrony 1998: 454–5.

[226] A type of vase or vessel with two distinctive handles rising from the brim and curving downward to join the body and terminating in a foot.

[227] The inscriptions were published in Piccirillo 2005: 281–2; Feissel 2006: 284–6.

[228] Both lateral inscribed medallions are in good condition. The left one can be translated as 'At the time of the most pious priest Saola the holy place was built and finished' (Piccirillo 2001: 281); for the right, see **6.30** and Plate 7. The central medallion has been completely deleted by a wide patch of white limestone tesserae, and only few letters remain, indicating presumably a second dedication by a member of the clergy or/lay donor (?) to the holy place: . . . (επι) *TOY* . . . . (αγιον τοπο) *N*.

[229] 'O God of Saint Sergius help Ammonis and his sons, the mosaicist who has laboured for the (holy) place' (Piccirillo 2001: 281).

[230] Compared to those in the first and second row, the two inscriptions are written in a completely different manner: the Greek letters are angular, and not rounded, suggesting the work of a second team of mosaicists. The one on the right reads: 'Saint Sergius accept the offering of Peter (son) of Dorius and of John the *adiutor*' (Piccirillo 2001: 282). For the inscription on the left it is possible to suggest a few insertions, such as: . . . .. (προσδεζ) *AI* . . . . (θεοδ)*OPOΣ* . . . . (...)*XOΣ* . . . (—)*POΣ*. The latter has not been published.

[231] Dauphin 1987.

Fig. 6.8. Nitl, St Sergius Church, main carpet: *kantharos*. Photograph by Basema Hamarneh.
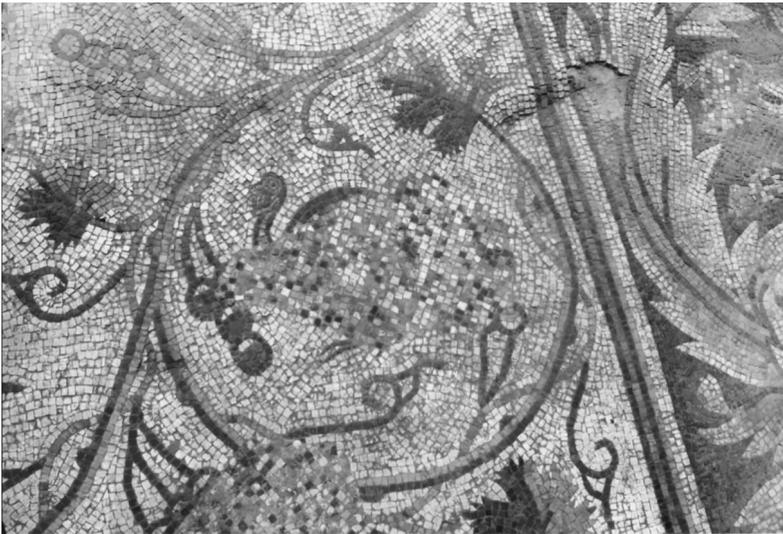
Fig. 6.9 Nitl, St Sergius Church, main carpet: turkey. Photograph by Basema Hamarneh.

that permitted access, stressing that the tomb was deliberately included in the original architectural planning and probably had a specific role within the liturgical context.[232]

Starting from the fifth row, the vine *rinceaux* frame a large geometric *emblema*,[233] enclosed within two concentric circles; its internal part displays interlaced circles and rectangles entwined with loops forming a central octagon with a dedicatory inscription of which only a few letters remain.

The smaller and well-proportioned, second, rectangular field extends from the seventh pillar to the facade. The surviving segments allow one to reconstruct a large medallion, perfectly placed in the centre and filled with a combination of triangles of various sizes that gradually widen towards the external edge of calyx florets. Externally, a pattern of diagonal squares outlined by a row of florets include, in vertical order, trees laden with fruits, confronted birds, plants, fruits, and flowers in bloom. The floor was laid by Ammonis, the mosaicist who invokes the mercy of St Sergius upon himself and his children in one of the nave inscriptions.[234] Near the side entrance in the intercolumniation, an inscription mentions 'Eretha, son of Al-Aretha' (**6.30; Plate 7**).[235]

Nitl: The North Church

The north church, parallel to the south church (Fig. 4.5), has a similar architectural and stylistic layout, despite its slightly wider proportions. The *presbyterium*, covered by a modern building and thus only partially investigated, displays a meander-swastika border.[236] Incorporated into the new building, the mosaic pavement of the north *diakonikon* (Fig. 6.10) is still *in situ* and consists of a swastika-meander border, the inner field exhibiting a combination of three-*peltae*[237] rosettes diagonally crossed by two lines, filled with calyx florets arranged in a triangle.[238]

The nave mosaic is framed by an inhabited vine *rinceau*, of which the few visible stems enclose peacocks and baskets full of grapes, while the field consists of crossed *scuta*,[239] unfortunately preserved only in limited areas. The general iconographic setting of the second rectangular panel perfectly

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[232] Piccirillo suggested that the church probably included the tomb of Thaalaba and his descendants. See Piccirillo 2001: 283; it seems improbable, though, that the church acted effectively as a 'dynastic' Jafnid mausoleum, since several examples from other rural settlements in the area show that burial in churches was common in the sixth century. See also Sanmorì 1998: 412–24; Hamarneh 2004: 203.

[233] A central panel with figure representations—people, animals, and other objects, or occasionally another featured design motif in a mosaic, usually surrounded by floral or geometric designs in coarser mosaic work.

[234] Cf. Piccirillo 2001: 281–2.   [235] Shahîd 2001a: 286–7.

[236] Hamarneh 2006b: 272–3.

[237] A decorative pattern of a semicircular shield shape.   [238] Hamarneh 2004: 209.

[239] *Scutum*: a stylized form recalling a rectangular curved shield.

Fig. 6.10. Nitl, north church, North/East *diakonikon*: geometric mosaic pavement. Photograph by Basema Hamarneh.

twins that of the south church—a unique case in Jordan.[240] Although slight changes were introduced, this panel exhibits a frame of acanthus leaves enclosing scenes of an animal chase, with a mask of the Seasons at each corner. In the centre, an *emblema* is filled with small triangles that widen gradually towards the outer edge emphasized by a sinuous double loop. The remaining part of the field includes diagonal compartments with flowers, baskets, and birds.

The South *Diakonikon*

Built against the south wall of the Church of St Sergius, and communicating with it through a door, a small rectangular chapel is located behind the apse of the martyrion chapel. The mosaic floor originally covered the whole room, and consisted of a panel with an inhabited acanthus scroll border, identical in colours to that in the Church of St Sergius, displaying an animal chase with a running gazelle, a hare (Fig. 6.11), a tiger and a hound on the south (Fig. 6.12), and a sheep and a bird on the east. The field was originally filled with vine scrolls inhabited by animals of which only an ox is extant.[241]

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[240] Several cases of twin churches are characterized by different pavements; see, for instance, the double churches of the Umm al-Raṣāṣ fort. See Piccirillo 1993.

[241] Hamarneh 2004: 212.

Fig. 6.11. Nitl, South/East *diakonikon*: frieze with running gazelle and hare. Photograph by Basema Hamarneh.

Fig. 6.12. Nitl, South/East *diakonikon*: frieze with running hound. Photograph by Basema Hamarneh.

The Martyrion Chapel

Undoubtedly the most intriguing part of the ecclesiastical complex is the martyrion chapel, built against and parallel to the south wall of the Church of St Sergius, and appearing slightly elongated so as to allow entry directly

from the narthex. The martyrion was closed on the facade by a raised plastered structure crowned by a barrel vault. The platform included a shallow cavity, probably an uncommon form of reliquary,[242] and was frontally equipped with a chancel screen. The martyrion mosaics covered the whole pavement, although fragments have survived only in the centre and near the reliquary. A large rectangular frame produced by a tree-stranded guilloche surrounded the field decorated with a large vase flanked on either side by a heraldic peacock. Animals face each other within acanthus *rinceaux*: a wild boar and a lioness, a lion and a bull, all figures facing the apse of the chapel.[243] In reverse order and facing the reliquary cavity, two rampant heraldic lions flank a medallion that originally contained a standing figure, unfortunately now lost.[244] This unusual orientation is not casual: the intention of the mosaicist and of the benefactor was probably to emphasize the importance of the relics, or whatever was kept within the raised platform.

Dating

In regard to displayed subjects and general layout, the pavements of Nitl appear well in line with those discovered in both urban contexts and in rural settlements, although the dominant imprint is that of the mosaic tradition established within the jurisdiction of the episcopal see of Madaba. The lack of a dating inscription, presumably lost in the numerous lacunae, leads us to put forward some historical and iconographic considerations paralleling the Nitl mosaics with other dated floors within the diocese of Madaba. Piccirillo suggested that the mosaic should be dated to the first half of the sixth century within the period of office of bishops Cyrus (beginning of the sixth century) and Elias (531–6) as bishops of Madaba.[245] Nevertheless, it appears preferable, in view of stylistic uniformity, to date the layout under their successor, John (542/57–65), whilst maintaining the broad chronological framework suggested by Piccirillo. The closest parallel is that of the floor of the church of al-Khadir in Madaba, dated to the sixth century, probably laid also under John. Its dynamic programme has much in common with that of the Church of St Sergius at Nitl.[246] Vine scrolls were perhaps one of the most popular subjects for unfurling a narrative on local pavements. Several variants are displayed: in the Church of Saints Lot and Procopius at Khirbat al-Mukhayyāt (diocese of Madaba) dated to 542/57;[247] similarly, in the Church of al-Khadir

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[242] Reliquaries are usually set in the *presbyterium* of churches in a cavity under the altar. See Duval 1994: 180–8.

[243] Hamarneh 2004: 213–14.

[244] A parallel may be suggested with the panel included within the chancel screen of the *presbyterium* of the upper church of Massūh, which depicts two lions facing a medallion. See Piccirillo 1993: 252.

[245] For the list of the bishops of Madaba, see Piccirillo 2005: 380–1.

[246] Piccirillo 1989: 110–15.   [247] Piccirillo 1993: 164–5.

in Madaba,[248] in the Upper Church of Massūh,[249] in that of Deacon Thomas
(ʿAyun Mousa),[250] and in the chapel at Ṣuwayfiyah (Philadelphia).[251] In the
church of Khirbat al-Kursi (Philadelphia) and in the Chapel of Anastasius
(Church 81) at Khirbat al-Samrāʾ the vine scroll motif is associated with four
kantharoi at the four corners of the floor.[252] Parallels for the decoration of
the floor of the *diakonikon* of the north church, with its exhibits of *peltae*, are:
the nave of the Basilica of Moses on Mount Nebo (diocese of Madaba),[253] the
atrium of the Lower Chapel of the Priest John at Khirbat al-Mukhayyāt
(diocese of Madaba), the side aisle of al-Khadir in Madaba,[254] and finally the
Church of al-Dayr in Maʿin (diocese of Madaba) dated to 557/8.

The geometric grid of crossed *scuta*, combined with an acanthus border
which included hunting scenes, was also applied in the Chapel of the Martyr
Theodore (Cathedral of Madaba), dated to 562,[255] in the crypt of St Elianus of
Madaba,[256] and in the chapel built against the Church of Procopius in Gerasa
(Jerash),[257] and in the Yaʿamun Church.[258] The pattern of crossed circles and
rectangles of the central medallion of the St Sergius pavement also decorated
the pavement of the Church of the Holy Fathers in the village of Khattabiya[259]
(Madaba), that of the Upper Church of Massūh (diocese of Esbous),[260] the
aisle of the Church of St Kyriakos (Philadelphia),[261] and that of the Church of
Procopius in Gerasa built in 526.[262] The grid of rectangles created by florets
which enclosed trees, birds, and baskets is also represented in the baptistery of
the Cathedral of Madaba,[263] in the first panel of the al-Khadir Church in
Madaba,[264] and in the so-called birds and fish pavement now in the Archaeo-
logical Museum of Madaba.[265]

Tall al-ʿ-Umayrī East

The mosaic pavement originally covered the entire floor of the church.[266]
Small preserved areas of the *presbyterium* mosaic bear a geometric design of
looped circles intertwined with one another so as to create curvilinear octa-
gons with short axial sides between every group of four. The decoration inside
the circles has been removed, while the spaces within the curvilinear octagons
are decorated with diamonds. The closest parallel to the general layout is
afforded by the Jabal al-Akhdar Chapel in Philadelphia, despite a different
internal motif.[267]

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[248] Piccirillo 1993: 129–31.   [249] Piccirillo 1993: 253.
[250] Piccirillo 1993: 187.   [251] Piccirillo 1993: 264.   [252] Piccirillo 1993: 265, 308.
[253] Piccirillo 1993: 129–31.   [254] Piccirillo 1993: 129–31.
[255] Piccirillo 1993: 116–17.   [256] Piccirillo 1993: 124–5.
[257] Piccirillo 1993: 292–3.   [258] Nassar and Turshan 2011.
[259] Piccirillo 1993: 224.   [260] Piccirillo 1993: 252–3.   [261] Piccirillo 1993: 268.
[262] Piccirillo 1993: 292–3.   [263] Piccirillo 1993: 118.
[264] Piccirillo 1993: 129–31.   [265] Piccirillo 1993: 159.   [266] Al-Shami 2010, fig. 10.
[267] Piccirillo 1993: 269.

The central nave carpet is decorated with a line of diamonds running parallel to the chancel screen, followed by the dedicatory inscription inserted within a *tabula ansata*.[268] The main carpet, surrounded by a border, consists of a sequence of elegantly interlaced circles and squares.[269] The inner field offers a unique motif of crossed *scuta* alternating in their outer decoration with a double stranded guilloche, waves, diamonds, and triangles executed in beautiful colour combinations.[270] Interlocking *scuta* form diamond-shaped elements, and on the outer edge of the inner frame of the carpet, semicircular sections are filled with fan-shaped designs. The octagonal spaces within the interlocking *scuta* are filled with various species of animals and birds (Figs 6.13–14).

Most of these were destroyed and replaced by patches of jumbled *tesserae* or plain white cubes (Fig. 6.15) or diamonds (Fig. 6.16).

These obliterations, carried out with rigour and accuracy, are chronologically attributed to the first decades of the eighth century, and aimed to conserve
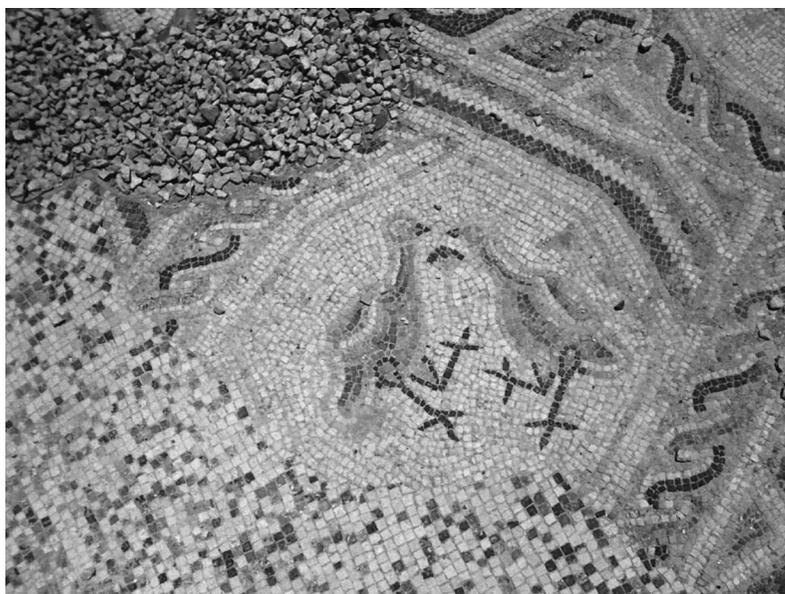
Fig. 6.13. Detail of the mosaic carpet from Tall al-ʿUmayrī East, showing octagonal spaces illustrated with images of animals. Photograph by Robert Schick.

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[268] Bevan et al. 2015.
[269] A similar motif is displayed in the *presbyterium* of the church of Yaʿamun. See Nassar and Turshan 2011: 52.
[270] For parallels, see discussion above.

Fig. 6.14. Detail of the mosaic carpet from Tall al-ʿUmayrī East, showing octagonal spaces illustrated with images of animals. Photograph by Robert Schick.

Fig. 6.15. Detail of the mosaic carpet from Tall al-ʿUmayrī East, showing later damage. Photograph by Robert Schick.
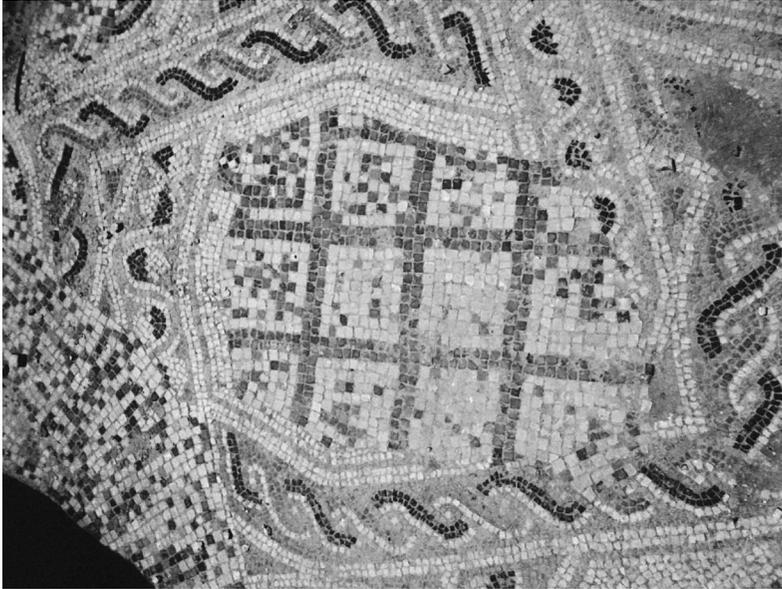
Fig. 6.16. Detail of the mosaic carpet from Tall al-ʿUmayrī East, showing octagonal spaces illustrated with diamond motifs. Photograph by Robert Schick.

the liturgical functionality of the building despite altering the visual perception of its floor. Owing to reuse, little survives of the decoration of the side naves, which appear to have had a simple geometric decoration consisting of small octagons filled with diamond-shaped elements.

Parallels for the main motifs displayed were uncovered on several sites in Jordan, although the predominance of geometric decoration is more frequent in the northern parts of *Provincia Arabia*, as for example in the first church at Yasileh, dating to the sixth century;[271] in the Church of Procopius in Gerasa (Jerash);[272] and on the pavement of the Chapel of Khirbat Munya-Asfur.[273] Additionally, in the Madaba bishopric,[274] parallels are also to be found in the churches of Nitl. The date of the church dedication and the indiction year are missing, but based on the title given to al-Mundhir, discussed below, a date prior to 569 is preferable, perhaps between 563 and 568.

Nitl and Tall al-ʿUmayrī East: Conclusions

The iconographic themes displayed in the Nitl and Tall al-ʿUmayrī East churches are perfectly in accordance with those discovered on other sites of

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[271] al-Muheisen 1989: 271–2; al-Muheisen 1990: 459–62; al-Muheisen 1991; al-Muheisen 1992: 533–4.
[272] Piccirillo 1993: 293.   [273] Piccirillo 1983: 349–62.
[274] Piccirillo 1981; Piccirillo 1985.

Provincia Arabia which were much influenced by the local Hellenistic-Roman tradition. It should be stressed, however, that some specific features differentiate the Nitl and Tall al-ʿUmayrī floors—above all, chronologically. The mosaics of Nitl, as demonstrated above, certainly belong to the first half of the sixth century, while the Tall al-ʿUmayrī pavement was laid in the second half of the sixth century, although it is impossible to be precise about the exact date. It is possible that the suggested date for the title held by al-Mundhir, *c.*563/4, might be contemporary with the building of the church.

The second difference lies in the modalities of execution, which, in the case of Nitl, exhibit a dominant imprint of the mosaic school of Madaba, an outstanding centre of artistic production, particularly in this period. The floors of the ecclesiastical complex, taken as a whole, provide examples of great artistic refinement in the representation of various themes that involve humans, plants, and animals. The latter are rendered realistically with perfect anatomical proportions, and are also accurately depicted in motion, especially in hunting scenes. The geometric patterns harmoniously combine light and dark colours and include small details, such as florets, introduced into the layout in order to break the apparent stiffness. By contrast, the mosaics of Tall al-ʿUmayrī East are more simple, with a predominantly neutral decoration, and a random inclusion of animals and birds represented with less skill and accuracy. An overall rigidity prevails in the rendering of living creatures, which verges on the naïve. Surprisingly, inhabited scrolls are replaced by interlacing geometric patterns more frequently employed in northern *Provincia Arabia*.[275]

The mosaics of both sites were damaged by an iconophobic obliteration of the images of the living creatures, which reflects a general trend that would have affected many churches in the region, though some figures were spared, or only partially destroyed. This phenomenon, ascribed to the eighth century, indicated, however, that the churches were still liturgically functioning during that period.

The obvious differences between the two churches point to the importance of the site of Nitl in comparison with Tall al-ʿUmayrī. The settlement is more extensive, since the complex included not only two parallel churches, but also a martyrion and chapels. Tall al-ʿUmayrī might be seen as more marginal, with a single church/martyrion for a smaller community. Beyond these considerations, though, both sites, especially via their inscriptions, demonstrate the important imprint of the Jafnids on the territory of *Provincia Arabia*, and how mosaics served as a celebratory pamphlet attesting to the rise of these important local individuals, who were deeply connected, in the sixth century,

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[275] As for example in the funerary chapel of Jabal al-Akhdar in Philadelphia, in the two funerary chapels of Gerasa, and in that of the monastic chapel of Khirbat Munya-Asfur. See Piccirillo 1993: 269, 298–9.

with these remarkable monuments in the language and style of the later
Roman empire in the East.

Basema Hamarneh

Sixth-century Martyria from Syria

The inscriptions discussed in the previous section are complemented by three
additional sixth-century examples, all from Syria. The first, in Greek, is from
al-Burj, close to the Roman site at Ḍumayr, near Damascus (**4.2**). Long
thought to refer to the construction of a tower, it has now been reread by
Gatier as a dedication to a martyrion.[276]

> The martyrion from al-Burj
> [**6.32**] *Wadd.* 2562c (trans. Gatier)
> Flavius Alamoundaros, *paneuphēmos*, patrikios, and phylarch, in thanks to Lord
> God and saint Sabinianos, for his salvation and for the salvation of his children,
> *endoxotatoi*, built this holy martyrion.[277]

The rereading of this inscription as a martyrion dedication now means that
almost all of the epigraphic evidence relating to the Jafnids comes from
explicitly Christian contexts. The different examples discussed throughout
this chapter ultimately reinforce the participation of the Jafnids in the 'cultural
language' of late antique Roman community patrons and benefactors, while the
diversity of the various inscriptions, combined with the literary evidence, also
indicates their relevance to both Miaphysite and non-Miaphysite communities.

Two other martyria, whose locations are indicated in Fig. 6.17, are of
interest. Both are also of great importance for the study of Old Arabic.
While for the sake of convenience and 'completeness' the Arabic translations
are also quoted here, readers should see **7.5** and **7.7** for a detailed discussion of
the Arabic texts.

The first is from a martyrion to St Sergius at Zabad, with an inscription in
Greek, Syriac, and Arabic.

> A martyrion of St Sergius from Zabad, south-east of Aleppo, Syria, 512
> [**6.33**] *IGLS* 2.310 (Greek and Syriac texts trans. Bevan; Arabic text trans.
> Macdonald = **7.5**)
>
> *Greek text*
> A In the year 823 (of the Seleucid Era, i.e. 512), on the 24th day of month
>   Gorpiaios (i.e. 24 September), the martyrion of Saint Sergius was built from

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[276] Principal reading: Gatier 2014: 203–5.
[277] Gatier 2014: 203–4. The editor is grateful for Professor Gatier's assistance with the English
translation of the inscription.

Fig. 6.17. Map showing the location of Zabad (**6.33**) and Ḥarrān (**6.34**). Map amended by Carla Russo from an original by Mat Dalton.

the foundations in the time of the *periodeutes*[278] John and of Anneos, son of Bo{r}keos, and Sergius son of Sergius son of Sergius.[279]

Symeon, son of Amraas, son of Elias, and Leontius were the architects who built it. Amen.

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[278] The *periodeutoi* were clergy who travelled in the countryside.
[279] Literally, 'Sergius three times' in the Greek. Alternatively, Littmann (1911) suggested the 'three Sergii' were those referred to in the Arabic inscription.

B Saturninus Azizos. Azizos son of Sergius and Azizos Mara Barka gave (gifts).[280]

Syriac text

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and the Holy Spirit. In the year 823 of the month Illul the foundations were laid and John the *periodeutes*, may his memory be blessed, laid the first stone, and it was Mara who wrote (the inscription), and it was Annas and Antiochus who were the founders.

(in the margin) Abu Sergius.

Arabic text (**7.5**)

May God be mindful of Sirgū son of ʾAmt-Manāfū and Ha{l/n}īʾ son of Maraʾ l-Qays and Sirgū son of Saʿdū and Š/Syrw and Š/S{.}ygw

(Syriac, after the Arabic text)

Abu Sergius and Antiochus and Muqim bar Timay and Mari rebuilt it.
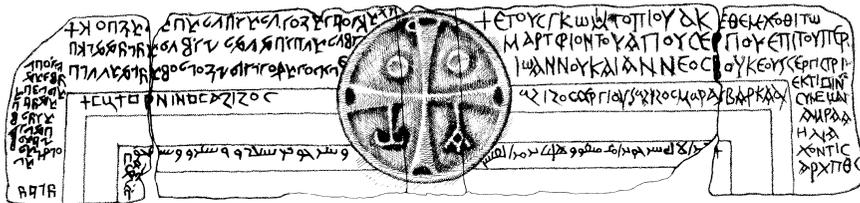
Fig. 6.18. The Zabad inscription. Facsimile drawn by Maria Gorea.

A second example, a martyrion of St John from Ḥarrān with an inscription in Greek and Arabic, is also of great interest (Plate 16).

A martyrion of St John from Ḥarrān, southern Syria, *c.*567/8 (Fig. 6.19)
[**6.34**] *Wadd.* 2464 = *IGLS* 15.261 (Greek text trans. Bevan; Arabic text trans. Macdonald = **7.7**)[281]

Fig. 6.19. The Ḥarrān inscription. Facsimile drawn by Maria Gorea.

Greek text

Asaraël, son of Talemos, the phylarch founded this martyrion of St John in the first year of the indiction [begins 1 September 567], in year 463 [begins 22 March 568]. May the writer be remembered.†

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[280] The line ends only with *di-*. Trombley 2004: 94 n. 124 completes this as *di(dousi)*, 'they give', although *di(akonoi)* is also possible, though less likely as no deacons are found in the Syriac text.

[281] On this inscription see now Sartre's commentary in *IGLS* 15.261. See also Dussaud and Macler 1902: 726. See too Sartre 1982: 177; Genequand 2006: 80; Littmann 1911; Robin 2006: 332–6; Millar 2010b: 219.

Arabic text (7.7)
1. I Šaraḥīl son of Ẓālim built this martyrion
2. [in] the year 463, after the rebellion [?]
3. of Khaybar
4. by one year

Aside from its philological significnce (Ch. 7), the appearance of Arabic on these two Christian monuments can be seen, from a cultural perspective, as a reflection of the broader phenomenon explored in this chapter—the rising prominence of Arab Christian elites within the Roman empire, especially in rural settings, a development represented most clearly by the Jafnids. Neither Asaraël/Šaraḥīl nor the dedicants listed in the Arabic text at Zabad are known, but it seems unlikely that they were related in any way with the Jafnid family, even if the expedition to Khaybar might conceivably be linked with an elderly al-Ḥārith see (7.7).

The date of the Ḥarrān inscription is 568: by that time the Jafnids had, for a generation, offered models of (Christian) Arab leadership which spanned the ecclesiastical, military, and political arenas. It is quite possible that their prominent position encouraged others to assume similar functions. Models of Christian Arab leaders had, of course, existed in the fourth and fifth centuries, such as Mavia and Aspebetos–Peter, yet none of these individuals had enjoyed the prominence and degree of Roman support as al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir—men whose public Christian monuments declared their senior ranks and titles, and whose political status was deeply embedded, and written, into a rural landscape studded with churches, martyria, and monasteries.[282]

George Bevan and Greg Fisher

Miaphysite Missions in the Jazīra: The *Life* of Aḥūdemmeh

The focus of this discussion now shifts away from Syria and the Jafnids, first to consider Arab Christianity in the Jazīra, and subsequently the experience of the Naṣrid dynasty at al-Ḥīra.

The *Life of Aḥūdemmeh* sheds light on the Christianization of the Arabs in the Jazīra, the expanse of pastureland that lies between the cities of Aleppo (Beroea) and Mosul (Nineveh), in the third quarter of the sixth century. The Christianization of the Arabs further south-west, among the Arabs of Sinai or Palestine or among the clients of the Jafnids, had always been tied in some way to Roman political authority, and Christianity was used as a means of cementing political relationships on a number of levels, both through the appeals

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[282] Millar 2010b: 219; Hoyland 2009a: 133; Robin 2006: 332.

of charismatic holy men and the creation of institutional church structures. In the Jazīra, however, Miaphysite missionaries acted without the support of any state structures, and Christianity was spread without the lure of explicit external political patronage.[283]

Aḥūdemmeh himself was a native of the Mesopotamian city of Balad, in the Persian empire, and a convert to Miaphysitism from the Church of the East. Our dominant narrative of Miaphysitism in the sixth century is as a Roman phenomenon, and our main sources are hagiographers such as John Rufus and John of Ephesus.[284] But we should remember that not everyone in the Sasanian world was sympathetic to the Dyophysite Christology that spread eastwards from the schools of Edessa and Nisibis.[285] Bar Hebraeus, the thirteenth-century polymath and the leading Jacobite bishop of the East (the *maphrian*), presented Aḥūdemmeh as the successor to the early *catholicoi* of the Church of the East, who had been 'led astray' to Nestorianism in the fifth century.[286] The major monastery of Mar Mattai, located in the hills north of Nineveh, entered communion with the Miaphysites and separated itself from the authority of the *catholicoi* at Ctesiphon in the fifth century, so it is important to recognize that Miaphysitism was not merely an import from the West, as it is portrayed in the sources of the Church of the East, but also had some measure of support within older Christian institutions in the Persian world.[287]

The *Life* presents Aḥūdemmeh as a missionary to Arab groups who had no earlier contact with Christianity, or with any political structures that might mediate their conversion. As we have seen in the other hagiographies discussed above, a parallel is drawn between the Arabs and the wild animals of the wilderness, though, by recognizing them as 'sheep', the hagiographer does anticipate their conversion and the transformation of their earlier state.

The mission of Aḥūdemmeh
[**6.35**] *Life of Aḥūdemmeh* (PO 3, p. 21; trans. after Nau)
. . . when he studied Christ's precepts, he found many things that are recommended to his holy apostles, above all 'go and baptise all the nations' (Matt. 28.19), and the instruction to the head of the apostles to 'feed my sheep' (John 21.16) . . . so he took up Christ's cross, which is the weapon of victory, and he sought out wandering sheep who were fed upon by wild animals since they had not entered the pasture of Christ and had fallen into the putrid mire of worshipping dead idols.

There were many people between the Tigris and Euphrates in the land named Gezīrtā [the Jazīra]: they lived there in tents and were homicidal barbarians. They

[283] Note the discussions of Aḥūdemmeh's apostolate in Hainthaler 2007: 106–7; Fowden (G.) 1993: 121; Vööbus 1988, vol. 3: 250–4. See too Saint-Laurent 2009: ch. 6.
[284] Wood 2010a: ch. 6; Horn 2006; Steppa 2005.   [285] Becker 2005.
[286] Bar Hebraeus, *HE* 2.99ff.
[287] Bar Hebraeus, *HE* 2.99ff. Hainthaler 2007: 100; Trimingham 1979: 169; Fiey 1970: 127.

had many superstitions and were the most ignorant of all peoples of the land until the light of the Messiah shone upon them.

The hagiographer introduces Aḥūdemmeh's struggle to convert the Arabs by depicting it as a struggle between the light of the Messiah and demonic forces, but it is clear that the actual progress of his missionary campaign was hard going at first.

> Aḥūdemmeh and the Arabs
> [**6.36**] *Life of Aḥūdemmeh* (*PO* 3, pp. 23–4; trans. after Nau)
> . . . he destroyed the temples that were used for their sacrifices and burnt the idols they contained. Some Arab camps resisted him and did not let him approach and did not listen to his preaching. He went away from them and prayed to God, and the stones to which they gave the names of gods were broken. God acted through him to perform signs and prodigies: he expelled demons, purified lepers, healed the sick and drove out the plague [that had been caused by divine] anger, but they [the Arabs] fled from him as from a persecutor.

This record of early setbacks in which the Arabs initially resented Aḥūdemmeh's intrusion into their religious life, and his destruction of their statues, has a ring of truth to it. It does not correspond with the model set out in the other hagiographies where healing is rapidly followed by the destruction of idols and conversion. It is only when he heals the daughter of the chief that the Arabs eventually agree to be converted.

> The healing of a young girl
> [**6.37**] *Life of Aḥūdemmeh* (*PO* 3, p. 25; trans. after Nau)
> That night [after Aḥūdemmeh had prayed and fasted] a demon seized the daughter of the chief of the camp and agitated her all night long. In the morning they took the young girl to Aḥūdemmeh and said to her 'If you are truly the servant of God then place your hands on her and heal her.' Then the holy Aḥūdemmeh rose up and put his hand on her and the demon left her and murmured[288] against him, saying . . . 'What have these barbarians given you to make you bother with them?' They were filled with admiration at the prodigies of God they had seen and heard through the saint . . . and they cried 'This is an angel whom God has sent us whom we did not know', and they all fell down on their faces before him.

As before, the pagan Arabs show themselves to be vulnerable to possession and it is only the saint's intercession that can counteract it. Here the demon (implicitly, the demon that they worship) castigates Aḥūdemmeh for pursuing him even here. The exorcism is a sign of Christian universalism, of the expansion of Christianity to the ends of the earth, a motif that was especially prominent for the missionary expansion of the Miaphysite

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[288] This verb is used in the Gospels, when the Pharisees conspire against Christ.

movement.[289] However, it may be that the hagiographer had to defend Aḥūdemmeh, and the Miaphysite movement in general, against accusations that these new converts had never been properly instructed in their new faith. These may have been internal criticisms, by those concerned that the canons might not be properly followed by this 'barbarian' people, or external ones, by opponents of Miaphysitism, who suggested that these Arabs had been led astray. It is in reply to such criticism that the hagiographer invokes the example of the Ethiopian eunuch from Acts 8:36–8, who converts after a brief conversation, and is immediately baptized.[290]

The following section of the *Life* sees Aḥūdemmeh visit a number of different camps to spread his message and establish the basic institutional structures of Christianity. Unlike St Euthymius in Palestine (section 'The monks of Palestine'), Aḥūdemmeh does not have the support of a network of monastic catechists to draw on, and the hagiographer suggests that he has to perform this kind of instruction himself. However, since he was already a bishop at this stage, it is hard to imagine that he was really the solo operator presented in his *Life*. These later conversions are all treated in one unit. It may be that Aḥūdemmeh's first attempts are given in more detail to add interest to the narrative: the hagiographer may suppress similar problems in each of the different groups he encounters. But we might also speculate that his early experience made his second wave of conversions much easier, perhaps because Aḥūdemmeh had targeted a particularly prominent tribal chief, whose example was followed by others, or because of greater familiarity with Arab language and culture.

> The churches and the tribes
> [**6.38**] *Life of Aḥūdemmeh* (PO 3, pp. 26–7; trans. after Nau)
> The saint dedicated himself to visiting all the camps and instructing the peo-ple . . . [not only this] but he endured much suffering in hot and cold, difficult paths and deserts and brackish water, and he never abstained from his pure fasts, or from prayers and vigils. Through his zeal he summoned the priests from many lands: by his sweet speeches . . . he established a priest and a deacon in each tribe. He founded churches and named them after the chiefs of the tribes who helped him in everything that was needed. He consecrated altars, which he placed in the churches, and he did all that was necessary for the church, buying and arranging for whatever was necessary.

In this scene Aḥūdemmeh encourages the chiefs of the tribes to take responsibility for the churches that the missionary builds and, in doing so, creates a network whose 'fixed points' bear the names of the leaders of the tribes, and

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[289] For Miaphysitism's self-presentation as a universal, missionary religion see Wood 2010a: 224–6.
[290] *Life of Aḥūdemmeh* (PO 3, pp. 25–6).

around which the tribes might congregate. Aḥūdemmeh seems to fund this
endeavour out of the resources of his bishopric, but the practice of naming
the churches after the chiefs may also have helped to cement local hier-
archies, and encouraged them to protect and fund the churches after
Aḥūdemmeh had left.[291] This episode reflects the way that a 'supra- or
para-tribal identity' might be organized around Christian sites, an idea
evoked earlier in this chapter,[292] and is an apt example of the importance
of churches (and monasteries) to conversion, and then, subsequently, main-
taining the focus of new converts.[293] Indeed, the hagiographer suggests that
this experience paid dividends in the constancy of the Arabs in future
generations, both as dedicated Christians and as donors to local churches
and monasteries:

> The results of Aḥūdemmeh's work
> [6.39] *Life of Aḥūdemmeh* (*PO* 3, pp. 27–8; trans. after Nau)
> He devoted special care to the monasteries, which were upheld by them [the
> Arabs] for their bodily needs (just as now), Mar Mattai, Kōktā and Mar Sargīs,
> and the community of monks on the mount Sinjār, along with all the other
> monasteries in the lands of the Romans and Persians . . . they did not neglect to
> give to the poor, to monks, to churches and to strangers. They greatly loved
> fasting and asceticism and began to fast at Lent a week before other Christians.
> Many among them ate no bread during fasting, not only the men, but also the
> women: they were zealous for the orthodox faith and each time it was persecuted
> they gave their heads for the church of Christ, above all the numerous chosen
> peoples of the ʿAqūlāyē, the Tanūkh and the Ṭuʿāyē.

Thanks to their instruction by Aḥūdemmeh, the Arabs become important
sponsors of monasteries on both sides of the Roman–Persian border. The
hagiographer gives greater emphasis to the Persian monasteries, especially the
famous monastery of Mar Mattai. This may be because of Aḥūdemmeh's
greater fame in Persia: he was buried in Tikrīt and is the first major Jacobite
saint of the East.[294] But it is probably also rooted in reality, given Aḥūdem-
meh's background as an easterner and a convert from 'Nestorianism'. Some of
these monasteries, such as the foundations in Sinjār, may have been new
foundations, and Aḥūdemmeh's missions may fit into a wider movement by
the Miaphysites to found monasteries and schools to win over inhabitants of
the East, especially after being expelled from the Roman world. It was in
reaction to this Miaphysite threat that the *catholicos* Joseph ordered the

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[291] Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 121–9.   [292] Fowden (E. K.) 2013: 402.
[293] Fowden (E. K.) 2013: 399–400.
[294] Fiey 1968 differentiates this Aḥūdemmeh from the 'Nestorian' bishop of Nineveh, and
from the philosopher-theologian of the same name. Hage 1966: 22–3 on the rank of maphrian.
On the foundation of Tikrīt see Frend 1972: 344 and Fiey 1968.

construction of 'Nestorian' schools and monasteries in villages, since their absence had become 'a source of rejoicing to Jews and heretics'.[295] Indeed, the hagiographer places a particular emphasis on the ascetic devotion of Aḥū-demmeh's converts, and it may be that this was a source of prestige and distinction for the Miaphysites, since celibate monasticism had only recently been re-established in the east after a hiatus of some 60 years.[296]

The final lines of this extract refer to the Arab groups more specifically, as members of the confederations of ʿAqūlāyē, Tanūkh, and Ṭuʿāyē.[297] The Ṭuʿāyē inhabited this region at the end of the fifth century as clients of the Persians, and may have given their names to the general Syriac term for all Arabs, 'Ṭayyāyē'.[298] The term ceases to be used in the Islamic period, but this probably reflects an alteration in structures of political allegiance: the term Ṭuʿāyē may well be a general name for pastoral Arabs that included the banū Namir, the banū ʿIjl, the Bakr, and the Taghlib.[299] The ʿAqūlāyē inhabited the region near the future city of Kūfa (Aqoula), near the Naṣrid centre of al-Ḥīra. This is so far south of Aḥūdemmeh's range of activity that they may have been included simply to glorify his achievement.[300] Tanūkh may have been a more recent arrival, and this group in particular would achieve considerable fame as a Christian Arab group that refused to convert to Islam and that retained their own Jacobite bishop into the eighth century.[301] Indeed, the Tanūkh would hold out until the ʿAbbāsid period, and some members seem to have remained Christian into the eleventh century, in spite of state-directed efforts to force their conversion under the caliph al-Mahdi.[302] References at the end of the *Life* to the transfer of Aḥūdemmeh's body to Tikrīt give the text a seventh-century *terminus a quo*, and it may be that it is the resilience of Tanūkh to Islam that the author celebrates at the end of this extract, instead of (or as well as) the pressures of the Persian government in the time of the saint.

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[295] *Syn. Or.* 106 (canon 20).

[296] Winkler and Baum 2003: 30–2; Gero 1981; Labourt 1904: 170–2.

[297] The same tribes would fall under the jurisdiction of George, bishop of the Arab tribes, in the eighth century: Ryssel 1891: 44.

[298] *Aḥūd.* (*PO* 3, p. 29), nn. 3 and 4 (Nau); Hainthaler 2012: 34–5. See Ch. 1 for the terms Ṭayyāyē/Saracen.

[299] Robinson 1996: 433–4; Morony 1984: 374. Bishops of the Christian Arabs in the Islamic period are commonly termed 'bishops of the Taghlib'.

[300] Robinson 1996: 433 n. 40; Segal 1984: 103–4.

[301] Hoyland 2001: 246; Shahîd 1984b: 423–32; Trimingham 1979: 173–7; Nau 1933: 106–11. Some of the Arabs of the Jazīra probably did convert to Islam at an early date (e.g. as suggested by al-Ṭabarī, 1.2474).

[302] The possible role of nomadic bishops in earlier periods is discussed in Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 161 and Shahîd 1989b: 222. Fiey 1966–8 vol. 3: 148–9 discusses the evidence for tribal bishoprics in the Arabian Peninsula itself in the eighth and ninth centuries. For the forced conversion of the Tanūkh see the Ehnesh Inscription, translated in Palmer 1993: 71.

The culmination of Aḥūdemmeh's activities on the frontier was his construction of a major shrine to St Sergius at Qaṣr Serj, which lay on the Persian side of the border.[303]

Aḥūdemmeh and St Sergius
[**6.40**] *Life of Aḥūdemmeh* (*PO* 3, p. 29; trans. after Nau)
Since the Arabs love his name and go to him more than any other people, the saint called this place Mar Sergius to detach them from Mar Sergius de beth Ruṣāfa,[304] which was on the other bank of the Euphrates and a long way distant . . . near this temple he had built he constructed a great and celebrated monastery called Ainqenoye.

Aḥūdemmeh goes on to write rules for this monastery, and it may be that its monks were intended to serve as ascetic exemplars to the Arab pilgrims who visited the shrine, as well as providing hospitality. Qaṣr Serj was modelled closely on the Roman shrine at Ruṣāfa, if on a smaller scale.[305] Thus, from the point of view of Aḥūdemmeh, the building project must be seen as a deliberate attempt to lure Arab pilgrims away from their connections to a sacred site in the Roman world and away from Chalcedonian interference. However, we should also see this initiative as political as well as religious: in the same way that the Naṣrid leaders had resented their subjects going on pilgrimage to visit Symeon the Stylite, a pilgrimage centre on the eastern side of the border also promised greater political control to the Sasanian authorities.

We get an indication of the importance of Aḥūdemmeh's project from the reaction of others: the monastery was torn down by the 'heretics' (presumably the 'Nestorians') but it was restored by Khusrau I (531–79), who was moved to intervene by God. The hagiographer passes over these events in only a couple of lines: his main intention is to emphasize Aḥūdemmeh's initiative in building the monastery in the first place and his close relationship with the local Christian Arabs. The actions of the 'Nestorians' point to the same kind of anxieties seen in the proclamations of Joseph's synod, which saw the Miaphysites as Western interlopers. But the involvement of the Persian king also shows that Aḥūdemmeh did not work in the political vacuum that is imagined for much of the hagiography. Aḥūdemmeh was involved at court in Ctesiphon and was ultimately executed by Khusrau for converting his son to Christianity, and the attitude taken to the king is predominately negative. But Khusrau's brief appearance in this scene points

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[303] Fiey 1958. On the cult of St Sergius note, in addition to the discussion above, Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 100; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 949–62. See also Vööbus 1988, vol. 3: 233; Delehaye 1909.
[304] Fowden (E. K.) 1999: 121–5, and also note 137–41 for Khusrau II's interest in Ruṣāfa.
[305] Oates 1968: 115–16.

to the use of political contacts by the Miaphysites to cement their institutions in the Jazīra, contacts that our hagiographer has mostly suppressed because of the breakdown in relations between Aḥūdemmeh and Khusrau. In addition, we may also speculate that Khusrau was himself aware of the appeal of the Roman shrine of Ruṣāfa, and was willing to sponsor a rival shrine to Sergius irrespective of its confessional allegiance. Indeed, it may be that the greater patronage of Christian institutions by the Persian kings at the end of the sixth century is, to some degree, a reflection of a changing situation, where the presence of a 'new' Christian confession in the Miaphysites made it possible for the king to sponsor either group and to derive advantages from both.

Philip Wood

The Naṣrids and Christianity in al-Ḥīra

As we have seen, the Persian-allied Naṣrid rulers of al-Ḥīra were, for much of their reign, prominent supporters of paganism.[306] They appear in the *Chronicle* of Ps.-Joshua as foils for the Roman city of Edessa to show its divine favour, when the Naṣrid leader al-Nuʿmān is struck down after suggesting an attack on the city to Kavadh (**5.6**).[307] Similarly, the Syriac *Life of Symeon* treats another al-Nuʿmān, an Arab ally of the Persians, as a pagan witness to the miracles of the saint (**6.11**). Still, the latter text does give incidental support for the existence of Christians in al-Ḥīra, in its mention of Naṣrid attempts to prevent visits to the Stylite, possibly out of fear of his political influence. The reticence of Christian members of al-Mundhir's army (**6.47**) offers similar suggestions, and Muslim traditions about al-Ḥīra insist on the existence of a Christian population there, the ʿIbād.[308] Sixth-century Syriac sources describe the involvement of Miaphysite missionaries in al-Ḥīra, among them the public debater Simeon Bēth Arshām. Al-Ḥīra seems to have been a base for missionary activity for the Sasanian world, as well as for the Arabian Peninsula.[309]

[306] References to Naṣrid impiety are collected in Fisher and Wood forthcoming. On al-Ḥīra and the Naṣrids, also note Toral-Niehoff 2010; Hainthaler 2007: 83–105; Trimingham 1979: 188–202; Finster 1976; Kister 1968; Talbot-Rice 1934. See **4.9** and Ch. 8 for additional perspectives on al-Ḥīra.

[307] Ps.-Josh. *Chron.* 58.　　　[308] Toral-Niehoff 2010; Wood forthcoming.

[309] Joh. Eph. *Vitae* (*PO* 17, p. 140) for visits to al-Ḥīra by the missionary Simeon Beth Arshām, and the construction of churches by his aristocratic Arab converts. Severus of Antioch, *Letters* (*PO* 12, p. 207) for Severus' letter to the Christians of Anbar and 'Ḥīrtā de Nuʿmān'. For the presence of the Julianists at al-Ḥīra see Hainthaler 2007: 105 and *DHGE* s.v. 'Gainites' (M. Jugie). Also note *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 5, pp. 310–12), discussed by Charles 1936: 58, for the presentation of al-Ḥīra as the 'gateway to the desert' in an account of a fifth-century 'Nestorian' mission to Yamāma and Baḥrayn. Though the *Chronicle*'s source probably exaggerates Nestorian activity this early, it may reflect conditions in the following century.

However, it would ultimately be the 'Nestorian' branch of Christianity that won over the pagan kings of al-Ḥīra.[310]

A rich source for the study of the Naṣrid sponsorship of Christianity in al-Ḥīra exists in the form of the tenth-/eleventh-century *Chronicle of Seert*, an Arabic compilation of earlier sources, most of which were originally written in Syriac.[311] The core of this collection is the history of the *catholicoi* of the Church of the East, centred in Ctesiphon, but to it has been added histories of the Sasanian emperors, 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 material that is set after *c.*590, such as the scenes examined here, is much more fully integrated, capable of examining the relationship between different kinds of institutions and numerous *dramatis personae*. One such section describes the missionary activities of the great monastic founder Abraham of Kashkar, who converted some of the inhabitants of al-Ḥīra.[312] It may be that these converts should be distinguished from the Christian aristocratic families of the city, the ʿIbād, and that they swelled their numbers; however, the fact that this source does not speak in these terms suggests that it is not primarily concerned with the issues of prestigious lineage that concern al-Ṭabarī in his descriptions of al-Ḥīra's population (**8.18**).

Later parts of the *Chronicle* have much more substantial sections on the Naṣrid kings themselves, rather than just on the population of the city. This reflects the Christian conversion of the last Naṣrid ruler, al-Nuʿmān, and the greater integration of secular history (*qosmotiqe*) with ecclesiastical material in this era. The material on the Naṣrid leaders was probably produced by several different historians within the Church of the East, some of them writing very close to the events described.[313] In spite of their late redaction, these scenes provide an important corrective to the Miaphysite sources on Christianity in al-Ḥīra, which, of course, had much more shallow roots in the city than their 'Nestorian' rivals.

Al-Nuʿmān's baptism is reported in a conventional manner from the Roman perspective by Evagrius, who places him in much the same category as his predecessor, the Naṣrid al-Mundhir—a polluted sacrificer of men, a devotee of demons and idols.[314] Evagrius then details the expected sudden conversion (accompanied by the melting of an idol—a golden Aphrodite),

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[310] Theories of the 'Nestorianism' of the 'Naṣrid' Imruʾ al-Qays in the fourth century (e.g. Charles 1936: 55) seem unlikely. For the Naṣrids treading a fine line between appealing to their Sasanian overlords and the Christian population of al-Ḥīra see Fisher 2011a: 66–9.

[311] This text is discussed in detail in Wood 2013.

[312] *Chron. Seert* (PO 7, p. 133).

[313] Other versions of al-Nuʿmān's conversion are preserved in the Arab-Islamic tradition. See further Toral-Niehoff 2012 and **8.40**.

[314] Evag. *HE* 6.22.

followed by the total conversion of those with him. The version given in the *Chronicle of Seert* offers further detail:

> The baptism of al-Nuʿmān
> [**6.41**] *Chronicle of Seert* (*PO* 13, pp. 468–9; trans. after Scher)
> Just as Paul adhered to Judaism and Aba [the *catholicos*] to Magianism, this man [al-Nuʿmān] 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 Jābir, bishop of Ḥīra; Sabrīshōʿ, bishop of Lashom, who would become *catholicos*; and the monk Išoʿzkha and asked for help. God cured him and the demon left him.
>
> Nuʿmān received the faith and was baptised in the fourth year of Khusrau [594] He was attached to the true faith [i.e. Diophysitism, 'Nestorianism'] and chased the Jacobites [Miaphysites] 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 Ḥasan and Mundhir, after seeing the graceful state of their father, also received baptism and baptised all their households. Ḥasan told his slaves not to prevent the poor approaching him when he entered church. And when Vistahm revolted against Khusrau [*c.*590/4][315] Ḥasan fought him and freed Khusrau from him . . . He was most attached to the Christian religion, may God have mercy upon him.

The motif of a pagan or Zoroastrian ruler who is possessed and can only be healed by the Christian missionary is a common one in Christian hagiography.[316] The comparison to Aba also connects the Christian al-Nuʿmān to examples of prominent Christian converts from the previous generation: the Church of the East underwent a great expansion in its political influence, and possibly its numbers, in the second half of the sixth century, and the historian places al-Nuʿmān's conversion into this wider context.[317]

This notice was probably composed before al-Nuʿmān's removal by Khusrau II at around the time of his invasion of the Roman empire (**5.35** and **8.25–7, 8.44**).[318] At the time of composition, the historian makes al-Nuʿmān the Christian servant of two Christian kings. Similarly his celebration of Ḥasan as both a lover of the poor and a defender of Khusrau at a time of political weakness must belong to the period before the fall of the Naṣrids. The historian seems to celebrate Ḥasan here as the next in a series of Naṣrid kings, but this was not to be.

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[315] Pourshariati 2008.   [316] E.g. Soc. Schol. *HE* 7.8.

[317] The use of Christian names and imagery is perhaps our best evidence for this, on which see Gyselen 2006. The involvement of Christian aristocrats in episcopal elections is also noteworthy. See Fiey 1969.

[318] See further Howard-Johnston 2010: 437–8 and 441 for the removal of al-Nuʿmān and the replacement of the 'Lakhmids' with a 'multi-lateral system of client management', based around the Jafnids, the Banu ʿIjl, and other clients.

A second notice (not quoted here), an adaptation of the *Life of Sabrīshōʿ*, gives us a more complex image of Christianity in al-Ḥīra.[319] Here Simeon bin Jābir prays to God for al-Nuʿmān's conversion, and the king receives a vision in which an angel promises him that his kingdom will grow, and he will gain eternal life, if he embraces Christianity.[320] However, he refuses to abandon his pagan beliefs, and a demon in the form of a black man sets upon him.[321] He is so terrified by the ordeal that he asks Simeon to baptize him and to write a letter to Khusrau to ask for permission, which he grants. Simeon baptizes al-Nuʿmān and his entire household, but he is soon lured away by 'heretics'. Following this event, he is possessed for a second time, and he writes to the *catholicos* Īshōʿyābh I to send Sabrīshōʿ to heal him. The *catholicos* then asks Khusrau for his help, and the Persian king and the *catholicos* persuade the holy man to intervene. Together with the monk Išoʿzkha, Sabrīshōʿ then expels al-Nuʿmān's demon (we are left to assume that he remains 'Nestorian').

We should emphasize two important differences between this latter version and the extract from the *Chronicle of Seert* in **6.41**. Firstly, in the adaptation of the *Life of Sabrīshōʿ*, al-Nuʿmān is targeted by heretics, almost certainly Miaphysites, whose belief is presented as ineffective as paganism in driving out the demon that possesses him. Secondly, the drawn-out conversion in the *Life of Sabrīshōʿ* suggests that the image of a 'united' conversion of al-Nuʿmān by three holy men in **6.41** looks like a 'compromise narrative'. The first baptism of al-Nuʿmān in the *Life of Sabrīshōʿ* is a tale of 'auto-conversion', where a bishop from al-Ḥīra, scion of a local magnate family, is responsible for converting the king. Al-Nuʿmān's second exorcism deliberately challenges Simeon's prestige by emphasizing al-Ḥīra's connections to the future *catholicos*, a man personally selected by Khusrau. The effect of this narrative of a second conversion emphasizes al-Ḥīra's ties to the wider Sasanian empire, to the king, and to his approved *catholicos*, rather than representing the king as 'a first among equals' alongside al-Ḥīra's magnate families who might have been Christian for a longer amount of time. Neither of these conversion narratives point to a split between Khusrau and al-Nuʿmān on religious grounds: the Sasanians employed increasing numbers of prominent Christians (both Miaphysites and Dyophysites) at this time, and the representation of Khusrau as an enemy of the Christians lies chiefly in Roman propaganda.[322]

The conversion of the Naṣrid kings to Christianity may have generated a major reworking of Naṣrid history. It is notable that the royal histories

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[319] *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 13, pp. 478–81). On this *catholicos*, Tamcke 1988.

[320] For Jābir, the father of Bishop Simeon, and the Arabic sources relating to him see Trimingham 1979: 199.

[321] The 'Ethiopian' is a classic form taken by the Devil in monastic hagiographies. Note Brakke 2006: 166–75 and Mayerson 1979.

[322] E.g. Conybeare 1910. The image of Khusrau as an anti-Christian persecutor has been taken to be accurate in Hunter 2008.

preserved in al-Ṭabarī and elsewhere imagine several earlier moments of Christian conversion, as well as suppressing periods of non-Naṣrid rule in al-Ḥīra.[323] These stories are more likely to represent the projection of the situation of al-Nuʿmān's reign into earlier periods, rather than a reflection of genuine social realities from the fifth century and before.[324] Similarly, reports of monastic foundations in al-Ḥīra from the fifth century should also be treated sceptically, for similar reasons.[325] From this perspective, it is therefore interesting to compare the versions of the story offered here with the much later viewpoint provided by the *Manāqib al-Mazyadiyya* (**8.40**).

In the aftermath of al-Nuʿmān's conversion the *catholicos* Īshōʿyābh I died, and Hind[326] was responsible for transferring his body to al-Ḥīra for burial.[327] This information is placed before the notices dedicated specifically to al-Nuʿmān and Sabrīshōʿ, in a notice on Īshōʿyābh I, but it follows the events described above chronologically and has probably come from the pen of a different historian. A similar notice is provided by the *Khuzistan Chronicle* (cf. **5.35**).

> The burial of Īshōʿyābh
> [**6.42**] *Chronicle of Seert* (PO 13, p. 442; trans. after Scher)
> Hind, daughter of al-Nuʿmān, son of al-Mundhir, king of the Arabs, buried him [the *catholicos*] in the church she had built at al-Ḥīra, in the middle of the choir . . . this church is known today as the monastery of Hind.
>
> [**6.43**] *Khuzistan Chronicle*, p. 16 (trans. M. Greatrex = Greatrex and Lieu 2002: 230, slightly modified)
> Īshōʿyābh, the leader of the Christians, because Khusrau had a great hatred indeed of him, in that he had not set out with him for the territory of the Romans, and furthermore on account of the slander of Timotheus the chief doctor of Nisibis, strenuously protected himself from the king. After a little time, when the patriarch went down to al-Ḥīra of the Ṭayyāyē to see al-Nuʿmān, king of the Ṭayyāyē, who had become a Christian, and when he reached the place of al-Ḥīra, he was struck down by disease and died in the area whose name is Beth Qushi. But when Hind, the sister of al-Nuʿmān heard (of this), she left al-Ḥīra with the priests and the faithful, and with a great procession they brought the body of the holy man into (the city); and Hind placed it in the new monastery which she had built.

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[323] al-Ṭabarī 1.822, 846, 850–4.

[324] The Christian bias of this material in al-Ṭabarī is noted in Retsö 2003: 477. These scenes will be discussed in Wood forthcoming.

[325] The account of Yāqūt is discussed in Fiey 1966–8, vol. 3: 206–25 (and given too much credence).

[326] Either the sister or daughter of al-Nuʿmān. See *PO* 13, 442 n. 2.

[327] On the burial sites of the *catholicoi*, and the prominent claims assumed by al-Ḥīra and Nisibis in the sixth century, note Fiey 1985.

We might consider this act something of a diplomatic coup on the part of Hind, given how recently the Naṣrids had converted. It may be that the king saw it as a threatening sign of the potential independence of his newly Christian client, and it is notable that Khusrau II boycotted an attempt by the people of al-Ḥīra to claim Īshōʿyābh's successor for burial. Indeed, such signs of independence may help explain Khusrau's decision to turn against al-Nuʿmān in the course of his wars with Rome, just as he also turned against the family of his Christian lieutenant Yazdin.[328] That said, the presence of other, non-Naṣrid Arab clients of the Sasanians who were also Christian suggests a rather different picture, where the *shah* was prepared to encourage middle-ranking Christian Arab clients as part of a strategy to establish a broader support base during his war with Rome. Examples of this phenomenon are Khusrau's sponsorship of Arabs allied with Rome, after his invasion of the Roman East,[329] or the elevation of Hawdha, the Christian ruler of Yamāma, who received money and honours from the Sasanian regime.[330]

Finally, this brief survey of the link between al-Ḥīra, the Naṣrids, and Christianity can be concluded with a curious story reported by Theophanes.

> The conversion of al-Mundhir?
> [**6.44**] Theophanes, *Chronicle* AM 6005/pp. 157–8 (trans. Mango and Scott, pp. 240–1)
> When Alamoundaros, phylarch of the Saracens, had been baptized, the impious Severus sent two bishops to win him over to his leprous heresy; but, by the providence of God, the man had been baptized by the orthodox who attended the synod. When Severus' bishops attempted to pervert the phylarch from the true teaching, Alamoundaros refuted them wonderfully with the following theatrical act. For he said to them, 'I received a letter today telling me that the archangel Michael was dead.' When they replied that this was impossible, the phylarch continued, 'How is it then according to you that God alone was crucified, unless Christ was of two natures, if even an angel cannot die?' And so Severus' bishops departed in ignominy.

This extract is derived from the staunchly pro-Chalcedonian *Church History* of Theodore Lector, composed during the reign of Justin I, and is repeated by subsequent Roman chroniclers. Theodore's work contains a number of pro-Chalcedonian anecdotes of this type and its veracity is open to doubt. While it appears that al-Mundhir's predecessor as Naṣrid king was a Christian and received a letter from Philoxenus, the anti-Chalcedonian bishop, that has survived, al-Mundhir himself was clearly a pagan at the time of the sacrifice of the 400 virgins to ʿUzzai (**5.10**). Al-Mundhir did have a Christian wife,

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[328] A narrative is given in Baumer 2006: 92–7.
[329] Howard-Johnston 2010: 438 and 441.
[330] al-Ṭabarī, 1.984–5 for Khusrau II's patronage of Hawdha and 1.987 for Hawdha's release of captives at Easter. See discussion in Eickelman 1969: 41 and 44.

Hind, on the other hand, and, as noted below, there were undoubtedly Christians among his followers. It is conceivable that he may have flirted with Chalcedonian Christianity at a time when it was rejected by the Roman emperor, since this would not call into question his loyalty to the Persians; for the same reason, he would have had every interest in rejecting overtures from anti-Chalcedonians, such as the patriarch Severus of Antioch, for to espouse their views would be to align himself with the Romans. A further possibility in the case of this extract is that it refers to an otherwise unknown (minor) tribal leader also called al-Mundhir.[331]

Philip Wood, with Geoffrey Greatrex

South Arabia: Events at Najrān

Numerous texts discussed in this chapter demonstrate the interweaving of religious choice with political allegiance. The extension of Roman and Persian political influence into Arabia, Christian Aksūm's rivalry with Ḥimyar, and a growing Christian presence in Ḥimyar that threatened pro-Persian and pro-independence elements helped to trigger one of the most notorious events to take place in the sixth century—the persecution and murder, in 523, of Christians at Najrān (Nagrān) in South Arabia. The background to these events is discussed in Ch. 3.

From the very beginning, Joseph's rebellion involved anti-Christian persecution:

> Joseph (Dhū Nuwās) and the persecution
> [**6.45**] Ps.-Dionysius, *Chron.* 56 (trans. Witakowski, p. 52)
> . . . After some time the Himyarite Jews waxed stronger. When the Christian king [Maʿdīkarib Yaʿfur] whom the king of the Ethiopians had established there died, (the Jews) chose a king from among themselves over the people of the Himyarites and in bitter wrath slew and destroyed all the Christian people there, men, women, young people and little children, poor and rich. On account of that a testimony to the numerous martyrs there was written by the zeal of the blessed Simeon the Disputer [i.e. Simeon of Beth Arshām].

This brief notice of the anti-Christian pogrom comes from the third part of a ninth-century universal chronicle written in Syriac, from the monastery of Zuqnīn near Amida (hence its alternative title, the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*). For some time the work was attributed to the Miaphysite patriarch Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē (818–45), but this has since been called into doubt. The actual author, who seems to have lived in the eighth century, has never been identified with certainty and, as a result, the text is still known as 'Ps.-Dionysius'. Much of part

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[331] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 702–9, Haarer 2006: 39–40; Theod. Lect. *HE* 147.

three of the *Chronicle* is based on the lost second part of John of Ephesus'
Ecclesiastical History.[332]

Ps.-Dionysius refers in general terms here to the killing of Christians
throughout Ḥimyar, and at the end of the extract to what happened at Najrān,
in November 523.[333] Alongside the epigraphic record (3.16), a Greek text, *The
Martyrdom of Arethas*,[334] and the Arab-Islamic tradition (8.7–9), the Najrān
episode is also known from a series of Syriac Christian texts: the complexity of
their authorship, editorial history, and ways in which they were 'remoulded
and reworked' has recently come under fresh scrutiny.[335] These texts include
the so-called *Book of the Ḥimyarites*, 'the most expanded form of the Syriac
tradition relating to the Ḥimyarite martyrs',[336] and a number of letters
attributed to the 'blessed Simeon the Disputer'—that is, the Miaphysite mis-
sionary Simeon of Bēth Arshām.

These letters exist in various forms. 'Letter C', a short version, appears in the
work of Ps.-Dionysius, Ps.-Zachariah, and Michael the Syrian.[337] Other ver-
sions include 'Letter 1', published by Guidi, and 'Letter 2', published by
Shahîd.[338] It is now preferable to see the version of 'Letter C' preserved in
the *Chronicle* of Ps.-Zachariah as the 'best-established source' for the martyr-
doms at Najrān.[339] It seems doubtful if 'Letter 2' can be attributed to Simeon,
as Shahîd suggested,[340] and while the *Book of the Ḥimyarites* contains 'traces
of influence' from 'Letter 1' (or perhaps 'Letter C') it is clear that the author
was not the same individual as that behind 'Letter 1' and 'Letter 2', and also
was not Simeon, contrary to earlier claims.[341]

Excerpts from 'Letter C' are presented below, from the text of Ps.-Zachariah.
The correspondence is addressed to the abbot of Gabbula, in Syria, and in this
portion Simeon reports a letter to al-Mundhir, the Naṣrid leader, from Joseph
(Dhū Nuwās).

'Letter C' of Simeon Beth Arshām
[6.46] Ps.-Zachariah, *Chron.* 8.3a–b (trans. Phenix and Horn, pp. 285–8)
When we entered Mundhir's camp, some pagan and nomadic Ṭayyayê and
Maʻdayê came up to us and said, 'What are you to do? For see, your Christ is

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[332] See the introduction to Witakowski's translation; Brock 1979–80: 10–13; Brock 1976: 20.
[333] Bowersock 2013: 89; Hoyland 2001: 53; Tardy 1999; Robin 2014a.
[334] See now Detoraki 2010, the translation by *eadem* (2007).
[335] Taylor 2010 (quote from 172); Briquel-Chatonnet 2010.
[336] See Taylor 2010: 147; the standard critical edition of the *Martyrdom of Arethas* is that
edited by M. Detoraki and trans. by J. Beaucamp (2007), see pp. 40–4; Moberg's edition (1924)
remains the standard text.
[337] Ps.-Dion. 57–69; Ps.-Zach. *Chron.* 8.3a–g; Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 9.18; Taylor 2010: 145. The
letter is also found in a Syriac manuscript, *BLAdd*. 14641.
[338] Guidi 1881 and Shahîd 1971, discussed by Taylor 2010: 145–6.
[339] Millar 2013a: 29.   [340] Shahîd 1971: 31–3.
[341] Taylor 2010: 170–2; Millar 2013a: 29.

rejected by the Romans, the Persians, and the Himyarites!' Being insulted by the Ṭayyayê caused us grief, and with the grief sorrow also came upon us, because during our visit there came a messenger who was sent from the king of the Himyarites to Mundhir, and [he] gave him a letter that was full of boasting, in which he had written as follows.

'The king whom the Ethiopians installed in our country is dead, and the season of winter is upon us, and they have not been able to come out to our country to provide a Christian king as they usually do. So I became king over the entire country of the Himyarites, and I planned to destroy first of all every one of the Christians who believes in Christ, if they would not become Jews like us, and I killed 280 priests who were found, and with them the Ethiopians who were guarding the church, and I made their church into our synagogue. Then with an army of 120,000 I went to Najran, their royal city, and when I besieged it for some time and did not capture it, I swore to them oaths and their leaders came out to me. I decided not to keep my word to the Christians, my enemies, and I seized them and forced them to bring their gold, their silver, and their possessions. They brought them to me, and I took them, and I asked for Paul their bishop, and when they said to me 'He has died', I did not believe them until they showed me his tomb. I had his bones dug up and I burned them along with their church and their priests and all who were found who were taking refuge in it, and the rest I forced to renounce Christ and the cross and become Jews, but they did not want to, and they confessed him to be God and the son of the Blessed One, and they chose for themselves to die for him. Their leader said many things against us and insulted us, and I commanded that all of their important figures be killed . . .'

The remainder of this part of the letter provides further details about the killings; Simeon then relates the reaction of al-Mundhir's army, on hearing of the massacre:

[**6.47**] Ps.-Zachariah, *Chron.* 8.3d (trans. Phenix and Horn. p. 289)
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.

After discussing other troubling news from southern Arabia, Simeon's letter concludes with these words:

[**6.48**] Ps.–Zachariah, *Chron.* 8.3g (trans. Phenix and Horn, pp. 292–3)
On account of this letter[342] and the reports that have been heard, the Christians
here are in distress, and so that what happened in the territory of the Himyarites
to the pious and believing bishops might become known, we have written so that
people commemorate these heroic martyrs. We exhort Your Charity[343] that as
soon as these things are known to the abbots and bishop and especially to the
archbishop of Alexandria, he should write to the king of Ethiopia immediately to
help the Himyarites, and the chief priests of the Jews in Tiberias should be
arrested, and they should be forced to send [word] to this Jewish king who has
appeared to stop the trial and persecution in the land of the Himyarites.

Simeon and his entourage had not found al-Mundhir where they expected to
(at the *ḥīrtā*—perhaps al-Ḥīra, although no clear indication is given, and the
term may simply refer to a camp) and so they travelled on to Ramallah (also
known as Ramla, or Ramleh). The Roman envoys mentioned as accompany-
ing Simeon at the beginning of the letter had been sent to al-Mundhir to secure
the release of two Roman commanders that he had captured. As Christians,
they found themselves mocked by the Ṭayyāyē and Maʿdayē (i.e. the people of
Maʿadd)—the Arabs with al-Mundhir. Joseph's missive is self-aggrandizing
and arrogant. He celebrates his broken promise to the people of Najrān which
resulted in the martyrdom of al-Ḥārith son of Kaʿb (the Arethas around
whom the *Martyrdom of Arethas* focuses) and revels in the destruction he
has wrought. The letter was aimed at winning support for Joseph's anti-
Christian (and hence anti-Roman) policies from other Arab leaders, notably
from the Naṣrid ruler al-Mundhir, and the people under his control. From the
passages cited here, it is clear that the king's efforts had met with some success,
which led to the discomfiture of the Miaphysite envoys (whose faith was, since
the accession of Justin I in 518, rejected not only in Ḥimyar and Persia, but
also even within the Roman empire, as the tribesmen point out). On the other
hand, Simeon goes on to report that Christian elements within al-Mundhir's
forces blunted the impact of Joseph's message. While the Naṣrid leaders
themselves remained mostly pagan, it is likely that some tribesmen had been
converted to (Miaphysite or Dyophysite) Christianity.

   Although there has been some debate as to the date of these events, there is
now a consensus that the conference at Ramallah (here mentioned) took place
in January/February 524, just three months after the massacre.[344] The aim of
Simeon's letter was to rally support for the Christians and to exert pressure on
Joseph. The *Martyrdom of Arethas* suggests that Justin I, despite his vigorous
support for the Council of Chalcedon, responded swiftly, deploying Roman
vessels in the Red Sea to assist the Aksūmite king Kālēb in a naval expedition

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[342] The one from Joseph quoted above.   [343] The Bishop of Gabbula.
[344] See Beaucamp et al. 1999–2000: 42–55 and Robin 2010b: 78–9 for chronology.

to Himyar (cf. **3.18**); similar indications are reported by al-Ṭabarī (**8.9**).[345] It now appears that Justin's involvement is apocryphal, but the Aksūmites did in fact launch an invasion that toppled Joseph/Dhū Nuwās and was followed up by an anti-Jewish pogrom. Aksūmite rule in Ḥimyar was reasserted in 525 in the person of Sumūyafaʿ Ashwaʾ (**3.19–20**), the Esimiphaeus who appears in Procopius (**5.17**).[346]

Greg Fisher and Geoffrey Greatrex

CHANGING IDENTITIES? ARABS AND 'ISHMAELITES'

Numerous excerpts quoted throughout this chapter feature the terms 'Ishmaelite', 'Saracen', and 'Hagarene' as labels for the Arabs, allowing them to be fitted into a Christian viewpoint on the world. Both the Old Testament and extra-biblical literature, such as the book of Jubilees, made several brief references to the Ishmaelites, who appear there as desert nomads usually associated with tents and camels (e.g. 1 Chron. 27:30).[347] No passage in the Hebrew Bible or the Septuagint explicitly identified this group as 'Arabs', and a passage in the book of Jubilees (written in the second century BC), which might do so, has proved inconclusive.[348] While two late Hellenistic writers identify Arabs as Ishmaelites, the clear identification between Arabs and Ishmaelites was found only later, in the person of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (37–c.100).[349]

Josephus identifies the Arabs as Ishmaelites in order to help explain why the Arabs practise circumcision in the 13th year after birth; he notes that Ishmael was 13 when God commanded circumcision as part of his covenant.[350] It is implied that the Arabs participate in the practice of circumcision because of their Abrahamic inheritance. A number of Christian authors relied on Josephus, and followed him in his identification of the Ishmaelites with the Arabs. (The Romans had a long interest in mapping the histories of the peoples who lived around them, and the Roman Christians in the empire carried on this tradition.)

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[345] *Martyrdom of Arethas*, 29/p. 263.

[346] For a concise summary and discussion of Justin I's involvement, see Robin 2012b: 282–4, *contra* Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 729. See further Shahîd 1964; Rubin 1989; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 722–8; Greatrex 1998b: 225–40; Fisher and Wood forthcoming; Bowersock 2013: 86–91. The passage in Ps.-Dion. *Chron.* 68–9 refers to the defeat of Joseph/Dhū Nuwās by Ella Asbeha (**3.18**); cf. Mal. *Chron.* 18.15/p. 452.

[347] As Gruen 2011: 299–302 notes, the Jewish image of Ishmaelites was not completely negative.

[348] On the issue of the appearance of the Ishmaelites in the Bible, see Ephʾal 1976: 225; on the point regarding their appearance and potential identification with the Arabs in the book of Jubilees, see Millar 1993b: 23–45.

[349] Retsö 2003: 335–6.   [350] Joseph. *AJ* 1.214.

Christian writers expanded on the identification of Ishmaelites and Arabs made by Josephus. The identification of Arabs with the Ishmaelites had a special significance for Christians. Paul had used them as an allegory for those peoples born under the Law, as opposed to those born by Sarah to the promise of the covenant (Gal. 4:21–31). Consequently, when the Arabs appear in Christian sources, it is usual that they were cited for their practices—similar to those of the Jews—and to whom pieces of the Law either seemed to apply, or were picked up by the Ishmaelites because of their historical associations with Ishmael and Abraham. Origen, in the third century, was the first Christian to identify the Ishmaelites with the Arabs, but he only does so in a cursory fashion.

The term 'Saracen' first appears in reference to a distinct group living on the Sinai peninsula and north-western Ḥijāz, in the *Geography* of Ptolemy (90–c.168).[351] It was not until the third or fourth century when the term began to be used as a synonym for a nomadic Arab (Ch. 1). In his *Onomasticon*, likely dated to the 320s,[352] Eusebius also identified the Ishmaelites with the Arabs and conflates them with the Saracens. Here, for example, is what Eusebius has to say on the subject in his *Onomasticon* under the entry for 'Pharan' (cf. **6.7**).

> Eusebius on Pharan
> [**6.49**] Eusebius, *Onomasticon*: 'Pharan' (trans. after Wolf, p. 69)
> (Now) a city beyond Arabia adjoining the desert of the Saracens through which the children of Israel went moving (camp) from Sinai. Located (we say) beyond Arabia on the south, three days journey to the west of Aila . . . where Scripture affirms Ishmael dwelled, whence the Ishmaelites.

In the passage Eusebius conflates the biblical desert Paran where Ishmael wandered with the contemporary town of Pharan, and the biblical descendants of Ishmael with the modern Saracens. The pilgrim Egeria (late fourth century) also described the desert of the Sinai as inhabited by the Saracens.[353] Jerome, who translated Eusebius' *Chronicon* and extended it to 379, has this to say under the tabular entry for the year 87 of the nation of the Hebrews, according to the world chronicle:

> Ishmaelites, Hagarenes, and Saracens (I)
> [**6.50**] Jerome, *Chronicle* 87 (trans. Pearse et al., p. 24)
> Through his female slave Hagar, Abraham fathers Ishmael, from whom come the race of Ishmaelites, later called Hagarenes, and finally Saracens.

Jerome, unfortunately, does not offer an explanation for this identification between Ishmaelites, Hagarenes, and Saracens.

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[351] Ptol. *Geog.* 5.16; 6.7.19. Retsö 2003: 505; Hainthaler 2012: 31–3.
[352] Ward 2012.   [353] *Egeria* 3.7.

These groups are further mentioned in 377, in the *Panarion* of Epiphanius of Salamis, a universal history of heresies from the beginning of the world. In Epiphanius one can still detect an awareness that the association between Ishmaelites, Hagarenes, and Saracens had not always been in use:

Ishmaelites, Hagarenes, and Saracens (II)
[**6.51**] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 4.1.5: on Judaism (trans. Williams, p. 20)
For Abraham had eight sons, but Isaac was the sole heir. This was both because, as his father wished, he was living as an adherent of the true religion, and because he had been given to his father by God's promise. Before him Abraham had Ishmael by the maidservant Hagar, and Khetura bore him six children. These were dispersed over the land called Arabia Felix—Zimram, Jokshan, Ishbak, Shuah, Medan and Midian. And the 'son of the bondmaid'—as I said, his name was Ishmael—also took up residence in <the wilderness> and founded the city called Paran in the wilderness. He had twelve children altogether; these were the ancestors of the tribes of the Hagarenes, or Ishmaelites, though today they are called Saracens.

The use of the terms 'Ishmaelite', 'Hagarene', and 'Saracen' were thus fluid, but were in the process of coming to be identified with each other. Epiphanius' heresiology was an attempt to explain the history of the origins of the peoples of the world in a way that was compatible with the biblical creation narrative.[354] To accomplish this, the peoples the Christians knew of—but who were not found in the Bible, such as the Saracens—were manipulated into categories of groups who had been previously established in the Bible. The passage here reflects Epiphanius' attempts to explain the origins of a number of groups known to the Romans, whose historical origin was unknown. Epiphanius supplied the missing historical foundation through links with Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael. He returned later in his work to explain the Ishmaelite practice of circumcision. For him the Saracens (and others) did not do so because of a connection to Abraham (as we found in Josephus) but instead do so 'from some senseless custom'.[355]

Eusebius, Jerome, and Epiphanius were all interested in the biblical Paran, which Eusebius equated to the town Pharan. Pharan was the community mentioned by Ammonius earlier in this chapter (**6.7**). There the Pharanites converted to Christianity and sought revenge against the Blemmyes for the killing of monks at Rhaithou. This passage significantly suggests that the term Ishmaelite was not necessarily a term of derision, for Obedianus is described as 'Christ loving', and the Pharanites respectfully mourn and bury the martyred monks.

After the fourth century it became standard practice to equate the Ishmaelites with the Saracens, even if those such as Cyril of Scythopolis (**6.14**) might

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[354] Schott 2007: 546–63.   [355] Epiph. *Panar.* 30.33.3 trans. Williams (p. 163).

prefer to emphasize the divergence between the two categories instead. Sometimes Ishmaelites were seen as a warlike or savage desert people, as in Jerome's hagiography of Malchus (**6.3**), where their sudden attack succeeded in capturing the hapless hermit. The attachment of the name 'Saracen' to the Ishmaelites received a mixed reaction among Christians, some of whom claimed that it was the Arabs who had themselves taken this name in an effort to legitimize themselves as a people descended from Abraham; others saw the attachment in a pejorative fashion. Cyril of Scythopolis clearly saw Saracens as a category superior to Ishmaelites. In his later years, Jerome, writing a commentary on Ezechiel in 414, refers to the 'Ishmaelites and Hagarenes, who are now called "Saracens", having falsely assumed the name Sarah and generated the name for themselves'.[356] Theodoret, however, said that the Ishmaelites 'who dwell in the desert, and have no knowledge of Greek writings, are distinguished by sharpness and understanding' (although as noted above in his hagiography of Symeon, he was quite capable as well of seeing them as idol-worshippers).[357]

The association between the Saracens and Abrahamic descent was continued in the fifth century by the ecclesiastical historians Socrates and Sozomen. Both writers elaborated on the history of the Arabs, and also understood them to have co-opted the name of 'Saracen' as a means of legitimization. The following summation from Sozomen of who the Ishmaelites were and their practices is most significant, and came to define Ishmaelite identity among Christians prior to the coming of Islam. (This passage precedes the one quoted and discussed in **6.2**.)

> The customs of the Ishmaelites
> [**6.52**] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.38 (trans. Hartranft, p. 375)
> This is the tribe which took its origin and has its name from Ishmael, the son of Abraham; and the ancients called them Ishmaelites after their progenitor. As their mother Hagar was a slave, they afterwards, to conceal the opprobrium of their origin, assumed the name of Saracens, as if they were descended from Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Such being their origin, they practice circumcision like the Jews, refrain from the use of pork, and observe many other Jewish rites and customs. If, indeed, they deviate in any respect from the observances of that nation, it must be ascribed to the lapse of time, and their intercourse with the neighbouring nations. Moses, who lived many centuries after Abraham, only legislated for those whom he led out of Egypt. The inhabitants of the neighbouring countries, being strongly addicted to superstition, probably soon corrupted the laws imposed upon them by their forefather Ishmael. The ancient Hebrews had their community life under this law only, using therefore unwritten customs, before the Mosaic legislation. These people certainly served the same gods as the

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[356] Jer. *Comm. in Hiezech.* 8.25. 1–7, trans. Schadler.
[357] Theod. *Cur.* 5.73, trans. Millar 2005: 306.

neighbouring nations, honouring and naming them similarly, so that by this likeness with their forefathers in religion, there is evidenced their departure from the laws of their forefathers. As is usual, in the lapse of time, their ancient customs fell into oblivion, and other practices gradually got the precedence among them. Some of their tribe, afterwards happening to come in contact with the Jews, gathered from them the facts of their true origin, returned to their kinsmen, and inclined to the Hebrew customs and laws. From that time on, until now, many of them regulate their lives according to the Jewish precepts. Some of the Saracens were converted to Christianity not long before the present reign. They shared in the faith of Christ by intercourse with the priests and monks who dwelt near them, and practiced philosophy in the neighbouring deserts, and who were distinguished by the excellence of their life, and by their miraculous works.

Here we find a full explanation for why the Arabs follow religious practices so similar to those of the Jews: they were descended from Abraham and Ishmael, and owed their customs to them. Sozomen notwithstanding, however, the identity gradually accreted to the 'Arabs' was not strictly speaking a 'religious' one.[358] It remained possible to be both a Christian and a Saracen, as Sozomen himself says, and as is clearly seen in the works of Cyril of Scythopolis or Theodoret (see sections 'The monks of Palestine' and 'The Arabs and Symeon the Stylite'), both of whom refer to groups of Saracens who received Christianity. The fact that many then adopted a political loyalty to Rome suggests, perhaps, that this confluence of fealty and religious confession 'played a part in the activation of the legendary descent of Saracens or Ishmaelites from Abraham'.[359]

Although the material in this volume concentrates on the pre-Islamic period, it is worth briefly mentioning John of Damascus (*c.*650–750), who devoted a long chapter in his work on sects to the '*threskeia* [superstition?] of the Ishmaelites'.[360] Apart from the fact that his own work would become one of the principal references for Islam in the Byzantine world for the next several hundred years, he also preserves information about the Ishmaelites that he presents as 'pre-Islamic'. John shows an awareness of the Ishmaelites as a group prior to the coming of Islam, but also sees them now with the addition of the person of Muḥammad and his teachings incorporated into the group. The short excerpt here further indicates that there was some awareness among Christians of pre-Islamic religious traditions, which in John's work appears attributable to all 'Ishmaelites'.

Sarah and the Saracens
[**6.53**] John of Damascus, *On Heresies* 100 (trans. Schadler)
It [the cult] takes its origin from Ishmael, who was born to Abraham from Hagar, and for this reason they are called Hagarenes and Ishmaelites. They also call them

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[358] See Millar 2005: 311–12.   [359] Millar 2005: 312. See too Millar 2013c: 143–4.
[360] On this author see Schadler forthcoming.

Saracens, allegedly for having been sent away by Sarah empty; for Hagar said to the angel, 'Sarah has sent me away empty.' These people worshipped and venerated the morning star and Aphrodite, whom they themselves called Habar in their own language, which means 'great'. Therefore they were clearly idolaters until the time of Heraclius . . .

John seems to have focused on a specific group of Ishmaelites, with whom Muḥammad then met and to whom he introduced his own teachings. One cannot tell from the text, but it is unlikely John thought that all Ishmaelites participated in the worship of the morning star (note again the occurrence of this motif, which appears in numerous extracts here) and he may well be simply reproducing material from Epiphanius' *Panarion*.

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Peter Schadler

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CONCLUSION

The texts and inscriptions discussed in this chapter reveal the complexity of the ways that Arabs interacted with the Christian faith, and the multifaceted ways in which those writing about conversions or 'pagan atrocities' explained and interpreted those actions. The assignment, or possible borrowing, and then ascription, of a biblical, 'Ishmaelite' identity represents one of the most important and intriguing aspects covered here. Several other key elements can be identified, such as the importance of holy men, churches, and monasteries in facilitating conversion, and then providing foci subsequent to the adoption of Christianity, particularly in rural areas. The interplay between confessional choice and political loyalty is also clearly visible, as is the importance of the differing Christological positions, and the way that political capital could be extracted from ongoing disagreements surrounding them. The sources for Arab Christians in Persia show patterns similar to those that existed in the Roman empire, such as the importance, again, of churches and monasteries to integrating tribal identities and patterns of life into the cultural forms of the two empires.[361] The overall image is again one of great complexity, and the importance of Christianity to al-Ḥīra also demonstrates how one-dimensional the Roman view of the 'pagan' Arabs might be. That the Jafnids dominate the sources for the Roman world of the sixth century is a reflection of their overall prominence relative to others, and can be seen as much as a consequence of Justinian's support for al-Ḥārith as the link between the family and Miaphysitism. It is even likely, perhaps, that the latter would not have been possible without the former.

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[361] Fowden (E. K.) forthcoming.

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Provincia Arabia: Nabataea, the Emergence of Arabic as a Written Language, and Graeco-Arabica

Zbigniew T. Fiema, Ahmad Al-Jallad,
Michael C. A. Macdonald and Laïla Nehmé

This chapter examines the Roman province of Arabia, created by the emperor Trajan through the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom in 106, as well as the late antique province of *Palaestina III/Salutaris*. These two provinces are of key importance to many of the events and themes examined in this volume—home to some of the Miaphysite monasteries linked with the Jafnid family (Ch. 6) and, at the southern limits, a locus of contact between Roman forces, warring tribes, and ambitious Arab leaders (Chs 1 and 5). The discussion here provides a portrait of the region, framed around a discussion of two of its urban centres, Petra and Ḥegrā, before considering the development of Arabic as a written language, and the dialogue between Greek and Arabic—Graeco-Arabica.

PETRA AND ḤEGRĀ BETWEEN THE ROMAN ANNEXATION AND THE COMING OF ISLAM

The affairs of the Nabataean kingdom were largely concentrated in three major Nabataean cities: Petra in southern Jordan, Bostra (Boṣrā)[1] in southern Syria, and Ḥegrā (Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) in north-western Arabia (Fig. 7.1). The former two were the most significant political, economic, and cultural centres

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[1] See the note on these two names in Ch. 1. For the sake of convenience, Bostra is used here, as the primary focus of this chapter is the Roman period.

Fig. 7.1. The Nabataean kingdom. Map drawn by Aaron Styba.

of the kingdom. Ḥegrā, on the other hand, while a smaller and relatively less-embellished city, was nevertheless a significant trading emporium, the southernmost population centre of the Nabataean kingdom, and probably a frontier post.[2] The following text will provide an introduction to the history and archaeology of Petra and Ḥegrā between AD 106, i.e. when the Nabataean kingdom was annexed by Rome, and the Islamic conquest in the early seventh century.

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[2] On these three cities, see Dentzer 2009.

It has been suggested that Petra experienced a political and economic decline in the first century AD, triggered by the collapse of the Nabataean trading network. The direct consequence of the eclipse of Petra was the elevation of Bostra, ascribed to the last Nabataean king, Rabbel II, who is thought to have transferred the capital there from Petra.[3] These assumptions are belied by historical and archaeological data related to Petra during the Roman period.[4] The city remained the most important centre of the newly created province of *Arabia*, and the wealth of material culture indicates the flourishing of the city under Roman rule.

The Province of Arabia

In the year AD 106 Roman military forces under the Syrian legate Cornelius Palma entered the kingdom and, seemingly without major opposition, occupied the whole territory. Neither the nature nor the reasons for the annexation are fully understood.[5] Strategic or economic considerations on the part of the Romans are usually preferred, but the largely unknown state of the internal political affairs of the Nabataean kingdom in the first years of the second century might have been responsible for the Roman action. Equally enigmatic is the course of the event and its immediate aftermath—for example, whether or not the takeover involved a military action. The Nabataean residential quarter on ez-Zantūr ridge displays destruction, dated to the early second century; destructions also reported on other sites within the former Nabataean realm, with the assumption that all those were due to military action, but that remains unproven.[6]

What has so far been largely overlooked is the possibility of internal unrest caused by the foreign takeover. The collapse of Nabataean royal authority, and the apparent fall of previously influential persons, might have caused considerable political upheaval and social disorder, at least among the inhabitants of Petra, resulting in riots, arson, and other acts of dissatisfaction or revenge. Equally puzzling is that the Romans advertised the annexation only five years later, and the early provincial coins feature the term *adquisita*, rather than

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[3] For the alleged decline of Petra and the supposed elevation of Bostra, see Bowersock 1983: 21, 64; Bowersock 1971: 228; Sartre 1985: 54–6.

[4] As presented and discussed by Fiema 2003a: 39–43.

[5] On the annexation, its reasons, and outcome, see for example Fiema 1987; Kennedy 1980; Bowersock 1970. The most comprehensive and detailed presentation is by Freeman 1996. See too Lewin 2014.

[6] For possible military action, see Schmid 1997. *Papyrus Michigan* 465—a letter written by an Egyptian legionary to his family in the Fayoum during the winter of AD 107—was quoted as an argument in favour of a peaceful annexation (see Préaux 1950–1) but it probably represents a limited perspective of a single soldier.

capta.[7] Nevertheless, the treatment was unusually harsh: the name of Nabataea was suppressed, the royal family vanished into obscurity, and there is no indication of the incorporation of Nabataean aristocracy into the Roman senate. Nabataean military forces were apparently incorporated into the Roman army and organized as *cohortes Ulpiae Petraeorum.*[8]

Furthermore, Greek firmly replaced Nabataean in official documents and inscriptions in Petra after AD 106. The Nabataean script is no longer attested in written documents in Petra after 112. There are about 35 Nabataean or Nabataeo-Arabic inscriptions dated to the provincial era in the former Nabataean kingdom, with the latest known dated to 456, but Petra seems to have suffered a rather drastic change in its epigraphic habits soon after the annexation.

Puzzling evidence concerning the annexation comes from Ḥegrā, which may indicate that Ḥegrā (and its region?) was finally annexed only in 107. This is suggested by the fact that 'year 1 of king Malichos' is mentioned in an inscription (*JSNab* 39: see **1.11**) carved above a votive niche in the Jabal Ithlib area in Ḥegrā. This dedicatory inscription devotes the baetyl contained in the niche to ''r' who is in Boṣrā, the god of Rb'l', with Rabbel most probably being the Nabataean king Rabbel II, who reigned between AD 70/1 and 106.[9] Therefore, the king Malichos mentioned in the dating formula of the text could possibly be contemporary with or a successor of Rabbel II (cf. Ch. 1, after **1.11**). However, this Malichos must have been deposed fairly quickly, before the end of his first regnal year, and it is now certain that the Ḥijāz was fully integrated in the newly organized Roman province of *Arabia.*[10]

There is no evidence that Petra was garrisoned by the military during the Roman period, although some inscriptions may indicate the occasional presence of some army detachments or individual soldiers in the city.[11] On the other hand, the Roman military presence is better attested in the northern Ḥijāz. Detachments or individual soldiers of *legio III Cyrenaica* were stationed in Ḥegrā and Dumata (al-Jawf). A Greek inscription discovered in a well in Ḥegrā mentions a *zōgraphos*, a painter of the legion.[12] The Latin inscription, dated 175–7, discovered during the 2003 excavations at Madā'in Ṣāliḥ, mentions the restoration of a monument, probably the city wall (*[val]lum*), with the assistance of two centuries of the *III Cyrenaica.*[13] The restoration was

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[7] Bowersock 1983: 81. For coinage, see Spijkerman 1978: 32–5; see also Mattingly and Sydenham 1968: 278, nos 465–6 (fifth consulate); 287, nos 610, 612, and 614 (sixth consulate); and 239.

[8] Graf 1992.

[9] For a detailed presentation of the arguments, see Nehmé 2009: 42–4.

[10] Despite some doubts (e.g. Graf 1988: 171–82) there is little uncertainty about Ḥijāz incorporation. For this opinion, see Sartre 1982; Gatier and Salles 1988: 184–5; Lewin 1994: 110–18.

[11] E.g. Zayadine and Fiema 1986; Bennett and Kennedy 1978: 163–5. For the garrison of *Provincia Arabia*, see Speidel 1977.

[12] Bowersock 1983: 96 n. 19.　　　　[13] al-Talhi and al-Daire 2005.

made at the expense of *civitas Hegraeorum* and the work supervisor, who bears the title *primus civitatis*, has a well-known Nabataean name. In Dumata, a centurion of the *III Cyrenaica* dedicated an altar to two Arab gods for the salvation of two unnamed Augusti.[14] Finally, graffiti left by soldiers of Roman auxiliary cavalry units, *ala Getulorum* and *ala dromedariorum*, found in the Ḥegrā area,[15] may indicate the presence of a temporary or permanent garrison there. In Ḥegrā itself, the graffiti were carved on rocks on each side of what was probably a temporary military camp located on the ancient north–south road. Other graffiti were found *c.*7 km south of Ḥegrā, along the road which led to al-ʿUlā, in the place called Qubūr and Maqʿad al-Jundī. Neither of these graffiti is dated but these should be no later than the second century, according to both the palaeography and onomastics.[16]

In this context, it is worth reminding the reader of the bilingual Greek and Nabataean inscription from Ruwāfa, *c.*200 km north-west of Ḥegrā (**1.18–22**, and Plate 1).[17] The inscription, dated to AD 167–9, records the construction of a temple by the *ethnos/šrkt* of the 'Thamūd' in honour of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Initial interpretations concentrated on the possible mediating role of the Roman governor among tribal populations of Arabia.[18] The reinterpretation of the inscription by Macdonald, proposing that *ethnos/šrkt* did not designate a 'Thamūdic confederation', but rather a military unit composed of individuals recruited from the Thamūd tribe, appears more plausible as it helps to explain the presence of a temple devoted to the imperial cult in this remote area of the province and it provides a convincing linguistic analysis.[19] It should be noted, finally, that neither a settlement nor any other inscriptions have so far been found around the temple, which thus seems to have been an isolated building.

Administration and Civic Status

Undoubtedly the rivalry between Petra in the south and Bostra in the north would have continued in the Roman period. The provincial governor, being also the commander of the Arabian legion (*legio III Cyrenaica* for most of the Roman period) with its headquarters in Bostra, would occasionally reside in that city but this certainly neither supports the existence of an 'Era of Bostra'

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[14] Bowersock 1983: 98 and pl. 14.
[15] On which see Graf 1988: 192–6. See also other references in Nehmé 2009: 8 n. 43.
[16] Sartre 1982: 34.   [17] Milik 1971 [1972]; see also Bowersock 1975.
[18] E.g. Milik 1971 [1972]; Graf 1988: 172, 178–80. See also Millar 1993a: 140; Bowersock 1983: 96.
[19] Macdonald 2009c; followed by Sartre 2001: 785–6 n. 233. See the full discussion in Ch. 2.

nor the preeminence of Bostra in the new province.[20] However, the location of these two important urban centres in *Provincia Arabia* would have necessitated the governor's frequent journeys between Petra and Bostra and his periodic residence in both places.[21] On the other hand, while Greek and Latin inscriptions indicate the presence of soldiers of *legio III Cyrenaica* in Ḥegrā, the commanders of this legion are not attested there.

   Particularly enlightening is the evidence of the civic status, titles, and honorifics bestowed by the Romans on Petra and Bostra.[22] Those of Petra—*Augusta colonia Antoniniana nobilis ingenua mater coloniarum* (or *metrocolonia*) *Hadriana Petra Metropolis Arabiae* (the Antonine imperial colony, the distinguished and native mother of colonies, Hadrianic Petra, Metropolis of Arabia)—are particularly impressive, predate all those of Bostra, and were still in use in sixth-century Petra.[23] These honorifics and status designations clearly reflect the significance of the city in terms of administrative and status-related advancement within the Roman world. Under Trajan, Petra was recognized as a *metropolis* of Arabia.[24] The city also received the honorific *Hadriana Petra*, probably during the emperor's visit to the Near East in 130–1,[25] and it was granted the status of *colonia*, possibly as early as 209–12, by Caracalla,[26] or later, by Elagabalus.[27] The honorific *metrocolonia* is attested in the third century, possibly granted to Petra by Severus Alexander (222–35).[28] The title, which indicates the most important Roman colony in the region, appears to be known in the Near East only for Palmyra, Antioch, and perhaps Emesa.[29] This title also reflects the escalation of civic competition between Petra and Bostra in which Petra apparently held the upper hand. For if that city became a 'mother of colonies' under Severus Alexander, Bostra was only recognized as a 'colony' by that emperor. Furthermore, the qualifying adjectives of Petra—*nobilis* (distinguished) and *ingenua* (native/indigenous)—are not attested for Bostra. Although it is not known who bestowed these honorifics on Petra and when, their presence in

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[20] For the so-called 'era of Bostra' see Sartre 1985: 73–6; Sartre 1976: 41–4. The review of evidence (Fiema 1988 and Fiema 2003a) firmly rejects any specific association of the provincial dating system with Bostra. The most appropriate designation is 'era of the Province of Arabia' or 'Arabian provincial era'. See Freeman 1986.

[21] For some ideas in this matter, see Gagos 2009: 389.

[22] These are all discussed in Fiema 2003a.   [23] Koenen 1996: 187.

[24] The title appears in an inscription of AD 114 which also mentions C. Claudius Severus, the first governor of Arabia (Bowersock 1983: 84–5 n. 28).

[25] E.g. *IGLS* 21/4.55, text 22.

[26] Gitler 2005: 189–90.   [27] Spijkerman 1978: 218, 220–1, 236–7.

[28] Notably, *mater coloniarum* and *metrocolonia* seem to have been used interchangeably; for the former (in Latin) see Gagos 2009: 382–6; for the latter (in Greek), see Starcky and Bennett 1968: 60–2, no. XIII; *IGLS* 21/4.76–8, text 48.

[29] Gagos 2009: 385; Millar 1990: 41, 44–5, 51–2.

Petra's titulature may indicate local pride in the fact that the colony was apparently created without an influx of Roman citizens.[30]

Petra is listed as *polis* by Ptolemy[31] and the earliest known record of the *boulē* (city council) of the city is dated to 124. Periodic governors' assizes were held in Petra, as attested in the Babatha Archive of the Naḥal Ḥever documents.[32] The chief city magistrates (*strategoi*) are known from the early third century. Commemorative inscriptions referring to governors, military commanders, state and city officials, and army detachments have been uncovered in the city centre.[33] Furthermore, Sextius Florentinus, one of the early governors of Arabia, selected Petra as the place of his burial.[34]

Although recent excavations in Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ have produced a number of new Greek and Latin inscriptions,[35] there is, so far, no tangible evidence of a civic status advancement of Ḥegrā during the Roman period. However, the Latin inscription cited above specifies Ḥegrā as *civitas*, a common designation of smaller, native provincial population centres in the Roman empire.

Urbanism

A major city of the newly organized province would certainly have experienced a boom in new construction and displayed a tendency for further embellishment, a phenomenon well attested in the second-century context in other cities of Palestine, Syria, and Arabia. The civic centre of Petra was the focus of such activities which, among others, included the formalization of the main street of the city as it appears today.[36] While the exact sequence cannot be determined, archaeological data and the relevant epigraphic evidence strongly indicate the entire design as dating to the Trajanic period, and all main changes in the appearance of the centre seem to have been the components of one grand design.[37] These included the expansion of the shops facing

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[30] Gagos 2009: 386.   [31] Ptol. *Geog.* 5.17.5.
[32] Lewis 1989: 47–9, 54–6. See also Yadin 1963: 227–41.
[33] Starcky and Bennett 1968: 41–66; also *IGLS* 21/4.33–46, 53–8, 67–79. The most recent one is published by Salomies and Fiema 2009.
[34] For the tomb, see McKenzie 1990: 33, 47, 165–6, pls 35ab, 150c, 151–3. For the inscription, see *IGLS* 21/4.85–7, text 51. Possible reasons behind this decision are discussed by Haensch 2010: 40–6.
[35] The Saudi Arabian Department of Antiquities carried out excavations between 1986 and 1990 and in 2003 (see the 1988, 1989, and 1990 issues of *Atlal*). The Saudi–French exploration and excavation project began in 2002 and the second part of the overall fieldwork programme ended in 2012 while the third part started in 2014. New Greek and Latin inscriptions, reused in the city gate, were discovered in 2011 see Villeneuve forthcoming.
[36] Kanellopoulos 2001: 9–22.
[37] Already suggested by Parr 1970: 369–70. For the early, post-annexation date for these developments, as based on recent excavations, see Graf et al. 2005: 431–2 and Fiema 1998: 395–424.

the street on the southern side, the construction of the new portico wall with its sidewalk and colonnade, and the paving of the street. The Colonnaded Street became an elegant and orderly inner-city colonnaded boulevard, associated with typical city centre commerce and public functions.[38] The convex surface paved with regular, well-cut limestone slabs and the lack of traces of wheel tracks indicate that wheeled transport was not admitted to the city centre and that the street was mainly used by pedestrians. The Colonnaded Street had evidently become the major public space of Petra, symbolizing the new status of the city as the *metropolis* of Roman Arabia. The monumental structure known as the 'Great Temple' also witnessed major changes in the later first–early second century. The principal addition was a *theatron* inserted inside the main building, followed by the construction of the stage/*pulpitum* (post-AD 106).[39] Whether the structure became then a *bouleuterion* (city council building) or an *odeon* (concert hall) cannot be easily determined, but such secularization of a cultic place knows no parallels in the ancient world.[40] More plausibly, this conversion should imply that the structure did not possess a sacral character from the beginning but might have belonged to the multifunctional government complex, related first to a king in the Nabataean period, and then to a Roman governor or city council in the post-106 period. Such a transformation into a structure of public character—*bouleuterion* or *odeon*—would indeed make sense with the end of the Nabataean monarchy.[41] East of the 'Great Temple', in the luxurious Nabataean garden and pool complex (*paradeisos*), some additions and renovations, dated to the early second century, were carried out in the island pavilion and the hydraulic system.[42] On the opposite side of the 'Great Temple', an elegant bath complex (the so-called 'Great Temple Roman-Byzantine Baths') was constructed in the early second century, seemingly on the remains of the previous, Nabataean, bathing installations.[43]

The new political reality at Petra is also exemplified by the manifestation of loyalty expressed by the city toward its imperial masters. A small building located west of the 'Great Temple' has been identified as a temple dedicated to the imperial cult. Over 600 fragments of inscribed marble panels have been found there, some forming meaningful Latin and Greek inscriptions and dedicated to Trajan and Severus Alexander.[44] Significant changes also occurred at the western terminus of the valley, on the *temenos* (sacred precinct) of the Qaṣr al-Bint Temple. The great sacrificial altar in front of the temple was modified several times during the Roman period. More significantly, a

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[38] Fiema 2008: 161–8.   [39] Joukowsky 2007a: 223–30.
[40] Kanellopoulos 2004: 222–3.
[41] Schmid 2002: 49–50. M. Joukowsky is convinced that the building served as both a religious and, to some degree, an administrative centre (Joukowsky 2007a: 355).
[42] Bedal et al. 2007: 164–5.   [43] Joukowsky 2007b: 97–8.
[44] Karz Reid 2005: 117, 123–35. For inscriptions, see Gagos 2009: 381–3.

monumental exedra was built on the western enclosure wall as well as a second (northern) altar. Apparently designed to commemorate the imperial family, the exedra would have been decorated with large statues, judging from the inscriptions mentioning Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, and sculpture fragments which were found during the excavations.[45]

Changes are also notable in private dwellings. The most recently excavated Nabataean urban residence (EZ IV) at the southern part of the ez-Zantūr ridge, which features a wealth of internal decoration (frescoes, moulded stucco, mosaics), was modified in the late first/early second century AD, continued in use throughout the Roman period, and was apparently destroyed only by the AD 363 earthquake.[46]

The post-106 programme of new constructions and the renovation of the old ones as well as the incorporation of pre-existing structures into a unified urban design suggest that Roman idealizations of civic life were instrumental in redefining the urban landscape of Petra. The emergent picture of Petra during the early provincial period is far from that of a decline, and it implies that Petra remained the most prominent urban centre in Roman Arabia.

Compared to Petra, the information concerning urban Ḥegrā in the Roman period is limited. Excavations in the residential area, conducted between 2008 and 2015, imply no significant break in occupation in the early second century, although a few early mud brick-built buildings in some areas were abandoned by then and the occupation shifted elsewhere. Therefore, there is no particular or dramatic change in the second century. Some embellishment is attested in some structures—for example, the construction of a stone-paved courtyard in a room—and the intrasite spatial organization features many temporal variations, through the additions, alterations, and delimitation of existent buildings, but in general the occupation is both continuous and intensive.[47] Despite occasional episodes of destruction, due, for example, to flooding, and phases of temporary disuse, the occupation of the residential area continued at least until the fourth century, and in some places possibly until the sixth. By contrast, the excavations carried out in the area of the city wall, except at the so-called South-Eastern gate, indicate that its period of use does not continue beyond the second century AD.

Finally, it is worth commenting on some changes that affected the societies of Petra and Ḥegrā in the second century. During the pre-provincial period, fraternal societies (Greek symposia, Nabataean *marzeḥā*) were an important facet of Nabataean social life. Their members gathered in banquet halls (*tri-* or *biclinia*), of which more than 100 were identified in Petra, and three have recently been excavated in the Jabal Ithlib area to the north-east of the

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[45] Augé et al. 2002: 309–13.   [46] Kolb and Keller 2001; Kolb 2001.

[47] For the most recent results of the Madâʾin Sâlih Archaeological Project, see Charloux et al. 2010; Nehmé forthcoming (b).

residential area of Ḥegrā. Most of them are associated with votive niches, and inscriptions located nearby usually provide the names of those who attended the meetings. It is clear, however, that these banquet halls were no longer in use in the second century. Possibly, Roman laws concerning associations and public gatherings were responsible for the cessation of such meetings, where the internal affairs of the kingdom were previously discussed, and through which Nabataean tribes probably expressed their power and authority.[48] Good examples of this change are provided by the *triclinia* and associated structures of the so-called 'Obodas chapel' cultic place in Petra, which seem to be abandoned in the early second century,[49] and by the newly excavated *triclinia* in Ḥegrā, in which no pottery clearly later than the first century was found.[50]

Economy

Apparently trade also remained the backbone of Petra's significance during the Roman period. The construction between AD 111 and 114 of the *Via Nova Traiana*, a grand highway connecting Aila (ʿAqaba) with Bostra, would have further improved commercial transport and communication.[51] Notably, it was Petra, not Bostra, which already in 112 had become connected with the road network of Roman Palestine.[52] Furthermore, archaeological evidence of unguent/perfume containers (*unguentaria*), mass-produced in Petra between the first and at least the early third centuries,[53] attest the continued involvement of Petra in long-distance trade, as well as the continuity of the spice and perfume-related processing industry there. Additionally, the evidence from some kilns excavated in the suburbs of Petra indicates that the production of Nabataean fine ware pottery continued in Petra until the sixth century, notwithstanding a progressive change and decline in the quality of decor and ware.[54]

Petra's connections with the outlying regions were, at least in part, associated with its extensive trading contacts,[55] and there is no reason to assume that these had substantially changed before the third century. Indeed, the distribution of communication networks in southern Jordan during the first and the

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[48] See Schmidt 2013: 258–60.   [49] Tholbecq et al. 2008: 241.
[50] Nehmé et al. 2010: 270, 272.
[51] The detailed route of *Via Nova*, on the basis of the early survey of R. Brünnow and A. von Domaszewski 1904: 15–124, is presented by Thomsen 1917: 1–103. For recent surveys, see Graf 1995.
[52] For the presentation and discussion of evidence, see Fiema 2003a: 45.
[53] Johnson 1990.
[54] ʿAmr 1991: 313–23. Kilns nos III and IV were used no later than the second century, kilns nos I and II were used from the late third to early fourth century onwards, and kiln no. V is dated to the sixth century.
[55] Discussed by Zayadine 1985: 159–73.

second centuries, as revealed by regional surveys, appears consistent with the continuation of commercial activities during the Roman period.[56]

This situation is mirrored in north-western Arabia, at least in areas that have been surveyed, and which have yielded dated inscriptions along what have been interpreted as trade routes. The so-called Darb al-Bakra, which is thought to have linked Ḥegrā and Petra,[57] seems to have been frequented by travellers over a long time, including the period following the Roman annexation. At Umm Jadhāyidh, 200 km north-west of Ḥegrā, some of the individuals who left their signatures there came from or went to Ḥegrā, while others certainly came from Petra.[58] This demonstrates that Umm Jadhāyidh was located on the ancient route, and that at least some of the numerous inscriptions found there were written by persons involved in the caravan trade. The same can be suggested for the individuals who left graffiti at other Darb al-Bakra sites. Some of these were written in a script which is transitional between Nabataean and Arabic, and dated to sometime between the end of the third and mid-fifth century AD (see **7.13–15**, below, for a discussion of three of these 'transitional'—now called Nabataeo-Arabic—texts).[59]

Petra and Ḥegrā in the Third Century

Although the well-known third-century sophists Callinicus and Genethlius, of Helleno-Arab culture, are recorded in the written sources as natives of Petra,[60] the city rarely appears in historical sources of that turbulent century—marked by Persian wars, imperial usurpations, and the Palmyrene occupation of the Near East (269–72).[61] This may suggest that Petra enjoyed some tranquillity away from the main actions and conflicts, but—more likely—it also shows the dwindling significance of the city. Indeed, the third century witnessed the gradual disappearance of Petra's status as an international commercial emporium. The diminished demand for oriental goods in the Roman empire was related to unstable political conditions, continuous wars, the impoverishment of towns and regions, and a concomitant change in the pattern of the main

[56] For settlement patterns as associated with trade traffic, see Kouki 2009: 29–56. See also Fiema 2008: 51–2.

[57] Until the material from the Darb al-Bakra survey is published, see al-Ghabban 2007.

[58] A handsomely written inscription, previously published by al-Theeb 2002: no. 213, mentions five individuals who are to be remembered 'in the presence of Dushara the god of Gaia', i.e. Dushara of Petra. Another inscription (Theeb no. 89), misread in the *editio princeps*, expresses the following wish: 'May any man who went to Ḥegrā and any camel be safe.'

[59] On both these inscriptions and the script, see Nehmé 2010: *UJadh* 309 (AD 295), pp. 80–1; *UJadh* 297 (AD 305–6), pp. 79–80; *UJadh* 172 (AD 311–12), p. 77; *UJadh* 109 (AD 455–6), pp. 76–7.

[60] Stein 1923: 448–56. For cultural affairs, see Bowersock 1991: 15–22.

[61] For the general political and economic situation, see Butcher 2003: 48–60.

trade routes. The routes appear to have shifted either farther north of the Petra area (Persian Gulf—Mesopotamia—Armenia—North Syria), or to the south (South Arabia—Ethiopia—Red Sea). The commercial decline of Petra bene-fited the emporia on the Red Sea, such as Clysma (Qalʿat al-Qulzum) and Aila (ʿAqaba), which are known to have participated in the seaborne Indian and South Arabian trade in the late antique period.[62] At the same time, the overland trade routes, between the Ḥijāz and Syria, began to shift further east, benefiting the settlements located on the fringes of the desert, such as Udhruḥ.[63]

Consistent with the redirection of trade, and the probable diminished demand for unguents and aromatics, the manufacturing and processing in-dustry at Petra would also have gradually disappeared. The latest group of *unguentaria* produced in Petra, and representing reused examples of earlier forms, was found in the Temple of the Winged Lions in deposits which also included coins from the early to mid-third century.[64]

The city itself also shows signs of deterioration and stagnation. Possible disuse, and even abandonment, associated with dumping activities and rob-bing out was recorded in many areas of the 'Great Temple' complex as already happening in the late second–third century. The luxurious pool in the nearby *paradeisos* complex seems to have been converted into an ordinary reservoir.[65] The dwelling complex (EZ III) on the ez-Zanṭūr ridge appears to have already been abandoned by the Severan period.[66] Although these symptoms may appear insignificant in the general perspective of the Roman Near East in the third century, they may suggest that by the later part of that century the prosperity of Petra was no longer easily sustainable.

Nabataean Petra was the example par excellence of Nabataean cultural integration within the Hellenistic tradition, as well as of their aspirations for assimilation into the Roman-dominated world. The 'showcase' status and the political-economic centrality of Petra continued to be perpetuated after AD 106, to signify and manifest the acceptance and benefits of Roman rule. This role, however, lasted little more than a hundred years. The earthquake which seriously damaged Petra in 363 (see section 'The earthquake of 363') dealt a severe blow to a city which was already politically and economically stagnant.

Even less is known about Ḥegrā in the third century. The most important source of information is an inscription, usually referred to as *JSNab* 17, written in the Nabataean script with the name and patronym of the deceased repeated in a Thamudic D inscription carved vertically to the right of the Nabataean

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[62] For the Arabian trade routes in the third–fourth centuries, and Aila and Clysma, see Young 2001: 122–8.

[63] Fiema 2002: 231–4.   [64] Johnson 1990: 242.

[65] For the third-century changes in the so-called Great Temple, see Joukowsky 2007a: 230. For *paradeisos*, see Bedal et al. 2007: 165.

[66] Kolb 1998: 262, 267.

text, and partially expressed in the 'Old Arabic' language—the term used to refer to attestations of the Arabic language from the pre-Islamic period.[67] The *JSNab* 17 text, dated to AD 267, was chiselled above an ordinary tomb cut in the rock face between two monumental Nabataean rock-cut tombs, on the southern side of the Qaṣr al-Bint, the most important necropolis of ancient Ḥegrā, and in a place easily visible from the residential area. The inscription mentions the construction by an individual of the small tomb for his mother (see **7.2** for a detailed discussion of the text). Apparently, by the second half of the third century, the authorities at Ḥegrā were still sufficiently in control of the outlying areas, where the old Nabataean tombs were located, so that an individual felt it safe to build a tomb for his mother in the midst of them. Domestic structures excavated in the residential area display no major change in the third century. This period still features intensive occupation in many sectors, sometimes even marked by a reoccupation after a destruction episode in the early third century. On the other hand, the South-Eastern gate of the city wall was still in use, at least until the beginning of this century, featuring many reused elements, including blocks with Greek and Latin inscriptions, a situation strikingly similar to many other fortifications of Roman provincial cities in the third century.

Political Changes from the Early Fourth to the Early Seventh Century

Beginning with the fourth century, the histories of Petra and Ḥegrā become markedly different. As the result of the Diocletianic reforms and the successive reorganizations of the Roman provinces of Arabia and Palestine during the fourth century,[68] Petra became the capital of the province ultimately known as *Palaestina Salutaris* (later *Tertia*), which included the territories of southern Jordan, the Negev, and probably the Sinai. On the other hand, Ḥegrā found itself outside the Roman empire. (See Fig. 7.2.)

Probably, at the end of the fourth century at the latest, direct control of the region to the south and east of Aila, including, for example, Dūmat al-Jandal

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[67] Healey and Smith 1989: 77–84. For a balanced discussion on the Old Arabic material, see section 'The Emergence of Arabic as a Written Language' and Macdonald 2008b.

[68] During the reign of Diocletian, Petra and the southern part of the Roman province of *Arabia* were attached to that of *Palaestina*; under Licinius that area was organized as *Arabia Nova*, but under Constantine (*c.*325) it was returned to *Palaestina*, except for the Negev. Around 340, southern Jordan was returned to *Arabia*. In 357/8, the Negev was detached from *Palaestina* and attached to *Arabia*. Around 392, southern Jordan, Negev, and the Sinai were formed as the province *Palaestina Salutaris*, later known as *Tertia* (*III*). Finally, after 451, the northern limit of *Palaestina Tertia* was extended up to the Wādī Mujīb. For all these, see Sipilä 2004: 317–48; Sipilä 2009: 149–96; Ward 2012.

Fig. 7.2. *Provincia Arabia* and *Tres Palaestinae* in late antiquity. Map drawn by Aaron Styba.

in the Wādī Sirḥān, and Ḥegrā farther south, was relinquished, perhaps gradually, to control of the Arab tribes.[69] The *Notitia Dignitatum* (*Or.* 34) indicates that around AD 400 there was no permanent military presence south of Aila, which was garrisoned by *legio X Fretensis*. Presumably military units would still operate in the region to the south-east of Aila if an intervention

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[69] Suggested by Bowersock 1975: 520–2 to have probably occurred during the reign of Diocletian.

was necessary, but it would take no less than ten days to cover the distance from Aila to Ḥegrā, *c.*400 km by the straightest route. It is also apparent that the Roman provincial administration of the period did not extend much south of Aila. A mid-fourth-century inscription, which is said to come from Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, written in Aramaic but in Nabataean characters, mentions a man who is *ryš* (chief citizen) of Ḥegrā and another who is *ryš* of Taymāʾ.[70] Both men bear North Arabian names and, whatever the function was carried by *ryš*, this inscription indicates that the municipalities were governed by people of local origin.

The political situation in the region from the fourth century onwards needs also to be understood in the context of the increasing involvement of the Ḥimyarite kings in the affairs of *Arabia Deserta*.[71] An inscription dated to AD 360[72] indicates that Ḥimyarite troops operated in the Ḥijāz, in the Najd, and in the Ḥasāʾ, thus in western, central, and eastern Arabia. Around AD 445 large portions of territories in central and western Arabia were annexed by Ḥimyar. Accordingly Ḥimyarite kings added a new formula to their official titles, specifying that they were now also rulers of 'the Arabs of the Upper-Country and of the Coast' (which became later 'of *their* Arabs of the Upper-Country and of the Coast'; see Ch. 3).

The Arabs who are referred to in this formula, which is attested until AD 558, are the tribal confederations of Maʿadd and Muḍar. The former was active in central Arabia, but also extended its influence down to the Red Sea, while the latter is the great tribal confederation of western Arabia, which, just before Islam, also included the tribe of Quraysh. A text by Ibn Ḥabīb (d. AD 860) suggests that a century earlier the tribes of Muḍar were established in northern Ḥijāz (**8.29**).[73] Muḍar was probably led by the Salīḥid kings, two of whom bore the name ʿAmr. It is thus not surprising that a text found in Umm Jadhāyidh, which is written in the transitional script between Nabataean and Arabic, mentions 'the year when they introduced ʿAmrū the king'.[74] Considering that it was perhaps the Salīḥids who were replaced by the Jafnids in the early sixth century, and since this text is dated to AD 455–6, the ʿAmrū who is mentioned in this text may be the Salīḥid king ʿAmr ibn Mālik, but he may be a few decades too early. He could also be the Ḥujrid king ʿAmr ibn Ḥujr, whose son al-Ḥārith reigned for a long period until AD 528, when he was killed by the Naṣrid leader al-Mundhir (see **5.14**). One should, however, bear in mind that at the same time that Muḍar was the subject or ally of Ḥimyar, it

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[70] Stiehl 1970: 87–90. For a new reading of some of the names, see also al-Najem and Macdonald 2009: 213–14.

[71] On this and what follows, see the fundamental contribution of Robin 2008a: 178–81, as well as the discussion of these texts by Robin in this volume (Ch. 3).

[72] Robin and Gajda 1994.

[73] Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, pp. 370–1; see Robin 2008a: 177.

[74] Nehmé 2009: 50–2.

also seems to have had close contacts with the Roman empire. Its territory might roughly have covered the Ḥijāz, as it is known in the Islamic period, including the large oases of northern Ḥijāz, such as Yathrib (Medina), Khaybar, al-ʿUlā, and Taymāʾ. While the account of Amorkesos sheds some light on the political situation in the northern Ḥijāz at the end of the fifth century (**1.27**), neither Salīḥ nor Muḍar are mentioned in contemporary Graeco-Roman or Syriac sources.[75]

Although the formal military organization in Syro-Palestine largely survived until the Islamic conquest in the early seventh century, it is apparent that the Romans increasingly relied on the military alliances with the phylarchs of the dominant Arab tribal confederations. While it is possible that the kings of Salīḥ were *foederati* of the Romans in the fifth century (**8.29**), the dominant allies of the sixth-century Roman empire were the Jafnids (Chs 5 and 6). Under al-Ḥārith (**5.15**), Justinian appointed Abū Karib, his brother, as 'Phylarch of the Saracens of Palestine'. Although his main responsibility was the control over the Arab populations of *Palaestina Tertia*, he was a person of great authority and apparently was involved in various internal affairs of the province. In addition to the evidence discussed in Chs 5 and 6, Abū Karib is mentioned (as Abochorabos, the Phylarch) in the Petra Papyri (see section 'Administration, economy, and society') as a mediator in a long-lasting dispute among the inhabitants of Kastron Zadacathon (modern Sadaqa), *c.*20 km south-east of Petra.[76]

Abū Karib's authority extended 'beyond the boundaries of Palestine', into the area known as the 'Palm Groves' (*Phoinikôn*). Apparently after his appointment as a 'captain over the Saracens in Palestine', Abū Karib ceded the Palm Groves region to Justinian but continued to efficiently guard this region (**5.19**).[77] The 'Palm Groves' mentioned by Procopius would most probably mean the Ḥijāz oases[78] and it is therefore likely that Abū Karib, a Jafnid phylarch, controlled this area, including Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, on behalf of the emperor in Constantinople.

Petra in Late Antiquity

Although Petra remained an important provincial city of the Roman empire, its impressive honorifics—the Antonine imperial colony, the distinguished

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[75] See also Letsios 1989.   [76] Kaimio and Koenen 1997: 462, inv. 83.
[77] Proc. *BP* 1.19.8–13.
[78] For this identification, see Robin 2008a: 174 n. 39: *Phoinikôn* is located at a walking distance of ten days from the empire, on a large territory, thus probably over a region which includes the four main oases (Taymāʾ, al-ʿUlā and Ḥegrā/al-Ḥijr, Khaybar, Yathrib).

and native mother of colonies, Hadrianic Petra, Metropolis of the Third Palestine Salutaris—still in use in sixth-century documents, reflect more the glorious past of the city, rather than the late antique reality.

The progress of Christianity in Petra appears to have been slow and uneven. Persecutions of Christians took place in Petra during the reign of Diocletian. In the early fourth century, the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea mentioned pagan superstitions in Petra.[79] He also noted, however, that churches were built in the city,[80] and that the pious visitors to the Mountain of Aaron (Jabal Hārūn), located *c*.5 km south-west of Petra, were shown there the miraculous spring created by Moses during the Exodus.[81] Epiphanius described practices of mixed pagan idolatry and Christian elements in Petra in the later fourth century.[82] According to Sozomen, pagans in Petra still zealously contended on behalf of their temples in the late fourth century.[83] The apocryphal story of the conversion of the Petraeans to Christianity, miraculously effected by the monk Barṣauma, may indicate that even in the early fifth century paganism still continued in Petra.[84] However, the status of the city advanced within the Christian hierarchy. Until the Council of Chalcedon (451) Petra was ecclesiastically subject to the Patriarchate of Antioch, and under the Metropolitan See of Bostra. Following the establishment of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Petra was attached to it and granted the status of the Metropolitan See.[85] The first known metropolitan bishop of Petra, after 451, was Johannes, one of the bishops to whom Emperor Leo addressed a letter in 457. Bishops from Petra attended the church councils in Sardica (347), Seleucia (359), Alexandria (362), and Jerusalem (536).[86]

In this mixed context of high ecclesiastical status and surviving pagan traditions in the city, it is of interest to note that at the end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth centuries, Petra had acquired a less than honourable status as a place of banishment for various individuals, including some ecclesiastics whose theological views differed from those of the government in Constantinople, as well as common criminals.[87] Either Petra was considered a city sufficiently safe and loyal to detain individuals potentially dangerous to the government, or it was already becoming a distant and insignificant place where the presence of the exiles would be harmless.

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[79] Euseb. *Comm. on Isaiah* 2.23.38–41.   [80] Euseb. *Comm. on Isaiah* 2.23.42.11–12.

[81] Euseb. *Onomast.* 176:7. Sources concerning the Mountain of Aaron in antiquity are presented by Frösén and Miettunen 2008.

[82] Epiph. *Panar.* 2 51.22.11.   [83] Soz. *HE* 7.15.

[84] For Barṣauma see Sivan 2008: 175–86, 215–17, and Nau 1927.

[85] Schick 2001: 1–5.

[86] For a list of all the bishops of Petra see Fedalto 1988: 1040.

[87] Examples include Flavian, the Nestorian Patriarch of Antioch, Mare, the Miaphysite Bishop of Amida, and John Isthemus, an alchemist and forger. For references and commentary, see Fiema 2002: 193.

Notably, no traces of Christianity were found in Ḥegrā and such evidence in present-day north-western Saudi Arabia is very scarce.[88] A French–Saudi project has recently investigated the remains of a small monastic settlement at Kilwa, not far from the Saudi–Jordanian border, where the presence of scattered cross marks was noted.[89] One may also mention a few Greek graffiti, discovered north of Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, which are associated with crosses or contain invocations and/or Christian names, such as Kyriakos. These graffiti were probably left by individuals who came from outside the region, as they were found along a caravan route.

The Earthquake of 363

On 19 May 363 Petra was affected by an earthquake in which, according to ancient sources, 'a third part of the city was destroyed'.[90] Archaeological data indicate that the earthquake indeed resulted in substantial destruction of the public buildings in the city centre.[91] Some of these, such as the Temple of the Winged Lions, the so-called 'Great Temple', and the Theatre, were never restored. The domestic structures on ez-Zantūr ridge were rebuilt after this destruction, but they fell victim to an earthquake in the early fifth century, and were finally abandoned.[92] The Colonnaded Street was only partially cleared of debris from the earthquake of 363. Afterwards there was an encroachment of private structures into the public space of the street. Simple shops made of reused elements were erected along the street and upon the sidewalk.[93] The inadequate restoration of the anti-flash flood installations, following their damage in 363, caused a growing deposition of alluvial material in the city centre, evidenced inside shops which faced the street.[94] Although the impact of the earthquake of 363 should not be overestimated, its outcome was particularly harmful for the city, whose political significance was already limited and whose economic viability was stagnant.

Ecclesiastical Architecture in Petra

It may be that the long-lasting conflict between paganism and Christianity, associated with the detrimental effects of the 363 earthquake, also had an impact on the welfare and economy of Petra in terms of decreased income generated by visitors and traders. Despite the claims of Eusebius (see section

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[88] See Beaucamp and Robin 1981.   [89] Farès-Drappeau 2011.   [90] Brock 1977.
[91] Hammond 1980: 65–7; Russell 1980. For the evidence from the recent excavations on the temenos of Qaṣr al-Bint and the post-earthquake occupation there, see Renel 2013.
[92] Kolb 1996: 51, 89.   [93] Fiema 2008: 165–7.   [94] Fiema 1998.

'Petra in late antiquity'), archaeological evidence indicates that it was only in the second half of the fifth century that major Christian edifices were built in Petra. The earliest known is the Nabataean monumental Urn Tomb, which was converted into a church on 24 July 446,[95] during the episcopate of Bishop Jason, but the centre of Christian Petra was located on the northern slopes of the city. A tripartite monoapsidal basilica, the so-called 'Ridge Church', was built there, probably in the fifth–sixth centuries.[96] Further down the slope, there is the so-called 'Blue Chapel', a small but elegant edifice featuring granite columns and a bishop's throne, and probably of the same date.[97] The largest and the most impressive is the Petra church—the basilica of the Virgin Mary.[98] Built in the late fifth century, it originally featured a monoapsidal design with lateral *pastophoria*, an entrance porch (*narthex*), and a three-room baptismal building, which included the cruciform baptismal font. A major remodelling in the early sixth century included the insertion of side apses in the spaces of the *pastophoria*, and the installation of fine marble furnishings and wall mosaics in the church, as well as the creation of a peristyle atrium. The 'inhabited scroll' designs of the well-preserved floor mosaics, which feature images of animals and objects, show affinities with the mosaic schools of Gaza and Madaba. Other designs, such as the Four Seasons, personifications of Ocean, Earth, Wisdom, and so on, which have clear pagan implications in Hellenistic and Roman culture, must have become more rhetorical figures in the late antique period than the actual bearers of old religious ideas. The late addition in the church interior was a step-like *synthronon* inserted in the space of the central apse. The church burned down at the very end of the sixth century and was ecclesiastically abandoned, but a limited occupation continued in the atrium.

Monasticism is also attested in Petra. Probably the al-Dayr ('monastery') monument was also utilized for Christian practices, as painted crosses are still visible on its back wall. The area nearby preserves hermitage and monastic cells, also decorated with crosses.[99] More significantly, an impressive monastic and pilgrimage complex devoted to the veneration of Aaron, and located on Jabal Hārūn, had, by the late fifth century, replaced an earlier Nabataean sanctuary there. The complex included a large church, a chapel with baptismal fonts, a pilgrims' hostel, and other associated structures.[100] The monastery

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[95] *IGLS* 24/4.81–4, text 50.

[96] A late fourth-century date for the church, recently postulated on the basis of a late fourth-century lamp found within the 'foundation wall' of the northern wall of the church (Egan and Bikai 1999: 510), seems less likely. This evidence may perhaps relate to a pre-existing building.

[97] Bikai and Perry 2000: 1–2.

[98] For phasing history, architecture of this church, its mosaic floors, and associated finds, see Fiema et al. 2001.

[99] Dalman 1908: 261–2, 270–1, ill. 213.

[100] For the analysis of Jabal Hārūn, its role in the Nabataean and Roman times, the veneration of St Aaron, and the church and the chapel of the monastic complex, see Fiema and Frösén 2008.

was rebuilt several times following episodes of seismic-related destructions. It remained in active existence at least until the ninth century, and some parts of the complex might still have been visited by pilgrims during the Crusader period.

Administration, Economy, and Society

A glimpse into the life in Petra in the sixth century is provided by the Petra Papyri—the archive of carbonized Greek documents found in a room adjacent to the Petra church.[101] The archive, probably deposited in the church complex for safekeeping, concerns the affairs of a wealthy family of landowners whose possessions concentrated in the area between Petra, Augustopolis (Udhruḥ), and Kastron Zadacathon (Sadaqa), but who also had lands as far away as Gaza. The documents concern the possession, disposition, and acquisition of real estate, and include contracts and depositions, settlements of disputes, loans, receipts of paid taxes, cessions, divisions, inheritance and registrations of properties, transfers of tax responsibilities, mortgages, and marriage contracts. The dated documents cover the time from 537 to 592/3.[102] The information concerning the municipal affairs in Petra is of major interest. As the city council (*boulē*) is never mentioned, Petra in the sixth century may probably have experienced a transition to a system of municipal rule defined as 'post-curial government', dominated by the local notables, bishop, clergy, landlords, and surviving members (*politeuomenoi*) of the earlier city council or their descendants.[103] These members of wealthy families were often involved in collecting taxes that had been assessed on their community by the central government. The papyri specify details concerning the tax collecting for the city and for the imperial government. Additionally, municipal clerks, administrators, and legal officials as well as military personnel are mentioned in relation to Petra and its hinterland.

While the papyri present a highly selective image of the city, as seen from the perspective of a prosperous family of local landowners, they also confirm the continuity of urban life and the existence of local government officials, at least up to the end of the sixth century. The papyri also confirm the assumption that agriculture remained the main economic pursuit among the inhabitants of late antique Petra. International trade has completely disappeared, and commercial contacts seem to have been restricted to the regional level.

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[101] The context of the discovery is presented by Fiema 2001: 139–50.

[102] So far, four volumes of the final publication of the Petra Papyri have appeared: Frösén et al. 2002 (vol. 1); Koenen et al. 2013 (vol. 2); Arjava et al. 2007 (vol. 3); and Arjava et al. 2011 (vol. 4). Volume 5 is in preparation.

[103] For this process and its ramifications, see Liebeschuetz 2003: 104–36. For details in Petra, see Fiema 2002: 214–17.

The papyri also reflect the ethnic and linguistic spectrum of the population of Petra in the sixth century, as well as the survival of Nabataean customs and traditions in the city some 400 years after it was annexed to the Roman empire. Individuals mentioned have Greek, Roman, specifically Christian, and Nabataean names (such as Dusarios and Obodianos), and often Greek names may be regarded as equivalents of local Arabic names. Many individuals bear high status-titles, such as *Flavii*. In addition, a wealth of clearly Semitic, mostly Arabic, toponyms and names of houses or their parts are rendered in Greek. This is a good indication of the population speaking or recognizing Old Arabic in sixth-century Petra (see **7.16**).[104]

Finally, the evidence related to military forces stationed in Petra during late antiquity is worth mentioning. A fourth- or fifth-century inscription from the north-western approach to Petra mentions an *ex-magister hopliton*, probably a leader of a local militia who patrolled the access roads.[105] The inscription relating to the conversion of the Urn Tomb into a church in 446 mentions a *numerus*, stationed permanently or temporarily in Petra.[106]

Late Antique Urbanism at Petra

The image of affairs in late antique Petra is particularly ambiguous when comparing the prosperous tone of the Petra Papyri, and the magnificently decorated Petra church, with the generally depressing appearance of the city centre by the later sixth century. Certainly, from an historical-archaeological perspective, late antique Petra appears more like an average provincial town, rather than the flourishing international metropolis of the Nabataean–Roman period. In fact, the well-being of some of Petra's citizens does not necessarily imply the prosperity of the city itself, as neither the papyri nor any other evidence support the continuity of the international trade through Petra in late antiquity—a major source of past revenues. The urban appearance of late antique Petra is particularly telling.[107] As in other cities of that time period, new churches in Petra are often surrounded by ruined or abandoned structures, or even uncleared rubble. Secondary walls, enclosures, shops, and stalls are erected encroaching upon public spaces—porticoes, plazas, and sidewalks. Monumental buildings and spaces are abandoned or remodelled to serve commercial or industrial utilitarian purposes. The robbing-out of older architectural entities for reusable material is common.

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[104] al-Ghul 2006; Al-Jallad et al. 2013.
[105] Zayadine 1992: 218–22, and *IGLS* 24/4.65–6, text 36.
[106] The unit is reconstructed as *numerus Tertiodalmatarum* (*IGLS* 24/4.82). For the military presence in the countryside of Petra during late antiquity, see Fiema 2007.
[107] For discussion, see Fiema 2002: 222–5.

It may be debated whether this picture of late antique Petra indicates the decline of the city and the increased communal poverty, or if it reflects profound changes in the character and nature of urban life which will have continued, not only at Petra, into the early Islamic period. Undoubtedly this particular pattern of urbanism, often termed as the transformation from *polis* to *madina*, is attested in archaeological excavations of other major cities of the Near East during the sixth and seventh centuries.[108] It can be defined as a practical approach to urban existence, and extreme pragmatism in solving problems of urban expansion, which takes over from classical aesthetics and orderliness. In the case of Petra, however, the emergent picture should be interpreted as implying an increasing material and economic deterioration. The city had never fully recovered from the destruction of the 363 earthquake, and that must have been due to the already impoverished economy of the city.

The End of Urban Petra and Ḥegrā

The latest extant historical information mentions Athenogenes as a bishop of Petra at the end of the sixth century or slightly later.[109] Sometime during the seventh century the city lost its status as the Metropolitan See in favour of Areopolis (al-Rabba).[110] The vicissitudes of the Persian and Muslim invasions, and occupation in the first half of the seventh century, are unrecorded for Petra, but these might have had a considerable impact on the growing decline, isolation, and the ultimate end of the city. The only historical information available refers to the peaceful capitulations of major towns in the area, such as Aila, Udhruḥ, and Jarba in AD 630, to the Muslim forces.[111] Petra is not mentioned in any of these accounts, or in any early Islamic historical sources.[112]

The archaeological record indicates that the inner city wall, probably built in late antiquity, enclosed a smaller area than its predecessor, and even within this enclosure some major buildings and areas were already abandoned and in ruins by the sixth century. The late sixth- and the seventh-century occupation apparently continued in the northern part of the city, where the three churches are located. But the process of the gradual abandonment of shops in the Colonnaded Street area, which already began in the later fifth century, was largely completed by the early seventh century.[113] The paved street of the

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[108] For the process, see Kennedy 1985.
[109] Moschus, *Prat. Spir.* 127, 128. See Honigmann 1953a: 223–5.
[110] Zayadine 1971: 71–6.
[111] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra* 525–6, and al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-buldān* 92–5.
[112] E.g. Schick 1997: 73–85.   [113] Fiema 1998.

Sīq of Petra, the major approach to the city, was definitely in disuse after the mid-eighth century.[114] Possibly, in the later seventh or early eighth century, Petra effectively ceased as an urban centre. Certainly no dramatic abandonment of the site should be envisaged. Rather, what is postulated here is the ruralization of the city—a gradual urban disintegration into informal, separate clusters of habitations located in the Petra valley, some of which might have continued into the Crusader period.[115]

The latest epigraphic evidence in Ḥegrā is dated to the mid-fourth century, a time period which is still relatively well represented in the residential area. However, the later periods, up to the sixth century, are attested only in a few excavated sectors. So far no post-sixth-century occupation has been recorded in Ḥegrā, except for some early Islamic Arabic graffiti.

Zbigniew T. Fiema and Laïla Nehmé

THE EMERGENCE OF ARABIC
AS A WRITTEN LANGUAGE

After the Roman annexation of the Nabataean kingdom in AD 106, Greek officially replaced Nabataean Aramaic as the language of the administration, and Latin (and Greek) as the principal languages in the army.[116, 117] However, the change was neither immediate[118] nor uniform throughout the province, and, except for official statements,[119] the penetration of Greek and Latin was patchy in remoter areas such as north-west Arabia. Moreover, the change to Greek and Latin in official statements and records did not necessarily affect language use in ordinary life, where Nabataean Aramaic continued as the

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[114] Bellwald 2003: 93–4.

[115] E.g. in Wādī Farasah (Schmid 2001: 173–4). See also Fiema 2002: 241–2.

[116] For editorial conventions used in this section, see the transliteration tables at the front of this volume and Ch. 1 n. 7.

[117] See Adams 2003: 760–1, and the discussion in Macdonald 2009c: 13–14.

[118] For example, two of the five Nabataean papyri from Naḥal Ḥever (*P. Yadin* 6 and 9) are dated respectively to year 14 of the province (AD 119/120) and year 19 of the province = year 5 of the emperor Hadrian (AD 122) (see Yadin et. al. 2002: 201, 257, 268). The earliest Greek document in the same collection is *P. Yadin* 5, dated by a consulate and the fifth year of the province (AD 110) (see Lewis 1989: 29, 35, 39). This suggests that in these early years of the provincial government it was still possible to use both the inherited language of administration and the new one.

[119] For instance, the Ruwāfa inscriptions (see **1.18–22**) and the Latin inscription from Ḥegrā (modern Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ), see section 'The province of Arabia' and Al-Talhi and Al-Daire 2005 and Villeneuve 2010.

written language for centuries after the annexation,[120] though sometimes together with Greek.[121]

Greek seems gradually to have replaced Nabataean (and/or Ḥawrān Aramaic)[122] as the written language in those parts of the province in what is now southern Syria and Jordan, but not in north-western Arabia. This area seems, in practical terms, to have been more or less abandoned by Rome after the reorganization of the provinces under Diocletian (285–305),[123] even though, theoretically, it was still part of *Provincia Palaestina* and, after 358, of *Palaestina Salutaris* (later *Palaestina Tertia*—see section 'Political changes from the early fourth to the early seventh century').[124] Here Nabataean continued to be used as (apparently) the main, or perhaps the only, widespread written language,[125] and the script continued to develop. Even in the mid-second century the Roman authorities apparently recognized Nabataean as the local written language of the region by their use of it in the Ruwāfa inscription (see **1.18–22**).

In this situation, it is important to distinguish between language and script, and between written and spoken languages (and see section 'How widely spoken was Arabic?'). The question of the language(s) *spoken* by the Nabataeans has been debated for many years.[126] It now seems likely that in some parts of the kingdom (and therefore of *Provincia Arabia* which succeeded it) some people spoke a dialect of Arabic or one of the Ancient North Arabian

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[120] Thus, to take just one example, all the dated Nabataean graffiti from Sinai postdate the annexation (see Macdonald 2003b: 47), and of the eight dated graffiti out of the almost 800 Nabataean texts on the Darb al-Bakra in north-west Arabia all but one are dated by the era of the province (I am most grateful to Laïla Nehmé for this information). On the other hand, of the nine dated Nabataean graffiti from other areas of Arabia, seven are dated by the regnal years of Nabataean kings (see al-Dhīyīb 2010: nos 379, 608, 762, 766, 943, and 967; Nebes 2006), and one, al-Dhīyīb's 813, by a year of an unspecified era (note that no. 562 from Umm Jadhāyidh has already been counted in the total from Darb al-Bakra).

[121] An interesting example is a gravestone from Madaba in northern Jordan inscribed in Nabataean (at the top and taking up most of the space) and Greek (in second place and shorter), which is dated to year 3 of the province (AD 108/9). Although the text is personal it was clearly intended for public display and apparently the man who commissioned it wished to be on the right side of the authorities (see Milik 1958: 243–6).

[122] For this term see Macdonald 2003b: 54–6.

[123] See Sartre 1982: 71–5. Interestingly, the 'era of the province (of Arabia)' or the 'era of Bostra' (starting in AD 105/6—see section 'Political changes from the early fourth to the early seventh century') continued to be widely used in the former parts of the province, including north-west Arabia, up to, and in some places even beyond, the Islamic conquests, rather than being replaced by a different provincial era or the consulships or regnal years of emperors, though these were sometimes used as well (see Meimaris 1992: 146–7).

[124] See the excellent discussion of the available evidence in Nehmé 2009: 38–9.

[125] By the time of the annexation, it would appear that Taymanitic and Dadanitic, the indigenous Ancient North Arabian scripts of the oases of Taymā' and Dadan, had long since ceased to be used, and while the scripts of the nomads (Safaitic, Hismaic, and Thamudic B, C, and D) were probably still in use they are unlikely to have been considered as serious alternatives to Nabataean by the settled elites who needed a written language.

[126] See Macdonald 2010b: 19–20.

dialects. Of course, in a culturally diverse political entity which stretched from Bostra in southern Syria to Ḥegrā in north-west Arabia and from Jawf in northern Arabia to the eastern borders of Egypt, it is likely that a number of different languages, and different dialects of the same language, were in use. Some of the languages/dialects spoken in the Nabataean realm may have been unwritten, and Nabataean Aramaic and, later, Greek may have served as the written language of many who spoke other—'vernacular'—dialects of Aramaic, Arabic, or other languages.[127] It is also possible that, in certain circumstances, those whose spoken languages *could* be written, such as speakers of the Ancient North Arabian dialects of Safaitic and Hismaic (which had their own scripts), may have commissioned a scribe to write official documents for them in Nabataean Aramaic or in Greek, since their own alphabets were for personal, often playful, use and were incomprehensible to their settled neighbours.[128]

Those texts fully or partially composed in Arabic which have survived from the pre-Islamic period without having been transmitted (and possibly 'corrected') by the early Islamic grammarians are few and far between. The language they contain is known as 'epigraphic Old Arabic'[129] because the vast majority of these traces are found in inscriptions. Interestingly, most of those known so far have been found in the Levant and are the subject of a fascinating study by Ahmad Al-Jallad.[130]

For reasons which are unclear, Arabic seems to have remained a largely spoken language possibly until the fifth century AD. The culture of most Arabic-speakers appears to have remained a fundamentally oral one until well after the revelation of Islam.[131] This does not mean that no Arabic-speaker could read or write, but that—for reasons we do not fully understand—culturally important matters such as religious texts, literature, genealogy, history, and so on had to be transmitted orally and were not written down.[132] However, this general reluctance to write Arabic—or possibly the belief that 'it could not be written', rather as most Arabic-speakers in the recent past believed that it was 'impossible' to write their spoken dialects (and that 'Written

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[127] Ahmad Al-Jallad has pointed out (personal communication) that it is unlikely that anyone *spoke* Nabataean Aramaic since it is a continuation of the Official (Imperial) Aramaic dialect. See also Gzella 2011: 601–2.

[128] See Macdonald 2005: 58–64, 74–96. For a good example of this see Macdonald 2006 [2008]: 285–91, 295–6.

[129] See Macdonald 2000: 48–57; 2008b. The term 'Old Arabic' is modelled on the similar terms 'Old English', 'Old French', etc., which represent stages in the development of these languages which are considered to be ancestral to the later forms (e.g. 'Middle English' and 'Modern English'). In the case of Old Arabic, we are dealing with dialects some of which may have been used in the construction of 'Classical Arabic' and some of which may have been ancestors of the modern 'vernaculars'.

[130] See Al-Jallad forthcoming.

[131] See Schoeler 2010 and references there.   [132] See Macdonald 2010b: 20–2.

Arabic' had to be used)—extended much further, and until relatively late it does not seem to have been used for writing on any subject, even letters, legal documents, bills, etc.

For this reason, Arabic did not develop or adopt a script of its own until late antiquity. Instead, it used other languages for writing, principally Nabataean Aramaic in the north of the Peninsula, and Sabaʾic in the south. Thus an Arabic speaker would either learn the language and script of Aramaic or Sabaic in order to be able to write, or employ someone to write, in these languages for him/her. A similar situation exists today for speakers of the unwritten Modern South Arabian languages in Dhofar (southern Oman), Yemen, and Soqotra,[133] who, if they wish to write, do so in the Arabic language and script if they know them or, if not, find someone to write in Arabic for them. Interestingly, a process is now under way by which some of the communities speaking these languages are adapting the Arabic script to express their spoken tongues, a process which roughly mirrors that by which Arabic-speakers came to use the Nabataean Aramaic script to express their spoken Arabic.

Although it seems strange that it took so long for Arabic to become written when it was of cultural importance to large numbers of people, and was surrounded by other written languages, it is possible that it was exactly this availability of other written languages that made it seem 'unnecessary' to write Arabic. In societies where relatively few people are literate there is little pressure for the writing of the spoken language, since those who *can* write have learned to do so in one of the written languages. If one adds the possible taboo on writing down culturally important texts, one might be surprised instead that Arabic *did* became a written language before the Islamic conquests.

One explanation—and this can only be an hypothesis—is that in the north-west of Arabia where one might expect the majority of the population to have been Arabic-speakers and where Rome seems to have had relatively little cultural impact, Greek never really took hold as a written language after the annexation, as it did further north. Nabataean Aramaic continued to be the written language, but gradually the knowledge of the Aramaic language may have declined until it was mostly confined to a few scribes and scholars. However, a much wider group knew how to *write* at least their names and the more or less fossilized Aramaic expressions such as *dkyr* ('may N be remembered'), *šlm* ('security'), *b-ṭb* ('in well-being'), etc. which they used in their graffiti, and such things as dating formulae *b-yrḥ* ('in the month of'), *šnt* + number ('year . . .'), etc., or the epithets of deities (e.g. *mr(y) ʿlmʾ*, 'the lord(s) of the world') which could be used in more formal texts. We know from an epitaph of AD 356 that still at that date someone could be found to compose a

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[133] These languages are Mehri, Ḥarsūsi, Baṭhari, Hobyōt, Jibbāli, and Soqoṭri. For a brief survey see Lonnet 2009, and for a more detailed description see Simeone-Senelle 2011.

text in Nabataean Aramaic,[134] but thereafter what inscriptions we have are almost entirely in Arabic, apart from the fossilized Aramaic phrases mentioned above.[135]

Texts in the Nabataean Aramaic Script

I have suggested elsewhere that the inscription from ʿĒn ʿAvdat, in the Negev, which contains two lines of rhetorical Arabic, apparently in praise of the deified Nabataean king Obodas, may contain part of the religious liturgy of his worship.[136] However, the two lines of Arabic are exceptionally difficult to interpret and despite the large number of attempts which have been made, none is entirely satisfactory.[137]

The Nabataean script was a most unsuitable vehicle for expressing Arabic, because it had insufficient letters to represent all the sounds of the Arabic language. It also did not express medial [ā] or short vowels and, in the form of the Nabataean script used in the ʿĒn ʿAvdat inscription, *d* and *r* have the same shape, which also had to represent *ð.[138] Finally, we have no contemporary Arabic material with which to compare the syntax, the closest being the *rasm*, or consonantal text, of the Qurʾān, which is from a different area and probably at least 400 years later. In view of this, it is hardly surprising that even the transliteration of parts of the text is disputed, and the translations vary greatly. Unfortunately I am not wholly convinced by any of those suggested so far, and am not able to propose a convincing one myself. I have therefore, *faute de mieux*, given the one proposed by the original editors, with the slight adaptations suggested by Yardeni.[139] In the transliteration below, the passages which are in *Aramaic* are in *italics*; those in **Arabic** are in **bold**.[140]

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[134] See **1.12**.

[135] One of these fossilized expressions is the use of Aramaic *br* rather than Arabic *bn* for 'son of'. This carries over into the sixth-century inscriptions which are in both the Arabic language and what we think of as the 'Arabic script' (see **7.2–6** and Macdonald 2010b: 20 n. 41).

[136] Macdonald 2005: 98–9. Bellamy was the first to suggest that 'the first hemistich [of line 1] is from a hymn to Obodas' (1990: 79) but thought that the rest was composed by the author of the inscription. However, Shifman (cited in Noja 1993: 186–7) considered the whole piece a quotation.

[137] The text was originally published in Negev et al. 1986 and now has an extensive bibliography. See Hackl et al. 2003: 396–402 for a very careful reading, translation, and discussion of the text as well as references to previous treatments.

[138] See Macdonald 2008a: 216–20. Note that later their shapes diverged and *r* and *z* developed the same form.

[139] Yardeni 2000: B [99].

[140] Note that, for the sake of clarity, I have transliterated those parts of these inscriptions which are in Aramaic with the roman equivalents of Aramaic letters (e.g. *p* rather than *f*) and those parts which are in Arabic with the roman equivalents of Arabic letters (e.g. *f* rather than *p*). This masks the ambiguity of the script, but will I hope make the texts clearer for those who are not Semitic epigraphists.

ʿĒn ʿAvdat

[**7.1**] The inscription from ʿĒn ʿAvdat

1. *dkyr b-ṭb q{r}ʾ[ʾ] qdm ʿbdt ʾlhʾ w-dkyr*
2. *mn ktb - - - -*
2a. *- - - -*
3. *grmʾlhy br tymʾl{h}y šlm l-qbl ʿbdt* ⁽ᵗlh⁾
4. *f-yfʿl lʾ fdʾ w-lʾ ʾtrʾ f-kn hnʾ ybġ-nʾ ʾl-mwtw lʾ*
5. *ʾbġ-h f-kn hnʾ ʾrd grḥw lʾ yrd-nʾ*
6. *grmʾlhy kt[b] b-yd-h*

1. May he who {reads/recites} [this] be remembered for good before ʿbdt the god and may
2. he who wrote be remembered - - - -
3. May Grmʾlhy son of Tymʾlhy be secure in the presence of ʿbdt^(the god)

4. **and he acts neither for benefit nor favour and if death claims us**
5. **let me not be claimed. And if an affliction occurs let it not afflict us.**

6. Grmʾlhy wro[te] [this] in his [own] hand.

Line 1. dkyr b-ṭb 'may he be remembered for good / in well-being' is a very common expression in Nabataean graffiti.

qrʾ is probably a mistake for *qrʾʾ, the masculine singular emphatic of the active participle of the verb *qrʾ* which means both 'to read' and 'to recite', thus 'the reader/reciter'.[141] These two meanings, 'read' and 'recite', would almost certainly have been merged in the minds of the author and his contemporaries because in antiquity most people read aloud, even when reading to themselves. This practice then led to the belief that by reading/reciting a text you were momentarily activating something that was otherwise silent and lifeless. Thus it has been suggested that in parts of archaic Greece the inscriptions on tombstones were expressed in the first person so that, when read (aloud) by a passer-by, the deceased would seem to be speaking.[142] There is even one example where the reader is thanked for 'lending his voice' to the dead in this way.[143] I have suggested elsewhere that this is why the meaning of the word *npš* spread from 'breath / life / animal soul / self' to 'funerary inscription', because the essence of the deceased was expressed in his/her name, and reading it aloud brought it to life, if only momentarily.[144] Thus, here, the

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[141] See a similar apparent example of haplography in line 6 in *kt[b] b-yd-h* 'he wrote in his own hand' (Lacerenza: 2000: 108).

[142] See, for example, Svenbro 1993: 44–63; Thomas 1992: 63–5.

[143] See Thomas 1992: 64; and on these and other examples see Macdonald 2005: 98–9.

[144] Macdonald 2006 [2008]: 288–90. See also the very interesting discussion by D. Pardee (2009: 62–3) on the exact meaning of *nbš* in the new stela from Zincirli, in which he argues that there was a distinction (at least at that period, i.e. third quarter of the eighth century BC) between the deceased's soul (*nbš*) and the stela (*nṣb*) in which it dwelt (I am most grateful to Ahmad Al-Jallad for this reference).

text opens with a blessing on whoever reads (aloud) the name of the author and the liturgical text he has carved (see below).

Line 2. mn ktb: the author also wishes that 'he who wrote . . .' should be remembered and since the last word in the line is *'lh'* one might expect that the missing portion would contain something like *mn ktb* [*ktb' dnh l-qdm 'bdt*] *'lh'*, 'he who wrote [this text before 'bdt] the god'. However, it is quite clear from the excellent photographs provided by the Israel Antiquities Authority that it does not. Instead there is a clear space after *ktb* and it is impossible to see anything coherent in what follows. There appear to be a few letters placed between lines 2 and 3 (represented here as line 2a) but again it is impossible to read them with any certainty.

Line 3. Here the author gives his name and patronym and this is followed by a word which in the past—based on the published photograph and facsimile—has been read as *ṣlm* 'statue'. However, the new photographs suggest that it is in fact *šlm* and so the line either represents a statement 'Grm'lhy {son of} Tym'lhy is secure in the presence of 'bdt' or a wish 'May Grm'lhy {son of} Tym'lhy be secure in the presence of 'bdt'.[145] As Snir was the first to point out, the author, intending to keep the Arabic quotation on two lines separate from the rest of the text, found he did not have room for the word *'lh'* after *'bdt* and so, instead of running onto the next line, carved it above *'bdt*.[146]

Lines 4–5. These are the two lines of Old Arabic which I have suggested are a quotation from the liturgy in praise of Obodas the god. Note the rhetorical repetition of the negative *l'* (Arabic *lā*), of the conjunction *f* (Arabic *fa*), and of the phrase *f-kn hn'*, and the juxtaposition of the same verb in the perfect and imperfect: *ybġ* and *'bġ*, *'rd* and *yrd*, etc. in a chiasmic structure.

Line 4. The most likely subject of the verb appears to be 'Obodat the god (at the end of the previous line). Note the final *-w* on the word *al-mwtw* (*al-mawt* 'death') and on *grḥw* (*ġurḥ* literally 'a wound') in the next line. The function of this *-w* is uncertain. It was once suggested that it was a case ending, but it occurs on names and words regardless of the case they would have had if a case system existed. It is found on the majority, but by no means all, personal names in Nabataean. However, in some texts containing elements of Arabic it is also found on place names and common nouns. Thus in JSNab 17 (**7.2**), which is in a mixture of Aramaic and Arabic, we find *qbrw* (which would be in the nominative) but *'l-qbrw* (which would be in the accusative) and *'l-ḥgrw*

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[145] This then removes the problem of the lack of a verb of which *ṣlm* would be the object. Moreover, one would expect an inscription recording the dedication of a statue to be within the place where the dedication was made, as near to the statue as possible, either on the base or a nearby stela (e.g. Littmann 1914a: no. 103) or on the structure of the sanctuary itself (e.g. *CIS* ii 354 and see Nehmé 2012: 184–90). But this inscription is carved on a rock in the middle of the countryside some 4.5 km south of the town (Negev et al. 1986: 56). The sequence N *br* N *šlm* is a variant of the more common *šlm* N *br* N (see, for instance, *CIS* ii 735, 1589, and possibly 2735).

[146] Snir 1993: 116.

the name of the city, 'al-Ḥijr', Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ (which would be in the genitive), as well as on the personal names *Kʿbw* (nominative), *ʿbd-mnwtw* (genitive).[147] Nevertheless, in lines 4–5 of the ʿĒn ʿAvdat inscription, the two words ending in -*w* would be in the nominative, while the final -ʾ in *ʾṯrʾ* would be redundant in an Arabic text unless it represented the accusative case ending *-a.[148]

Line 6. The expression *ktb yd-h* is found quite often in graffiti such as this, but here the *b* is joined to the following *y*, i.e. we have *kt b-yd-h*, which probably means that the author must have omitted the *b* of *ktb* by haplography or end of word sandhi.[149]

JSNab 17

This inscription (discussed briefly above) was carved on the rock face above a simple loculus on a mountain known as Qaṣr al-Bint at the Nabataean city of Ḥegrā (modern Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) in north-west Arabia.[150] It is dated to AD 267 and was thus carved almost two centuries after the latest of the other tomb inscriptions at Ḥegrā (AD 74/5). It is unlike the earlier tomb inscriptions in that it is not a legal document stating possession of a tomb made during the owner's lifetime, and specifying who may be buried in it. Instead it is an epitaph giving details of the deceased. It is also unique in being accompanied down its right side by an Ancient North Arabian inscription in the Thamudic D script, giving the name and patronym of the deceased.[151]

The main inscription is carved in the Nabataean script and the person who composed it appears to have been an Arabic-speaker who was familiar with the common Aramaic expressions used in inscriptions, such as *dnh* 'this', *br* 'son of', *brt* 'daughter of', dates, divine names, etc., but who decided to use Arabic for everything else. It should be noted that *br* rather than *bn* is still found in the Arabic inscriptions of the sixth century (see section 'Texts in what we think of as the "Arabic script"') and was the last fossilized trace of the Aramaic language to remain, as the script came to be used entirely to write Arabic. In JSNab 17 we are near the beginning of this process.

In the transliteration below, the passages which are clearly in **Arabic** are printed in **bold**, those which could be in either Arabic or Aramaic are in roman, and those which are clearly in *Aramaic* are in *italics*. It will be seen that

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[147] See also LPNab 41 (**1.10**) where we find the -*w* on the common nouns *npšw* (nominative) and *rbw* (nominative) as well as the personal name *phrw* (genitive).

[148] I am most grateful to Ahmad Al-Jallad for pointing this out to me (personal communication).

[149] I.e. the pronunciation *katabbiyad*. I am grateful to Ahmad Al-Jallad for this suggestion.

[150] One of the most helpful studies of the text is Healey and Smith 1989. See also Healey 2011. For a recent treatment of the text, and references to previous studies, see Nehmé 2010: 68–9. For a discussion of its context see Nehmé 2009: 48.

[151] This is JSTham 1.

Fig. 7.3. JSNab 17. Photograph by Laïla Nehmé.

more of the text could be in either language than is clearly in one or the other. This makes it an excellent example of the transition for Arabic-speakers from writing in a 'foreign' language (Aramaic) to using the same script to write in their own language (Arabic).

[**7.2**] JSNab 17 (Fig. 7.3)
1. *dnh* qbr{w} ṣn ̔-**h** k ̔bw *br*
2. ḥrtt l-rqwš *brt*
3. ̔bd-mnwtw ʾm-h w hy
4. **hlkt fy ʾl-ḥgrw**
5. š/**snt** mʾh w-š/**styn**
6. *w-tryn b-yrḥ* tmwz w-l ̔**n**
7. *mry* ̔*lm*ʾ mn yšnʾ ʾ**l-qbrw**
8. d[ʾ] w-mn yftḥ-h ḥ**šy** w
9. **wld**-h w-l ̔**n** mn yqbr w {y} ̔**ly** mn-h.

This is the grave which K ̔bw son of Ḥrtt made for Rqwš daughter of ̔bd-mnwtw, his mother. And she died in al-Ḥigrū year one hundred and sixty two in the month of Tammūz. And may the Lord of the World curse anyone who desecrates this grave and anyone who opens it, apart from his children, and may he curse anyone who buries [a body] or removes [a body] from it.

Line 1. The first word was originally read *th* but a close examination of the original by Laïla Nehmé has shown that it is *dnh*,[152] the masculine demonstrative pronoun 'this' with which most Nabataean formal inscriptions begin.

On the -*w* on *qbrw* here and in line 7, and on the place name *ʾl-ḥgrw* in line 4, see the commentary on **7.1.**[153]

ṣnʿ is not only an Arabic verb 'to make', but the phrase *ṣnʿ-h* is a typically Arabic asyndetic relative clause—i.e. one which is not introduced by a relative pronoun—a construction which is extremely rare in Aramaic.[154] Thus *dnh qbrw ṣnʿ-h* literally means 'this is [the] grave he made it', i.e. 'which he made'. In Classical Arabic such relative clauses are only possible after an indefinite antecedent, but in earlier forms of Arabic, as well as in Safaitic, they can be used after a definite one.[155] The sense here requires *qbrw* in line 1 to be definite.

br and *brt* are probably Aramaic 'fossils' which have become ideograms and remain so even in the sixth-century Arabic inscriptions (see section 'Texts in what we think of as the "Arabic script"').

Line 2. The name *rqwš* is known in Arabic in the form Raqāš(i), and *ʿbdmnwtw* in the form ʿAbd-Manāh.[156]

Lines 3–4. The phrase *w hy hlkt fy ʾl-ḥgrw* is pure Arabic. But it is important to note that the Arabic dialect spoken by those who used Nabataean as their written language did not assimilate the *ʾ*- of the article after a vowel or the *l*- before any consonant. It shares this feature with the dialect in which the Qurʾān was written down (on which the orthography of Classical Arabic is largely based), in contrast to the dialect on which the *pronunciation* of Classical Arabic was modelled, which assimilated the *ʾ*- after vowels and the *l*- before the so-called 'sun-letters'.[157]

Lines 5–6. The part of the date in line 5 could be in either language, but given that the author uses the clearly Aramaic words for 'two' and 'month' in line 6, it seems likely that, for some reason, he thought of the date in Aramaic.

Line 6. lʿn: the use, here and in line 9, of the suffix conjugation ('perfect') to express an optative ('may he curse') is typically Arabic. Although it is not a feature of Aramaic syntax, it is commonly found in Nabataean and is a very significant loan from Arabic.

Line 7. The name of the deity is left in its Aramaic form.[158]

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[152] See Nehmé 2010: 68–9.   [153] On this, see also Healey and Smith 1989: 12.
[154] See the excellent study in Healey 2011: 86.
[155] On this see Macdonald 2004: 528.   [156] On this, see Healey and Smith 1989: 10.
[157] Some 15 years ago I presented these ideas in an article which in the past I have cited as one of the many examples of 'Macdonald (forthcoming)', and which I circulated to colleagues but, in the end, never got round to publishing! For a brilliant discussion of this and many other features of Old Arabic, see Al-Jallad 2014.
[158] On this form see Healey and Smith 1989: 7–8.

šnʾ: Although the root Š-N-ʾ exists in both Aramaic and Arabic with the basic meaning 'to hate', in Aramaic this is extended to 'to change (something) for the worse', which is the sense needed here.

Line 8. *ḥšy* must be the particle which appears in Classical Arabic as *ḥašā* (with *alif maqṣūrah*) meaning 'except'. The *w* at the end of this line may have been a false start of the word at the beginning of line 9.

Line 9. The *y* of *yʿly*, which the sense requires here, is badly formed and looks more like a small ʾ.

The Namāra Inscription

This was one of the first Old Arabic inscriptions to be discovered. It was found by René Dussaud and Frédéric Macler on their second exploration of the desert of broken-up lava flows east of Jabal Ḥawrān (modern Jabal al-ʿArab) in southern Syria in 1901.[159] It is the epitaph of a ruler named Maraʾ al-Qays carved on the lintel of his mausoleum, which was built 1 km to the east of the Roman outpost at al-Namāra. It is written in the Arabic language using the Nabataean Aramaic script and so the ambiguities found in the ʿĒn ʿAvdat text are also present here. However, the reading of most of the text is relatively clear, though the interpretation of some passages is still disputed.[160] (Several of the historical aspects of the inscription are discussed in Ch. 1.)

[**7.3**] The inscription from al-Namāra (Fig. 7.4)
1. *ty nfs mrʾlqys br ʿmrw mlk ʾl-ʿrb kl-h ḏw ʾsr ʾl-tg*
2. *w-mlk ʾl-ʾsryn w-Nzrw w-mlwk-hm w-ḥrb Mḏḥgw ʿkdy wgʾ*
3. *b-zg-h fy rtg Ngrn mdynt Šmr w mlk Mʿdw w-nḥl bny-h*
4. *ʾl-šʿwb w-wklw l-frs w l-rwm f-lm yblġ mlk mblġ-h*
5. *ʿkdy hlk snt 227 ywm 3 b-kslwl blsʿdzwwldh*

1. This is the funerary monument of Mrʾ-l-qys son of ʿmrw king of all ʿArab who bound on the crown,
2. and ruled the two Syrias and Nizārū[161] and their kings, and fought with Maḏḥiǧū until he struck
3. with his spear on the gates of Naǧrān, the city of Šammar. And he ruled Maʿaddū and gave his sons [rule over]

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[159] See Figs 0.1 and 6.17 for the location. Dussaud and Macler 1903: 26–7 [428–9], pl. IV/2, 314–22 [716–24].

[160] For a useful discussion of most of the interpretations up to the mid-1980s, see Bellamy 1985, though his own interpretation is impossible. For important contributions since then see Zwettler 1993 and 2006.

[161] Al-Jallad (2014a: §5:12) gives examples of a pronunciation of the final -*w* on names as [ō]. However, of the examples he gives, two come from Bostra and one from Umm al-Jimāl, both areas where there was a legacy of Aramaic, and it is impossible to know whether the author of the Namāra inscription, or the others in the Nabataean script discussed here, would have used the same pronunciation.

Fig. 7.4. The inscription from al-Namāra, Syria. Photograph by Michael Macdonald and Laïla Nehmé. © Musée du Louvre.

4. the (settled) peoples, and they were made proxies for Persia and Rome. And no king could match his achievements.
5. Thereafter, he died in the year 223 on the 3rd day of Kislūl...[?]

Line 1. nfs. See under **7.1**.

Mrʾlqys: Traditionally this has been vocalized as 'Imruʾ l-Qays', like the name of the famous sixth-century Arab poet (see Ch. 8). However, we have no evidence that the name had assumed this form in Arabic at the time this text was carved. Note that the ʾ is part of the first element of the name, *mrʾ* ('man', 'servant'). It is possible that the two successive ʾs were treated as a double ʾ in Nabataean and Nabataeo-Arabic orthography and so were written only once, i.e. *mrʾlqys* < *mrʾ-ʾl-qys, otherwise it would be a unique case of the assimilation of the ʾ of *ʾl-* in this orthography.

It has been plausibly argued that the Mrʾ l-Qays of this inscription was the second Naṣrid king of al-Ḥīra, but this is not certain (see Ch. 1).[162]

ʿmrw: On the *-w* ending, which is also found here on the names of the tribes *Nzrw*, *Mḏḥǧw*, and *Mʿdw*, see the commentary on **7.1**. The name ʿAmrw (pronounced ʿAmr) is the only relic of this *-w* to have survived into later Arabic.

mlk ʾl-ʿrb kl-h: This is one of several phrases in this text which have caused much argument. Traditionally it has been interpreted as 'king of all the Arabs', with some scholars assuming that 'Arabs' meant 'nomads' here.[163] However, there are philological and contextual problems with this. If *ʾl-ʿrb* means 'the Arabs', one would expect the third-person singular enclitic pronoun on *kl*, which refers to them, to be **-hā*,[164] which would be represented in the Nabataean script as *-hʾ*,[165] or possibly the third-person plural (*-hm*, as in

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[162] For the identity of the king, see Fisher and Wood forthcoming.
[163] For discussions of this see, for instance Macdonald 2009a VI, 2009b.
[164] In Arabic the word *al-ʿarab* ('the Arabs') is grammatically feminine singular.
[165] The only way one could explain the use of *-h*, rather than *-hʾ*, would be to assume that in the Arabic of the inscription the third-person singular feminine enclitic was pronounced [-ah], as it is in Ancient North Arabian (see Macdonald 2004: 507 § 4.1.8.2.6) and in most modern spoken Arabic dialects, rather than [-hā].

line 2), but not -*h* as it is here. On the contextual problem, Zwettler points out that if ʾ*l-ʿrb kl-h* did mean 'all the Arabs', why would the writer then specify only three tribes?[166] I have therefore followed Zwettler's very convincing argument that ʾ*l-ʿrb* here refers not to 'the Arabs' as a people but to one or more of the areas in the Jazīra and other parts of northern Mesopotamia which we know from the Hatran and Old Syriac inscriptions were called ʿ*rb*.[167] By this argument, ʾ*l-ʿrb* in this inscription would refer to one of several areas in Mesopotamia, with more or less undefined borders, which are mentioned in the Old Syriac and Hatran inscriptions.

ḏw ʾsr ʾl-tg: Zwettler has shown conclusively that this is a calque of a technical phrase used in Middle Persian, Parthian, and Mandaic for assuming kingship.[168]

Line 2. w mlk ʾl-ʾsryn: Robin suggested this reading, which would mean 'the Further Syria' (Mesopotamia and Assyria) and the 'Nearer Syria' (Palestine and the region to the west of the Euphrates), as they are divided in Syriac.[169]

ḥrb Mḏḥǧw: Desreumaux's copy and an intense study of the original shows that this is the correct reading rather than the traditional *hrb Mḏ[h]ǧw*.

ʿkdy: This expression does not occur as such in later Arabic. However, in two other pre-Islamic inscriptions which appear to be in forms of Arabic,[170] we find ʿ*dky* in what seem to be similar contexts. ʿ*dky* has been analysed as being composed of the preposition ʿ*d* 'to, until, more, yet, still' and the conjunction *ky* 'verily, that, in order that', and it has been suggested that ʿ*kdy* here and in line 5 is a metathesized form of ʿ*dky*. The meaning required in the context here and in line 5 is 'up to the point that, until'.

Line 3. w nḥl bny-h: The *ḥ* is clear on the stone once this transitional shape is recognized.[171] Robin was the first to read the word in this way.[172] The Arabic verb *naḥḥala* can mean 'to give someone part of one's property' and is followed by two direct objects. Thus *w nḥl bny-h ʾl-šʿwb* would mean 'and

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[166] Zwettler 1993: 7–8. There might be five tribes, depending on one's interpretation of the second word of line 2; see below. However, even this would not explain the discrepancy.

[167] See for example **1.13** (Ḥaṭrā) and **1.17** (Edessa). Note, however, that Zwettler (1993: 18) places ʾ*l-ʿrb* in 'the extensive cis- and trans-Euphratean region of central and southern Iraq and the eastern Syro-Arabian desert for which al-Ḥīra would have served as capital', because Mrʾ l-Qys has been identified with the second king of the Naṣrid dynasty of al-Ḥīra. However, the problem with this is that Zwettler was unable to find any firm contemporary evidence that the area in the *south* which he describes was called ʿ*rb* in or around the early fourth century. The Old Syriac and Hatran inscriptions clearly place the area(s) they call ʿ*rb* in the north.

[168] Zwettler 2006.

[169] For this and the problems with the traditional interpretation ʾ*l-ʾsdyn* 'the two Azds' see Robin in Bordreuil et al. 1997: 267.

[170] These are the ʿIgl bn Hfʿm inscription from Qaryat al-Fāw (see most recently Al-Jallad 2015b) and *JSLih* 72/6 (see Macdonald 2004: 519). See Al-Jallad 2015b for a discussion of this particle.

[171] See Nehmé 2010: 49 (fig. 1), 50.   [172] In Bordreuil et al. 1997: 268.

he gave his sons the settled tribes', i.e. made them the rulers over these tribes, a gesture which at the same time demonstrated kingly power and munificence, and kept the gift within the king's family.

Line 4. ʾl-šʿwb: As Beeston points out, 'in early Arabic *šuʿūb* always means "sedentary communities" and not "nomad tribes"' (cf. Ch. 2),[173] and so the *šʿwb* here are in contrast to the nomadic groups (Nizār, Maḏḥiǧ, and Maʿadd) mentioned earlier, thus making it clear that Mrʾ l-Qys ruled over both nomad and settled.

The passage after ʾl-šʿwb is extremely difficult to read because at this point the stone is rough and pitted. Groups of small holes can look like an incised line on photographs, and indeed on the original, and part of the large crack in the stone runs through the first word after ʾl-šʿwb. There is therefore very little agreement on how this passage should be read.[174] Unfortunately, at this point Desreumaux's otherwise extremely accurate facsimile cannot help, except in showing that the reading of a *h* after *wkl* is impossible. This in itself removes a great many difficulties.[175] After an intensive study of the original, together with the facsimile and numerous photographs, I would suggest the following analysis. The phrase *w wkl* is clear, though the two prongs at the top of the *k* have been crossed by the crack in the stone which continues between the left prong of the *k* and the vertical of the *l*. This is followed by what appears to be a *w*, the vertical of which ends just above the 'tail' of the preceding *l*. The apparent continuation of the top of the loop of the *w* diagonally up to the right is an optical illusion created by two holes in the stone. There is then a *l* followed by *frs*.[176] The two prongs of the *r* appear to be joined at the top and this is how Desreumaux copied the letter. However, close examination under a magnifying glass reveals that there are in fact two small holes between the prongs.[177] We therefore have the sequence ʾl-šʿwb w-wklw l-frs w-l-rwm, in which *wklw* would be wukkilū (i.e. the third-person plural passive of the perfect of Form II) with *bny-h* as its subjects. I would therefore suggest that this be translated as: 'and he gave his sons the settled tribes [i.e. to rule], and they were appointed agents for Persia and for Rome'.[178]

Line 5. ʿkdy: see line 2.

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[173] Beeston 1979: 5.

[174] For a discussion of some of the many proposed readings, see Bellamy 1985: 42–5.

[175] See the discussions of these in, for instance, Beeston 1979: 5 and Bellamy 1985: 42–5.

[176] On the photographs it looks as though the lower part of the loop of the *f* extends to the right of the stem, but this again is an optical illusion caused by small holes, and Desreumaux quite rightly did not record it on his facsimile.

[177] If the prongs were in fact joined the letter produced would be a *w* with a much smaller loop than any of the other examples in this text.

[178] As Ahmad Al-Jallad has pointed out to me (personal communication), it may well be significant that here the Persians are referred to as *frs* whereas in the Safaitic graffiti from the first century BC to the fourth century AD they are still called, anachronistically, *mdy* (i.e. 'Medes').

In the date, Kislūl is equivalent to November/December and if the era is that of *Provincia Arabia*, the year would be AD 328. The numerical figures are developments of those used in Nabataean inscriptions and it will be seen that the first of the units is significantly higher than the other two. It is just possible that this indicates that it represents 5 rather than 1, in which case the date would be 227, i.e. AD 332. But this is not certain.

The final phrase has been the subject of numerous interpretations, none of which are particularly convincing. One would expect it to name the place of the king's death, or describe his burial, or be in praise of him. In view of the uncertainty, I have left it untranslated.

A Text in the Dadanitic Script

JSLih 384

[7.4] JSLih 384
1. *nfs¹* / *ʿbd-s¹mn* / *bn*
2. *zd-ḫrg* / *ʾlt* / *bnh*
3. *s¹lmh* / *bnt* / {ʾ}*s¹*
4. *ʾrs²n* /

Funerary inscription of ʿbd-S¹mn son of Zd-Ḫrg which S¹lmh daughter of {ʾ}s¹-ʾrs²n made.

This text was recognized as probably being in Arabic by Walter W. Müller in 1982 because it contains the feminine relative pronoun *ʾlt* (cf. Classical Arabic *allatī*) in line 2.[179] Ahmad Al-Jallad has pointed out that the Arabic dialect recorded here is probably one in which the feminine verbal and nominal ending -at has become -ah, thus *bnh* (*banah < *banat, 'she built') and the personal name *s¹lmh* (*S¹almah < *S¹almat which is found in Ancient North Arabian texts).[180] The name ʿbd-S¹mn is a theophoric compound formed with the divine name (Baʿl)-Šamīn ('Lord of Heaven') who was worshipped throughout the Levant and in parts of northern Arabia. Zd-Ḫrg is a similar compound with the deity Ḫrg who was worshipped at Dadan. No deity named *ʾrs²n* has been found in north Arabia and it is possible that the interpretation of the final name as *ʾs¹-ʾrs²n* is incorrect.

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[179] Müller 1982: 32–3.
[180] Al-Jallad forthcoming. He has also pointed out that this change also occurs in some modern Arabic dialects in Yemen. Thus katbah and katba are found alongside forms which retain the final /t/, and even in verbs whose third radical is *y*, as here, e.g. ramah < *ramat 'she threw' (Behnstedt 1985, i: maps 71 and 95). Note that *bnt* 'daughter of' does not undergo this process because the final [-t] is not preceded by [a].

Texts in What We Think of as the 'Arabic Script'

One of the curious features of our present knowledge of the gradual use of the Nabataean script to write Arabic and the development of what we think of as the 'Arabic script' is that in the fourth and fifth centuries the development is found in north-west Arabia, while in the sixth century all the examples are found in Syria, but the earliest seventh-century examples are found back in Arabia. The following three texts are the only pre-Islamic inscriptions known so far which are in the Arabic language expressed in what is recognizably the Arabic script. They are all dated to the sixth century.

Zabad

Zabad (**6.33**, figs 6.17, 6.18) is in northern Syria, some 60 km south-east of Aleppo.[181] The Arabic inscription consists of a list of names carved on the lowest part of the lintel of a martyrion dedicated to St Sergius, the upper parts of which are occupied by inscriptions in Greek and Syriac.[182] The Greek and Syriac texts are dated to September AD 512,[183] and since it seems probable that the Arabic was part of the original scheme, by implication it shares the same date, though this cannot be certain.

It is extremely interesting to find inscriptions in three different languages on the lintel of a sixth-century ecclesiastical building. It has been called a 'trilingual' but in fact this is incorrect since the subject matter of each of the inscriptions is different. Greek, of course, was the official language of the eastern Roman provinces, Syriac was the ecclesiastical language of the Miaphysite church which the Jafnids supported, and the Jafnids were closely linked with the cult of St Sergius (Ch. 6).[184] Thus the fact that five men who are assumed to be donors, but who are not the donors mentioned in the Greek and Syriac texts,[185] had their names carved in Arabic shows a strong desire to express their *cultural* identity, in addition to their political and religious allegiance. The three inscriptions differ not only in their language and script but in their content. For instance, only the Greek text mentions St Sergius, and the Arabic does not even mention the building.[186] (Translations of the Greek and Syriac portions are provided under **6.33**.)

[7.5] The Arabic text at Zabad
[d]{k}r ʾl-ʾlh srgw br ʾmt-mnfw w h{l/n}yʾ br mrʾlqys [Roundel] *w srgw br sʿdw w syrw w s{.}ygw*

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[181] In earlier works it is spelt Zebed, which is closer to the local pronunciation.
[182] It was originally published in Sachau 1881, with modifications by numerous scholars since. For the most recent study see Robin 2006: 336–8.
[183] See Robin 2006: 336. [184] See Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 952–4.
[185] See **6.33**. [186] See Robin 2006: 334.

May God be mindful of Sirgū son of ʾAmt-Manāfū and Ha{l/n}ī ʾ son of Maraʾ
l-Qays and Sirgū son of Saʿdū and Š/Syrw and Š/S{.}ygw

The script still has features closer to Nabataean than to what we would think of
as the 'Arabic' script, such as the *d* in *sʿd* and the *t* like a reversed '2' in *ʾmt*.

[*ḏ*]{*k*}*r ʾl-ʾlh*: The first word is damaged by a break in the stone and the only
letter which is clear is the *r*. However, the second word is clearly *ʾl-ʾlh* (al-il{ā}h),
literally 'the god' > 'God', a pre-Islamic Christian Arabic usage, which was later
to be abandoned in favour of *Allāh*.

ʾmt-mnfw: Manāf was a pre-Islamic pagan deity about which very little is
known.[187] The word *ʾmt* means 'female servant, worshipper', the female
equivalent of *ʿbd* which is used to form theophoric names. Since these are
borne by women it would appear that this Sirgū gave his mother's name rather
than his father's. Kugener suggested that this may mean that Srgw was an (ex-)
slave,[188] though there are occasional examples of matrilineal lineages further
south in the Arabian Peninsula, but at earlier periods.

h{l/n}yʾ: The reading of this name has caused considerable difficulty and
several different suggestions have been made.[189] Since Laïla Nehmé's palaeo-
graphical analyses of the Nabataeo-Arabic transitional script[190] we can say
with certainty that the initial letter is clearly a *h* and the third and fourth are *y*
and ʾ respectively. Only the second letter is in doubt. The protrusion below the
'base line', shown on the facsimile, can be seen on the photographs to be
simply a line of small holes in the stone and not part of the letter. The most
natural reading would therefore be *l*, thus *Hlyʾ*. A name *Hullaiy* is known[191]
but it would be difficult to explain the final ʾ. It is just possible that the third
letter could be an exaggeratedly long *n* (quite different from the *n* in *mnfw*), in
which case the name would be *Hnyʾ*, which could represent *Hunaiyʾ*[192] or the
adjectival pattern *Haniʾ*.[193]

mrʾlqys: The same name as in the Namāra inscription; see the commentary
on **7.3**.

syrw: This has been read as *strw*;[194] however, the second letter is quite
different from the *t* in *ʾmt* and is much closer to the *y* in *qys*.

s{.}ygw: The break in the stone has destroyed the second letter but the others
are clearly *ygw*.[195]

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[187] See *EI*² s.v. Manāf (T. Fahd).   [188] Kugener 1907: 579.
[189] The most recent, in Robin 2006: 337, is 'Ṭlḥʾ (?)', which is impossible.
[190] See Nehmé 2010.   [191] Caskel 1966, ii: 286b.   [192] Caskel 1966, ii: 287a.
[193] I am most grateful to Ahmad Al-Jallad for pointing out that such a form, i.e. *Haniʾ, may
be found in some Greek transcriptions, e.g. Ἀνιου (genitive) in Littmann et al. 1913: no. 291
(from Umm al-Jimāl). He points out that in these transcriptions Greek iota reflects Arabic [ī],
while short [i] was realized as [e] and represented by epsilon or eta (see Al-Jallad 2014).
[194] See Robin 2006: 337.
[195] *Contra* Robin 2006: 337, who reads *sy[.]tḥw*, there is no sign of a *t* and the letter he reads as
ḥ is identical to the *g* in previous names. At this stage of the script *g* and *ḥ* were still differentiated.
See Nehmé 2010: 49, fig. 1.

Jabal Says

Jabal Says or ʿUsays consists of two concentric volcanic cones in the desert approximately 100 km south-south-east of Damascus, and approximately 20 km north-east of the large area of unbroken lava flows known as the Ṣafā. The outer cone is largely broken down but after the winter rains it retains a sizable lake for most of the year. Near the lake are the remains of an Umayyad palace and the ruins of what is probably a late pre-Islamic building (**4.4** and Figs 4.3, 4.4).[196] The inner cone is still high and surrounds a crater which can be entered at ground level on one side. From the rim there is a panoramic view of the desert all around. The combination of this with the presence of a perennial water supply has made it a much-favoured look-out point for centuries, and the rim of the inner cone is covered in Safaitic, Greek, and Arabic inscriptions, as well as numerous rock-drawings. Among the inscriptions is a small graffito (Plate 14) which is of great significance in the development of Arabic as a written language.[197]

> [**7.6**] Jabal ʿUsays (Fig. 7.5)
> 1. *ʾnh rqym br mʿrf ʾl-ʾwsy*
> 2. *ʾrsl-ny ʾl-ḥrt̲ ʾl-mlk ʿly*
> 3. *ʾsys mslḥḥ snt*
> 4. *4×100+20+1+1+1*
>
> 1. I Ruqaym son of Maʿarrif the Awsite
> 2. Al-Ḥāriṯ the king sent me to
> 3. Usays, as a frontier guard, [in] the year
> 4. 423 [= AD 528/9].

Line 1. The spelling of the first-person pronoun as *ʾnh* (as in Aramaic) rather than *ʾnʾ* (as in the Ḥarrān inscription and later Arabic) was first noted by Christian Robin.[198] It is now paralleled in an inscription in the Nabataeo-Arabic transitional script from the area of Eilat.[199] However, as Larcher points out, the early Arab grammarians note that *anah* is an acceptable alternative to *anā* in pause,[200] and claim that it is a feature of the dialect of

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[196] See Bloch 2008.

[197] For many years, the correct reading of the text was hampered by bad quality photographs. A better one provided by Robert Hoyland prompted Christian Robin to produce a new reading with several important discoveries in 2002. Finally a photograph taken by the present author in which the text is completely clear made it possible to read it with confidence. See Robin and Gorea 2002, Larcher 2010: 103–7 (but note that Larcher chose to ignore the correct reading of the first line and continued to argue on the basis of a previous flawed reading; compare his note 2 with his analysis on p. 106; but see now his revised reading in Larcher 2015), and Macdonald 2010c.

[198] Robin and Gorea 2002: 508.

[199] See Avner et al. 2013: 242, a graffito which reads *ʾnh ʿdyw b{r}//tʿlbh ʾl-mlk* 'I am ʿAdiyū son of Thaʿabah the king'.

[200] Larcher regards the fact that it is a pausal form as showing that the first line has the syntactic construction 'topic/comment', in which there is a pause between the two (2010: 106).
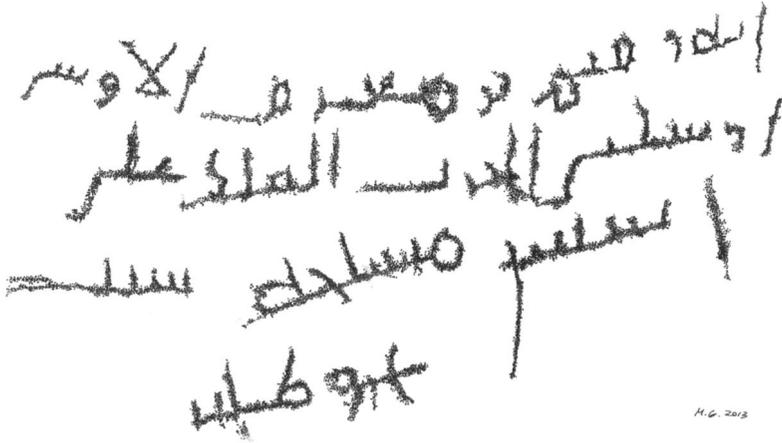
Fig. 7.5. The Jabal Says (Usays) graffito. Facsimile drawn by Maria Gorea.

the tribe of Ṭayyiʾ, of which one of the three tribes called Aws and one of the three tribes called al-Aws belonged.[201] Note that 'son of' is still represented by the Aramaic fossil *br*.[202]

Line 2. ʾ*rsl-ny*, i.e. arsal-nī 'he sent me'. ʾ*l-ḥrṯ* ʾ*l-mlk* is almost certainly al-Ḥārith son of Jabala (reg. *c.*528/9–69), who succeeded his father as leader of the Jafnids in AD 528/9 and was subsequently given the title of phylarch by the emperor Justinian (see **5.15**).[203] Whether the title al-malik here reflects this (i.e. his appointment as phylarch) or was simply a recognition of his leadership of the Jafnids is unknown.

Line 3. It is now recognized that the first word in this line is the name of the place ʾ*sys* (Jabal) Usays,[204] and the second is *mslḥh*, i.e. maslaḥah, which probably means here 'a frontier guard'.[205] Note that *snt*, which is in construct with the following numbers, is here is spelt with *tāʾ maftūhah*. Taken with the fact that *maslaḥah*, which is in pause, is spelt with *-h*, this shows that the orthographic device of *tāʾ marbūṭah* had not yet been developed.

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[201] See Mascitelli 2006: 182. Unfortunately we cannot know to which of these six tribes the author belonged. It should also be noted that the early Arab grammarians had the habit of attributing linguistic features they did not recognize to the tribe of Ṭayyiʾ.

[202] *Contra* Robin and Gorea 2002: 507–8 and Robin 2006: 331. See Macdonald 2010c: 141–2.

[203] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 123–4.

[204] First recognized by Robin and Gorea 2002: 509. The name Usays, in the form ʾ*s*[1]*s*[1], is found in the Safaitic inscriptions (see Macdonald et al. 1996: 466).

[205] See Larcher 2010: 106–7; 2015: 92.

Ḥarrān

Ḥarrān (**6.34**, figs 6.17, 6.19, Plate 16) is some 70 km south of Damascus, in the Lejā, a volcanic lava flow in southern Syria, north-west of Jabal al-ʿArab (previously known as Jabal al-Druz, and in antiquity as Jabal Ḥawrān). It is an Arabic-Greek bilingual carved, as at Zabad, on the lintel of a martyr-ion.[206] However, unlike the Zabad inscription, here the Arabic contains much of the same information as the Greek and has comparable space.[207] However, each text contains information not available in the other. Thus the Greek reveals that the founder, Šaraḥīl son of Ẓālim/*Saraēlos Talemou*, was a phylarch, and that the martyrion was dedicated to St John. It gives the date by 'Indiction 1' as well as the year 463 (presumably of *Provincia Arabia*) and finally asks that the writer be remembered. On the other hand the Arabic gives the date by the same year but also by an event which is not mentioned in the Greek. The two texts therefore complement each other. The Greek text is translated as **6.34**.

[7.7] The Arabic inscription from Ḥarrān (see also **7.25**)
1. ʾnʾ šrḥyl br ẓlmw bnyt ḏʾ ʾl-mrṭwl
2. snt 4 x100+20+20+20+3 bʿd m{f/q}{s/š}{d/ḏ/k}
3. ḫybr
4. b-ʿm

1. I Šaraḥīl son of Ẓālim built this martyrion
2. [in] the year 463, after the rebellion [?]
3. of Khaybar
4. by one year

that is, 'one year after the rebellion of Khaybar'.

The text is clear except for the last three words.

Line 1. Note *br* is used for 'son of' here as in the inscriptions at Zabad and Jabal Usays.[208] The word *mrṭwl* is obviously a loan from Greek *martyrion* but the final *l* is curious.[209]

Line 2. It is assumed that the date of 463 in both the Greek and the Arabic texts is according to the era of *Provincia Arabia*, which would make it AD 568.

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[206] On this inscription see Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 325–31, and references there, and Robin 2006: 332–6 (though I do not agree with some of his readings and interpretations), and Sartre-Fauriat and Sartre 2014, vol. 1: 324–5, no. 261.

[207] Christian Robin (2006: 333) says that the Arabic text was carved first on the basis that the first line of the Arabic 'déborde dans la partie réservée au grec à la ligne'. However, this does not take into account the fact that the last two words of the Arabic inscription are carved one below the other because they are blocked by the end of the Greek inscription. See the photograph and facsimile.

[208] Robin feels that the word should be *bn*, but palaeographically this is impossible and one can assume that the Aramaic word had become fossilized.

[209] Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 327 thinks it should be read *mrtwr* [*sic* for *mrṭwr*] but the final letter is clearly a *l* not a *r* (compare the other examples of *r* in the text).

Lines 2–5. The most difficult part of the Arabic inscription lies in the last three words, which have no counterpart in the Greek. The matter is, of course, complicated by the absence of diacritical dots, which means that almost all the letters have multiple possible readings. In 1911–12 Enno Littmann suggested reading *bʿd mfsd ḫybr b-ʿm*, i.e. baʿda mafsad ḫaybar b-ʿām 'after the expedition to Khaybar by a year', and this has been widely adopted ever since.[210] Littmann also cited a passage by Ibn Qutayba (AD 828–89) in which he reports that an al-Ḥārith ibn Abī Shamīr (who has been identified with al-Ḥārith ibn Jabala, i.e. the Jafnid leader) captured Khaybar (in north-west Arabia) and took prisoner some of its inhabitants whom he released after his return to Syria.[211] Since al-Ḥārith ibn Jabala reigned from AD 529 to 569/70 it is possible that this could refer to an expedition to Khaybar in 567 led by him, though he would have been very old, and the victory may have been won by a deputy and attributed to al-Ḥārith.

This still seems to be the least unsatisfactory interpretation, though since the causative form *afsad* in Arabic means among other things 'destroy, annihilate, lay waste, ruin' etc., one might suggest 'a year after the destruction (*mufsad*) of Khaybar', rather than the 'expedition', a translation for which there is less direct philological evidence.

Texts Possibly in Old Arabic

Apart from the texts discussed here, it has been suggested that the following are in Old Arabic.

[7.8] JSLih 71: This is an inscription honouring a man named ʿ*nzh bn ʾs¹* of the lineage of ʾ*ḥnkt*.[212] It is carved in a mixture of formal Dadanitic letter-shapes for the names and genealogy of the honorand, and very informal ones for the rest of the text. The Arabic definite article seems to occur in the phrase *b-l-ḥgr* ('in al-Hijr'), where it could be considered part of the name, and in the phrase *h-l-mfl* in line 8, which A. F. L. Beeston interpreted as *ha-l-mafālī* 'in these desert areas'.[213] It will be clear from these examples that in contrast to the Old Arabic

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[210] Robin 2006: 335–6 proposes a radically different interpretation, but unfortunately his suggestion that *ḫybr* should be read *ḫnyn* is palaeographically impossible and, alas, I find his whole interpretation unconvincing.

[211] Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Maʿārif* 642 [314].

[212] See Macdonald 2000: 52–3 for a discussion of this text.

[213] See Beeston et al. 1973: 69–70. In an unpublished part of the paper summarized in Beeston et al. 1973, he took the *ḏ* which immediately follows the phrase as part of the dating formula *ḏl t̠lt s¹nn* 'in the third year'. He says that 'the *ḏ* is difficult to evaluate, but furnishes a precise parallel to Old South Arabian texts of the late period, where year-dates are expressed by *ḏl* followed by a cardinal numeral'.

written in the Nabataean script and to the *rasm* of the Qurʾān, the ʾ of the article here is assimilated after a preceding vowel.

[**7.9**] JSLih 276: This is another text in the Dadanitic script, in which, this time, we find the *l* of the article assimilated before a following sibilant, thus ʾ-*sʾfr ḏh* 'this writing', again in contrast to the forms of Arabic found in the Nabataean script and the Qurʾānic *rasm*.

However, we need to be careful in assuming that the presence of what could be a definite article in ʾ*l* necessarily means that the whole text is in what we think of as 'Arabic'. *JSLih* 276, for instance, is identical in all other respects to other Dadanitic inscriptions,[214] and Ahmad Al-Jallad has found evidence both in Dadanitic and in Safaitic of what appears to be a definite article, which is simply ʾ-.[215] At present we know so little about the languages and dialects of pre-Islamic Arabia that it is difficult to identify with certainty any particular one. Moreover, the possible evidence in the Ancient North and South Arabian alphabets is made more difficult to use by the lack of any vowels.

[**7.10**] Qaryat al-Fāw (see **2.4**). In a very important article Ahmad Al-Jallad has argued convincingly that the language of the famous ʿIgl bin Hafʿam inscription in Ancient South Arabian letters at Qaryat al-Fāw, on the northern edge of the Empty Quarter, cannot be regarded as Arabic.[216]

It has also been suggested that the language of two inscriptions in the Hismaic script is also Arabic, rather than Hismaic.[217] This claim has still to be carefully tested but it is perhaps significant that in these—rather long inscriptions there is not a single instance of a definite article—Hismaic does not use a definite article, whereas it is difficult to write coherent Arabic without employing it. It is hoped that future work on these texts will reveal the linguistic affinities of their content.

[**7.11**] Umm al-Jimāl: There is a text which was found at Umm al-Jimāl, northern Jordan, which appears to be carved in the Arabic script but on a stone so pitted and unsuitable for inscribing that it is very difficult to read. It was found by the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria at the beginning of the twentieth century and published with only a facsimile by Littmann in 1949.[218] It was found in the structure of a building which the expedition called the 'Double Church' and was partly covered with plaster.[219] The letters were originally filled with red paint, so it was clearly intended to be seen and read. In the 1980s Geraldine King rediscovered the stone and photographed it but unfortunately it is very difficult to read the text from the photograph.[220] There are problems with Littmann's reading and

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[214] See Macdonald 2000: 53, where I was too hasty in assuming that the presence of ʾ*l*- meant that a whole text was in Arabic.

[215] Personal communication; and see Al-Jallad 2015a.   [216] Al-Jallad 2015b.

[217] Graf and Zwettler 2004.   [218] Littmann 1949: 1–3, no. 1.

[219] See the description in Littmann 1949: 1.   [220] See Hoyland 2010: 41.

interpretation but until a better photograph is available it will be difficult to provide a more convincing one. However, once a credible reading can be made and if it shows that the text is indeed in Arabic, it will, like the Zabad and Ḥarrān inscriptions, provide evidence of Arabic as a written language of pre-Islamic Christians.

[**7.12**] Wādī Ramm: Finally, in the 1930s, a fragment of plaster bearing three graffiti was found in the ruins of the temple of Lāt in Wādī Ramm, southern Jordan.[221] One of the texts is in the Thamudic D script, but the others have been regarded as being in an early form of the Arabic script.[222] However, thanks to the work of Laïla Nehmé, we now know a great deal more about the Nabataeo-Arabic transitional script and it is clear that there is nothing specifically 'Arabic' about either the language or the script of these texts.[223]

Michael C. A. Macdonald

Between Nabataean and Arabic: 'Transitional' Nabataeo-Arabic Texts

A number of inscriptions might be defined as 'transitional'—that is, offering glimpses of the important relationship between Nabataean and Arabic. The most evolved examples of these inscriptions, especially those dated to the fourth and fifth centuries AD, are now labelled 'Nabataeo-Arabic'. The three inscriptions presented below were found at Umm Jadhāyidh, 130 km directly north-west of Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ. The site is part of the so-called Darb al-Bakra, and 800 Nabataean or transitional/Nabataeo-Arabic texts were recorded there during the 2004 season of the Darb al-Bakra Survey Project, directed by Ali al-Ghabbān.[224]

Two of the texts are dated: the first to AD 295, the second to AD 455–6. The third is not dated, but it offers a typical example of a signature written in Nabataeo-Arabic characters.

[**7.13**] UJadh 309 (Figs 7.6, 7.7)
1. *bly dkyr šly br ʾwšw*
2. *br ʾlḥnh bṭb w šlm*
3. *w ktbʾ dnh ktb*
4. *ywm*
5. *ḥd btšry šnt*
6. *mʾt w tšʿyn*

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[221] See Savignac and Horsfield 1935: 270.
[222] Grimme 1936, Bellamy 1988: 370–2, Gruendler 1993: 13.
[223] See most recently Hoyland 2010: 39–40, though I cannot agree with his reading of the beginning of line 1 where the first complete letter cannot possibly be *br* (it would be back to front) and must be a *d* or *r*.
[224] These inscriptions were previously published in Nehmé 2010.

Fig. 7.6. UJadh 309. Photograph by Laïla Nehmé.
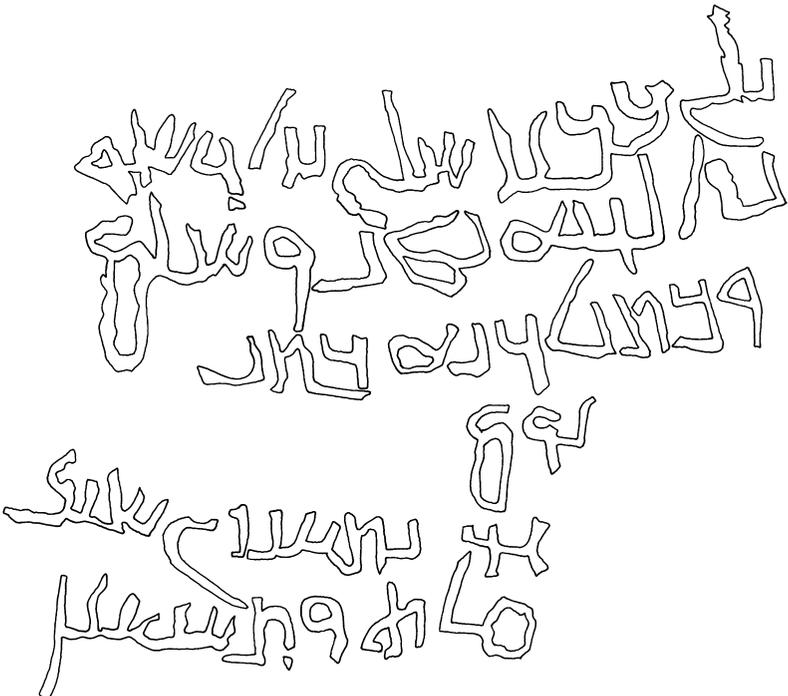
Fig. 7.7. UJadh 309. Facsimile drawn by Laïla Nehmé.

> Yea! May Šly son of ʾwšw son of ʾlḥnʾ be remembered for good and may he be secure. And this writing he wrote the first day of Tišrī, year one hundred and ninety.

The text belongs to the *dkyr* + *šlm* type and is dated to the month of Tišrī, year 190 of the province, i.e. AD 295. Note the form of the ʾ (a diagonal line), the final *h*, the *ḥ*, the medial and final *y*, the *m*, and the *š*. The *d* and the *k* have the typical form of these letters in the transitional script. By contrast, the medial *t* in *ktbʾ* and *ktb* and the final *m* in both *šlm* and *ywm* have the Nabataean 'calligraphic' form.

ʾlḥnh is the name of the grandfather of the author.[225] His son and grandson, ʾwšw and šly, bear names which are common in the Nabataean inscriptions. Note that *šnt* is written with a *tāʾ maftūḥah*. In the following word, *mʾt*, the final *t* is written with the form of the Nabataean *t* whose left stroke forms a loop. The difference between the two may be due to the fact that *šnt* is in the construct, whereas *mʾt* is in pause. Normally in Nabataean orthography one would expect *mʾt*, which is feminine, to be written *mʾh*, with a final *h*.

[**7.14**] UJadh 109[226] (Fig. 7.8)
1. *bly dkyr phmw br*
2. *ʿbydw šlm šnt 2x100*
3. *+100+20+20+10 ʾdḥlw*
4. *ʿmrw*
5. *ʾlmlk*

Yea, may Phmw son of ʿbydw be remembered [and] may he be secure, year 350 [when] they introduced ʿmrw [ʿAmrū] the king.

The text is probably dated to AD 455–6. Apart from the initial *š* and the final *m* of *šlm*, most of the letters are typical of the Nabataeo-Arabic script and there is no convincing argument in favour of a date a century earlier.[227] Note, in particular, the evolved form of the ʾ, the *h*, the *w* when ligatured from the right, the *ḥ*, the *y*, the *m*, and the *r*. The 'archaic' aspect of *šlm* may be explained by the fact that this word is so frequently used in the Nabataean texts that it is treated as an ideogram, the individual letters of which do not evolve separately. Two of the three examples of *d* are clearly dotted and it is just possible that the *d* of ʿbydw has a very small and faint dot above it. The language is at

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[225] On the name itself see Nehmé 2010: 82.
[226] This text was first published by S. al-Theeb in al-Theeb 2002: nos 132–3. The first correct reading was given by Macdonald during a workshop devoted to the study of a corpus of late Nabataean to early Islamic texts organized in Paris in 2005. It was republished in Nehmé 2009: 49–52, fig. 3.
[227] Which would be the case if the date was not read 2×100+100+20+20+10 (350) but 2×100 *and* 20+20+10 (thus 250), but the conjunction *w* is never used in that sort of context in Nabataean.
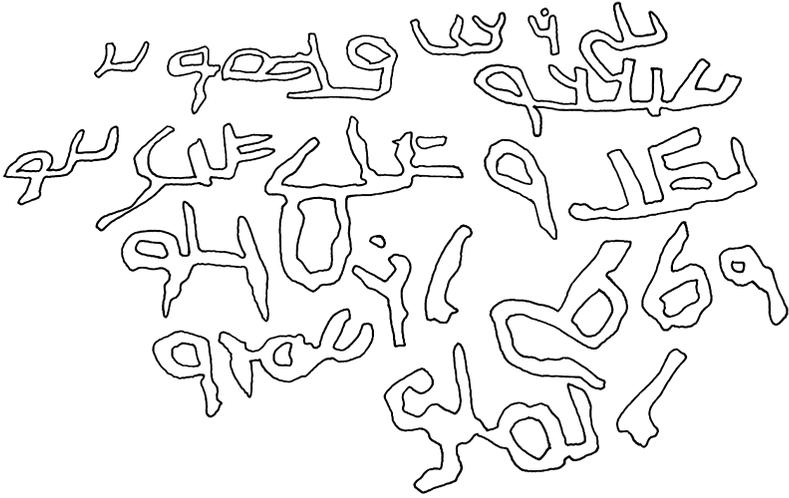
Fig. 7.8. UJadh 109. Facsimile drawn by Laïla Nehmé.

least partly Arabic because of the Arabic article *al-* in ʾ*lmlk* and because the verb *dḥl* is most probably Arabic ʾ*adḫala*, 'to cause to enter, to introduce' (*dḫl* is not attested in Aramaic with a meaning which would suit the context).

The order in which the lines are carved indicates a certain clumsiness on the author's part. Indeed, after writing ʿ*bydw*, at the beginning of line 2, he realized that he could not go in because he would have found *phmw* on his way. He therefore started again on the next line, and wrote line 3. When he got to line 4, he also realized, after writing the letters ʾ*d* of ʾ*dḥlw*, that he would not have enough space to carve the rest of the text if he did not use all the available surface of the rock. He therefore deliberately brought the letters *ḥlw* up, carving them beyond the final *m* of *šlm*. He ultimately only had to write ʿ*mrw* and ʾ*lmlk*, which he chose to carve in large characters on two lines rather than in small characters on one line.

This text is dated to the middle of the fifth century and mentions the 'introduction' of a man named ʿAmr who bears the title of king (cf. **7.6**). It is possible that this king was a member of the Salīḥid dynasty, whom Muslim authors suggest had a leading position in the Ḥijāz in the fifth century and who had levied taxes for the Romans on the Arabic tribes of Muḍar and others (see section 'Political changes from the early fourth to the early seventh century', and cf. **8.29**). It is also possible that he was the Ḥujrid king ʿAmr ibn Ḥujr, who would have 'reigned' between 455 and 468.[228]

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[228] See section 'Political Changes from the Early Fourth to the Early Seventh Century' and Robin 2008a: 183 on the identification of ʿAmr.

Fig. 7.9. UJadh 375. Photograph by Laïla Nehmé.
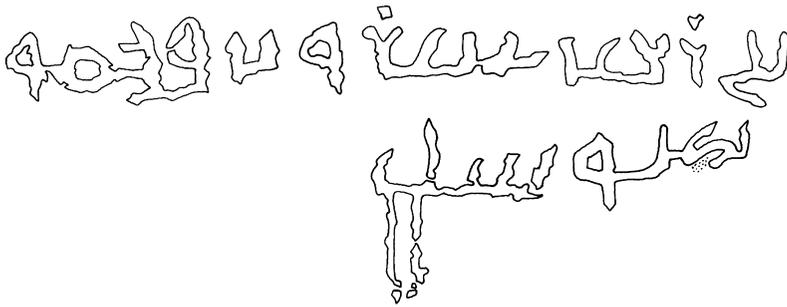
Fig. 7.10. UJadh 375. Facsimile drawn by Laïla Nehmé.

[**7.15**] UJadh 375[229] (Figs 7.9, 7.10)
1. *bly dkyr ʿbydw br phmw*
2. *bṭb w šlm*

Almost all the letters in this text are of the Nabataeo-Arabic type (except the final *m* of *šlm*) and the ligatures between the letters are also on their way to what they will look like in early Arabic texts. The two examples of *d* are dotted.

Laïla Nehmé

GRAECO-ARABICA

The pre-Islamic inscriptions in the Arabic script from Syria, and the large number of texts carved in a transitional script between Arabic and Nabataean, discovered in north-western Arabia, offer only a limited glimpse into the character of spoken Arabic of these regions. As a result, our ability to interpret the epigraphic evidence has depended heavily on the medieval Arabic

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[229] This text was first published by S. al-Theeb in al-Theeb 2005: no. 38.

grammatical and lexicographical traditions. This would seem to be unavoidable, but there exists, however, another valuable source for Old Arabic that can inform our understanding of the language—the so-called 'Graeco-Arabica'. This term covers Greek transcriptions of Arabic in documentary sources from the pre-Islamic period, including tombstones, dedicatory inscriptions, graffiti, and non-literary papyri. The focus on documentary evidence reduces the possibility of contamination through transmission by scribes unfamiliar with Arabic.[230] In documentary sources, authors likely reproduced Arabic names and phrases from diction, and as such they provide a candid view of the spoken language.[231] The Greek script itself offers two important advantages over the Semitic consonantal skeletons. First, both long and short vowels are noted, allowing us to reconstruct the vocalization of names and phrases with much more accuracy. Second, the choices authors made to approximate the Arabic consonants without Greek equivalents can shed important light on their actual pronunciation, which is often unclear on account of the several polyphonic letters in the Nabataean and early Arabic scripts. The following discussion provides an overview of the 'Graeco-Arabica', with special focus on the material from the southern Levant, in order to show how these sources can help fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the pronunciation of Old Arabic and related dialects attested in the Safaitic script, as well as some aspects of its lexicon and its linguistic context.

The Petra Papyri

One of the most valuable sources for Old Arabic is the Petra Papyri. The archive contains around 140 carbonized papyrus rolls dating to the sixth century AD (see Plate 13).[232] These private documents, written in Greek, concern the affairs of a single family with regard to matters such as property disputes, inheritance, and tax records. Embedded within the Greek text are over 100 Arabic words and phrases, usually names of plots of land, houses and parts of houses, and slaves. One part of the archive, *P. Petra* 17, contains the largest collection of Arabic material. The document, published in *The Petra*

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[230] A well-known example of contamination is the report of Herodotus that the Arabs of eastern Egypt worshipped a deity named Ορόταλτ, which was associated with Dionysus. Most scholars have understood this name as a garbled form of *rḍw*/ruḍaw/, but in its attested state it is impossible to say for sure, much less come to any conclusions about the Arabic vernacular from which it was drawn.

[231] Some have suggested that Arabic names and phrases were spelled conventionally in Greek, but there are no good arguments for this, especially in the context of graffiti carved by nomads. See Al-Jallad 2014 for a discussion.

[232] The Petra Papyri have been published in the eponymous series *The Petra Papyri* by the American Center of Oriental Research; see n. 102.

Papyri volume 2, deals with the division of land between three brothers, Bassos, Epiphanios, and Sabinos. Each plot and house (or part of a house) is given a name, and nearly all of these are in Arabic. While it is unknown how old some of these names were, many certainly reflect the spoken language of the area.

[**7.16**] *P. Petra* 17, lines 127–31

ἀπὸ οἰκημάτων [αὐτ]ῷ̂ [ν ἐπὶ τῆςδε τῆς] μητροπόλεως· τὸν οἶκον τὸν
καλούμενον **Βαιθαλαχβαρ** ἤτοι **Βαιθαλκελλαρ**, ποτὲ τῶν Οὐάλεντος
128 Ῥωμανοῦ, διεςταλμένον πρὸς νότον μετὰ τοῦ ἔνδοθεν αὐτοῦ κοιτῶ[νος]
[κ]α̣ὶ τῆς αὐτ[οῦ] κέλλης· κα[ὶτ]ὸ̣ν οἶκον **Βαιθαλμεναμ** διεςταλμένον [πρὸς]
[c. 6 μ]ετὰ [τοῦ ἐν τῇ προ]ςτ̣ά̣δι αὐ[τοῦ] κ[ο]ιτῶνος

From [their] dwellings [in this] metropolis: The first floor unit called **Baitha-lachbar** or **Baithalkellar**, from the (dwellings) formerly (owned) by Valens, son of Romanos, opening towards the south, with the bedroom inside it and its storage room. And the first floor unit **Baithalmenam** opening [towards...,] with [the] bedroom [by] its porch (trans. Koenen et al. 2013: 93–8).

The dwelling place called Βαιθαλαχβαρ /bayt al-ʾakbar /'the largest apartment' is comparable to the Greek designation for a large courtyard house in the neighbouring town of Serila, μεγάλη αὐλή, and could indeed be an Arabic translation of the Greek designation. Other descriptive names such as Βαιθαλμεναμ /bayt al-menām /'the sleeping quarters', lit. 'the apartment of sleep', likely reflect the local vernacular.

Metropolises such as Petra would have probably been unlikely places to find monolingual people, and, indeed, the Petra Papyri seem to preserve traces of Arabic-Aramaic bilingualism. The names of two plots of land in *P. Petra* 17 are derived from the Semitic root *qṣb*; however, one of them carries the Arabic definite article Αλκεσεβ /al-qeṣeb/, while the other has the Aramaic suffixed article -ā, Κιϲβα /qiṣbā/. A similar situation is found across the documents. *P. Petra* 17 Αλναϲβα /al-naṣba /'the farm' appears to be the Arabic equivalent of Ναϲβαθα /naṣbatā/ in *Inv.* 98v.[233] Both cases reflect an ability to draw a grammatical equivalence between the Arabic definite article ʾal- and the Aramaic suffix -ā, a fact which points towards active bilingualism. Aramaic loans into the local Arabic dialect also preserve their Aramaic morphology. The word Χαφφαθ /kaffat/, perhaps the equivalent of Greek θημοβολών 'grain depository', seems to be of Aramaic origin and forms its plural according to Aramaic morphology, Χαφφι /kaffī/.[234]

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[233] *Inv.* 98 will appear in volume 5 of the Petra Papyri.
[234] The word seems to be derived from Aramaic *kph* and the plural *kpy*, which can refer to a vaulted structure, a suitable description of a grain depository. The term seems to be preserved in the present-day toponymy, where the present inhabitants have folk-etymologized it as 'palm of the hand', based on its phonetic similarity with Arabic *kaff*.

The Arabian dialects of southern Syria and Jordan possessed many lexical items which were unknown to the classical Arabic lexicographers. In Safaitic, terms such as *dd* 'paternal uncle', *nḫl* 'valley', and *mdbr* 'steppe' find close parallels in meaning and form in Aramaic and Hebrew against Classical Arabic. The Arabic of the Petra Papyri exhibits a similar situation. The term *μαρβας*/marbaṣ/ 'threshing floor', the equivalent of Greek ἀλώνιον, has a transparent Aramaic equivalent but is unattested with a suitable sense in the Classical Arabic dictionaries. *Μαθ* /māt/, which occurs as a component of several plots of land, ultimately derives from Akkadian *māt* 'land', probably via Aramaic.[235] Greek equivalents in the text also allow us to zero in on the exact sense of common Arabic words in the dialect of Petra, which sometimes differ from their Classical Arabic counterparts. The term *Δαραθ-* /dārat- /is the equivalent of Greek αὐλή 'courtyard house' or 'house complex', while *Βαιθ*/bayt/ signifies a unit within this complex. *Γανναθ-* /gannat-/ corresponds to Greek ξηροκήπιον 'dry garden' or 'orchard'. A single Latin loan is attested in the toponym *Βαιθαλκελλαρ* /bayt al-qellār/, the second component of which is derived from Latin *cellarium* 'storeroom'.

The archive contains many personal names of diverse linguistic backgrounds. Members of the same family may have names drawn from Arabic, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin. The papyri mention a man named Valens who was father of a Dusarios, a name based on the Nabataean deity Dusares, in Nabataean, *dwšrʾ*. A certain Obodianos, whose name is a Hellenized form of the Nabataean ʿ*bdt*/ ʿobodah/, had a brother named Leontios. Daniel has suggested that, as in Egypt, local Arabic speakers sometimes chose Graeco-Roman names which provided suitable equivalents, either in sound or meaning, to common Arabic names.[236] Thus Leontios could have been regarded as the Greek equivalent to the common Arabic names ʾ*Asad* or *Laith*, both 'lion'. In a similar vein, Leontios' nephew was called Theodoros 'gift of God', which was perhaps regarded as the equivalent of Arabic *Awsallāh* or *Wahballāh*, both common in the area. A household slave mentioned in *P. Petra* 17 was simply called *Αλμασια* /al-maʿṣiyyah/, which seems to be an Arabic gentilic adjective based on the tribal name *Mʿṣ* mentioned in the Safaitic inscriptions. Thus she was known simply as the Maʿṣite, perhaps in reference to her tribe of origin. In addition to locals, *Inv.* 83 mentions a phylarch named *Αβουχερεβος*/*Αβουχηρηβος* /Abū kereb/, who was consulted to settle a dispute over the sale of a vineyard. This is none other than the Jafnid (Ghassānid) phylarch of Palestine, Abū Karib (**5.19**, **6.24**, and section 'Political changes from the early fourth to the early seventh century').[237]

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[235] This term has also been folk-etymologized by modern Jordanians, and is understood to mean 'death' based on its phonetic similarity to modern Arabic *māt* 'he died'.

[236] Daniel 2001: 339–40.

[237] For a discussion on this text, see Kaimio 2001. The spelling in this document suggests that the name was pronounced as Abū kereb. The realization of /a/ as /e/ in the vicinity of i-vowels is commonly called *imāla* by Arabists.

Another important corpus of non-literary papyri which contains a substantial amount of Arabic in Greek transcription comes from Nessana. Unlike the Petra Papyri, the Nessana corpus, edited by Kraemer, continues past the Muslim conquests.[238] The earliest dated documents come from the early sixth century, and the latest document is dated to the end of the seventh. The native inhabitants of Nessana seem to have spoken a variety of Arabic akin to the dialect spoken at Petra. Their personal names belong to the tradition of northern Arabian onomastica, as found in the Safaitic and Nabataean inscriptions, and include Nabataean basileophoric names such as Θεμοοβδου /teymo-ʿobd[ah] /'servant of Obodas', theophoric names such as Αλαφαλλου /khalaf-all[āh]/ or Αβδαλγη /ʿabd al-gē/, and one-word names like Ωναινας /ḥonayn/. The Muslim conquests introduced a new set of Arabic onomastica, previously unattested in the north, such as Αβδεραμαν /ʿabd er-raḥmān/. Names common to both the old northern dialects and the dialect of the conquests can sometimes be distinguished in pronunciation. This is exemplified by the theophoric name Abdallāh 'slave of Allāh', which is widely attested in the Safaitic and Nabataean inscriptions, and almost always transcribed in Greek as Αβδαλλα (cf. **6.31**, Tall al-ʿUmayrī). In the post-conquest period the name appears as Αβδελλα among the new population, while the local pronunciation was preserved in the names of the indigenous inhabitants, e.g. Αβδαλλου (the genitive of Αβδαλλας).

P. Ness. 89, which was produced at the turn of the seventh century, outlines the economic activities of a local trading corporation. A single phrase of Arabic is preserved in line 35 of this document, which reads: 'we deducted as the price of the camel, which the Saracens, the sons of Ειαλωδεειδ took, four coins'. The Saracen tribe Ειαλωδεειδ probably consists of two Arabic words 'the clan(s) of Ōdeeid'; the first term is probably Arabic ʿeyāl 'families' and the second term is a tribal name derived from the root ʿdd.

The Epigraphy

Like the Nessana Papyri, the Greek epigraphy of the Roman and Late Roman Near East is a trove of Arabic onomastica in transcription. There is no comprehensive edition of the Arabic material attested in the Greek epigraphy, and so names must be sought out individually in the editions of epigraphy from the southern Levant, Palmyra, and Dura Europos. The major collections have been assembled by Al-Jallad,[239] which also include a list of criteria to distinguish names of an Arabic etymological origin from

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[238] Kraemer 1958.   [239] Al-Jallad 2014; forthcoming.

other Semitic names.[240] The vast majority of this material is attested in monolingual Greek inscriptions, usually consisting of epitaphs and dedicatory inscriptions.

> [**7.17**] (PTer, Appendix 30): last quarter of the fourth century AD
> *Μνημιων Παυλου Αβδαλμιθαβος Πετρεος ητων ή*
> Monument of Paulus (son/father of) Abdalmithabos from Petra (who died) at age 8

Even short inscriptions such as these testify to the close relationship between Arabic and Aramaic in this area. *Αβδαλμιθαβος* is a Hellenized form of the Nabataean name *ʿbdʾlmytb*/ʿabdalmīthab/ previously attested at Bostra.[241] The *al-* article is Arabic but the second component, *mytb*, is of Aramaic origin, and means 'throne, seat'. The name can be translated as 'servant of the throne', presumably the throne of Dusares. The medieval Arab lexicographers seem to have been aware of this word, but misidentified it as Ḥimyaritic.[242] The Arabic form *mwtb* is also attested in Nabataean inscriptions, but not in transcription.[243]

A sizable collection of Greek-Nabataean bilinguals exist, and these constitute our most valuable source for the vocalization of the Nabataean onomasticon, especially with regard to names with Arabic etymologies. Consider the following text:

> [**7.18**] Bab es-Sīq bilingual inscription: first section[244]
> *mqb[rʾ] dnh bn[h] ʿbdmnkw br ʾkys...*
>
> Abdomankō son of Achayus built this monument
> *Αβδομα[νχ]ọς [Αχ]αιου...*

The accompanying Greek inscription fills in the gaps in the Nabataean consonantal skeleton. It is clear that the name *ʿbdmnkw* was pronounced as *ʿAbdomankō* rather than *ʿAbdmanku*, as it has often been vocalized.[245] The vowel between the two components *ʿabd* 'servant' and *mankō*, the Nabataean monarch, is of special interest as it probably reflects a vestige of the Old Arabic case endings.[246] Arabic phrases occur much less frequently in the epigraphy. An important example comes from Ṣammet el-Baradān in the Ḥawrān: *Ιλααλγη*, which transcribes the Arabic/ʾilāh ʾal-gē/'the god of Gaia'.[247] Another short phrase is attested in the southern Ḥawrān on the tombstone of a certain *Ουμανατ*, which seems to transcribe Arabic ʾomm-ghawwāth

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[240] A few comparative studies of this material exist as well, most recently Al-Jallad 2014, but also Isserlin 1969 and Westenholz 1990.

[241] For the Nabataean inscription containing this name, see Nehmé 1998.

[242] Lane 1863–93: 2920b.   [243] Healey 2001: 158–9.   [244] Healey 1993: 243–4.

[245] The final *w* on Nabataean personal names was pronounced as ō or o and not ū, as is clear from Greek transcriptions such as *Σιθρο* /sitro/, Nabataean *štrw*, and *Αουαθω* /ġawwāthō/(see Al-Jallad 2014: §5.12).

[246] Al-Jallad 2014: §5.3.   [247] See Milik 1972: 428–32 and Healey 2001: 90.

'mother of Ghawwāth'.[248] This phrase is comparable to the Greek μήτη(ρ) *Ρασαουαθου* 'mother of Raṣāwat'.[249] Interestingly, in both cases, there are no signs of the Arabic case endings.

Some members of the nomadic societies of the Ḥarra learned to write Greek when they ventured into the settled areas of southern Syria and northern Jordan. The inscriptions known so far only contain personal names, but, remarkably, all of these are Hellenized and are declined properly. The nomads carved Greek inscriptions in both the book-hand and the monumental script, and some of these are clearly the result of considerable skill and experience in writing Greek. Because the Safaitic script has no means of indicating vowels, Greek texts carved by the nomads are our only source for the vocalization of their dialects. Consider the following, for example:[250]

[**7.19**] A Safaitic-Greek bilingual text
l nṣrʾl bn ʿlw   by Naṣrʾel son of ʿAlūw

Μνησθη Νασρηλος Αλουου   may Naṣrʾel son of ʿAlūw be remembered

The Greek portion provides the vowels missing in the Safaitic script. We can now be sure that the name *Nṣrʾl* was pronounced as *Naṣrʾel*, as opposed to, for example, *Naṣrʾil* or *Naṣarʾil*, and *ʿlw* was either *ʿalw* or *ʿalūw*, but not *ʿulaww* or *ʿalāw*. The use of *Μνησθη* 'may he be remembered', along with the correct declension of the personal names, indicates that the author had learned more than just the Greek alphabet, and his use of book-hand rules out the possibility that the he was simply copying an example he had seen on a tombstone. While one should be careful not to stretch the evidence, it seems reasonable to conclude that this author had some functional knowledge of Greek.

Some nomads carved monolingual Greek inscriptions. Macdonald, Al Muʾazzin, and Nehmé, for example, have published an important Greek graffito carved in the book-hand by a member of the large *Ḏf* tribe of southern Syria and northern Jordan.[251]

[**7.20**] Macdonald, Al Muʾazzin, and Nehmé 1996: 480–5
Σααρος Χεσεμανου Σαιφηνος Φυλης Χαυυηυωυ
S²aʿār son of Keḥs¹emān, Ṣayfite of the section of Kawnites

These inscriptions can be equally informative with regard to the vocalization of the dialects of the nomads. We learn, for example, that the tribal name which is conventionally transcribed as *Ḏf* contained a diphthong and was in

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[248] *PUAES* IIIA 48; see Al-Jallad 2014: §3.2–3 for a discussion on the transcription of Arabic ġ and ṯ.
[249] *PUAES* IIIA 493.
[250] This text was published with a photograph in Macdonald 2009a: 76–7.
[251] Macdonald et al. 1996: 480–5.

fact pronounced as *ṣayf*.[252] The latter fact was important in putting to rest the idea that the tribe *Ḏf* had given its name to the basalt desert in southern Syria known as the *Ṣafā*.[253] This inscription provides our only evidence for the vocalization of the name *Kḥṣ¹mn*, which is unique to the Safaitic inscriptions.

Another important monolingual Greek inscription comes from Wādī Salmā, in north-eastern Jordan.[254] Unlike the previous text, the author chose to inscribe his name in the monumental script.

[**7.21**] A monolingual inscription from Wādī Salmā

Αναμος Σαδου του Θαιμαλλου Αμμασιχηνος

ʾAnʿam son of Saʿd son of Taymallāh the-masīkite (ham-masīkiyy)

The inscription (carved on the same rock as KRS 2420, **7.23**, and shown on Plate 15) was produced with considerable care and by someone with a confident Greek hand, suggesting considerable experience in writing Greek. The gentilic adjective begins with what appears to be the Safaitic definite article *ha* or *ʾa* with the gemination of the following consonant. If the article is not simply a component of the name from which the adjective is derived, then it provides an interesting example of interference from the author's native language on the Greek. Curiously neither the Greek or Arabian definite article is used in the previous inscription. Collectively texts such as these, while rare, testify to some degree of multilingualism among the nomads, and a close relationship of at least some members of their society with the nearby settled areas.

Greek graffiti carved by outsiders in the desert can sometimes shed light on the pronunciation of the local dialects. A unique example of this is a long and rather well-written graffito carved at Jathum in the north-eastern desert of Jordan.

[**7.22**] A graffito from Jathum

1. *ο Βιος* ωυδ 2. *εν εστιν Διομ* 3. *ηδης κιθαρωδ* 4. *ος και Αβχορος* 5. *κουρευς εξηλ*
6. *θαν οι δυο* 7. *εις τον ερη* 8. *μον μετα στρα* 9. *τηγου οπλει* 10. *των κε ες* 11. *τηκαν εν*
12. *γυς τοπ* 13. *ω λεγομ[ε]* 14. *νω Σιου[..]* 15. *Αβγαρ*

Mowry's translation is followed here, with the emendation of Schwabe on the last line in bold.[255]

Life is nothing. (As for) Diomedes the lyrist and Abchoros the barber, the two (of them) went out into the desert with the commander of the foot soldiers and were stationed near a place called **Siou[..] Abgar.**

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[252] The sign *ṣ́* signifies an emphatic lateral fricative, similar to Welsh *ll* in *Lloyd*.

[253] This connection was suggested by Milik and refuted by Macdonald. See the discussion in Macdonald 2009a II: 306.

[254] This inscription was first published by Attallah and al-Jibour 1997, but they did not take notice of its most interesting linguistic features: the attestation of the definite article.

[255] Mowry 1953; Schwabe 1954.

The undated inscription expresses the feelings of two hopeless civilians who were hired by a military official stationed in the remote desert of northern Jordan. Their camp was near a place called *Siou*. *Abgar*, the first word of which, according to Schwabe, should be connected with Aramaic *ṣəwāʾ* and Safaitic *ṣwy*, meaning 'tumulus' or 'cairn'. The area is not known from ancient sources, but may be identical to a place mentioned in a Safaitic inscription:[256]

> [**7.23**] KRS 2420
> *wrd ʾʿly h- ṣwy ʾbgr*
>
> he came to raise up this cairn of ʾbgr

The Safaitic inscription (illustrated as Plate 15, and cf. **7.21**) seems to recount the construction of the cairn of ʾAbgar, *ṣwy ʾbgr*, which could be the very landmark to which the previous Greek inscription refers. Regardless of whether this is correct or not, the identification of Siou[..] with Safaitic 'cairn' seems beyond doubt. This, in turn, indicates that Safaitic *ṣwy* was pronounced as ṣiw[āy] rather than Classical Arabic *ṣuwwah* 'pile of stones'. Perhaps if the remainder of the inscription were intact, it would have appeared as *Σιουαι* in transcription.

How Widely Spoken Was Arabic?

At the moment, it is unclear how widely Arabic was written before the sixth century AD. The development of the Arabic script suggests that the Nabataean script was frequently written on perishable materials, but whether the language written was Arabic or Aramaic, or perhaps more likely a mix of both, is impossible to determine. The distribution of the transitional inscriptions (see section 'Between Nabataean and Arabic: 'transitional' Nabataeo-Arabic texts') points towards a north-west Arabian provenance for the development of the Arabic script. It must, however, be remembered that (as discussed above) script and language are two different things, and so while it seems that Arabic speakers of north Arabia were responsible for developing the Arabic script, there is no reason to delimit the extent of spoken Arabic to that region. Indeed, many in the past have assumed that forms of Arabic were widely spoken in the Nabataean realm. The influence of Arabic syntax is felt throughout the corpus of Nabataean Aramaic, and Arabic loanwords are occasionally found in the Nabataean inscriptions and papyri.[257] But perhaps one of the main reasons

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[256] I thank M. C. A. Macdonald for pointing out this possible connection to me.
[257] The majority of Arabic loanwords come from the inscriptions of northern Arabia and Ḥegrā and from the Naḥal Ḥever papyri from the Dead Sea. One should not assume that the absence of loanwords in other places implies that Arabic was not spoken. This distribution can equally be explained as a consequence of genre or differences in scribal training or practices. The

scholars have assumed that the Nabataeans were Arabic speakers is that Arabic is the main etymological source of the Nabataean onomasticon. Macdonald, however, argued cogently against the use of the etymology of personal names to identify the spoken language of their carriers.[258] In principle, this is correct, especially when these names are transcribed in Semitic consonantal scripts. However, Greek offers us a clearer view into their actual realization, and in most cases Arabic personal names do not exhibit any of the features typical of an Aramaic pronunciation. For example, Aramaic tends to pronounce the /a/ vowel closer to /e/ in unstressed syllables and around sibilants (s-like sounds). This is exemplified by the name $Ζεβινθου$ /zebīnt[ā]/ from original *zabīntā.[259] Similar processes do not seem to affect names of an Arabic etymological origin, for example, $Σαουδου$ /saʿūd/ from the southern Ḥawrān, instead of the expected **$Σεουδ$ /seʿūd/.[260] Likewise, the original *ghayn* in Aramaic had become an ʿ*ayn*; however, many names of Arabic extraction retain this consonant, for example, $Γαυτος$ /ghawth/ from Bostra.[261]

Had Arabic names simply been used by monolingual Aramaic speakers, we should expect them to be realized with an Aramaic pronunciation, just as Arabic names used by non-Arabic speakers of Turkish conform to Turkish phonology, e.g. Turkish *mehmet* v. Arabic *muḥammad*. The Greek transcriptions suggest that Arabic was in fact spoken by many people with names drawn from an Arabic etymological source. This is not to say that these people self-identified as Arabs or used Arabic or the Arabic script for writing, but that they were simply speakers of a form of the language.

Following the second century AD, some toponyms of Judaea and the Negev begin to exhibit a shift towards an Arabic pronunciation as well. This seems to be recognized by the author of the Madaba map in his entry on Beersheba: '*Bērsabee* ($Βηρσαβεε$) *which is now Bērossaba* ($Βηροσσαβα$)' (IGLS 21/2.153, 102). Compound toponyms with an o-vowel in between their two components (cf. Abdomankō, **7.18**) are reminiscent of an Arabic pronunciation, and probably have their origin in Arabic calques of earlier Canaanite place names. These could reflect a growing presence of Arabic-speakers in these regions, which would have been especially possible following the Jewish revolt of AD 135. Literary sources inform us that these areas were repopulated by 'pagans'. The shift in toponymy, which is only apparent in Greek transcription, would suggest that many of these pagans were drawn from *Provincia Arabia*.[262]

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influence of Arabic syntax on Nabataean Aramaic is much more widespread than the distribution of loanwords, and syntax is a much better means to identify substrate influence, as a good scribe could much more easily avoid intrusive lexical items, while syntactic influence could easily go unnoticed.

[258] Macdonald 2000: 46, 48.   [259] *PTer* 146.   [260] *PUAES* IIIA 52.
[261] *IGLS* 13/2.9572. On the transcription of *th* with *tau*, see Al-Jallad 2014: §3.3.
[262] I am grateful to M. C. A. Macdonald for this suggestion.

The Pronunciation of Old Arabic

The Old Arabic inscriptions are written in defective scripts, and are usually vocalized by editors according to the conventional pronunciation of Classical Arabic. Both the Classical Nabataean script and the Arabic script have several polyphonic letters, and so their exact realization is not always apparent. Moreover, short vowels and internal long /ā/ are never indicated. While the Ancient North Arabian scripts exhibit a more robust consonantal inventory, they have no means whatsoever of representing vowels or diphthongs. Finally, the values given to several of the Ancient North Arabian letters are based on their Classical Arabic counterparts and, as we shall see, have little to do with the way these sounds were pronounced in the pre-Islamic dialects. Thus the Greek transcriptions of Arabic words and personal names constitute our primary source for the pronunciation of Old Arabic, and these reveal several important differences vis-à-vis the Classical language.

The short *i*-vowel of Old Arabic corresponding to Classical Arabic /i/ was usually transcribed with Epsilon, suggesting that it was pronounced closer to [e] than [i]. In a Nabataean bilingual from Umm al-Jimāl,[263] the name *ẓānin, in the Nabataean script *ṭnnw*, is given in Greek as Τανενου. Likewise, in a Safaitic-Greek bilingual, the name *yṯ'* is given in Greek as ΙΑΙΘΕΟΥ (gen.), where in Classical Arabic it would have been realized as *yayṯi'*.[264] Monolingual Greek graffiti exhibit the same equivalents, for example: Ουαελαθε */wāʾelat/;[265] Αμερος */ʿāmer/.[266] The *u*-vowel, pronounced as /u/ in Classical Arabic, is most often transcribed with Omicron, signalling an [o] pronunciation. For example, Ροδενα /rodeynah/;[267] Αλγοναιναθ /al-gonaynāt/;[268] Μοσλεμος /moslem/.[269] The /u/ quality, however, is sometimes still encountered: Ουσνος /ḥusn/;[270] Αλσουφλη /alsufle/.

Important differences in the pronunciation of the consonants exist as well. The consonant conventionally transcribed as *ẓ* seems to have been realized differently in the northern dialects. In a bilingual Safaitic-Greek graffito from the Burquʿ area in what is today eastern Jordan, the sound is given with Greek *T*:

[7.24] WH 1860 = Greek 2
l whblh bn ẓnʾl bn whblh...

Ουαβαλλας Ταννηλου του Ουαβαλλου

The transcription with Tau points towards a sound closer to *t*, probably an emphatic *th*, as in *three*. Indeed, the dialect of the Ḥarrān inscription also

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[263] LPNab 105.   [264] WH 3562.   [265] *PUAES* IIIA 183.
[266] *PUAES* IIIA 800.   [267] *PUAES* IIIA 516.   [268] *P. Petra* 17.2, 160–1.
[269] *PUAES* IIIA 119.   [270] *IGLS* 13/1.9324.

seems to share this pronunciation. This inscription is discussed above (**7.7**); here, the relevant portion can be reproduced:

[**7.25**] The Arabic inscription from Ḥarrān (2)

سر حل بر طلمو

Σαραηλος Ταλεμου

The Arabic name *ẓālim seems to have been pronounced in this dialect as ṭālem, similar to the dialects written in the Safaitic script.[271]

Another important difference is the pronunciation of the sound represented by the glyph ض in Arabic. As mentioned above, the transcription of tribal name *Ḍf* as Σαιφηνος indicates that it was pronounced closer to an /s/, probably ṣ́. The same value is found in the Greek epigraphy from settled areas, such as Umm al-Jimāl, e.g. Ρασουα /raṣ́wā/[272] and Ρασαουαθος /raṣ́āwat/,[273] both from the root *rḍw*. At Petra, on the other hand, the sound seems to have been voiced, as it was transcribed with a zeta in the plot name Αλμαζεκα /al-maẓ́ēqah/, which is derived from the root *ḍyq* 'to be narrow'.

In Classical Arabic, the word final long /ā/ is sometimes written with the *y* glyph, which is termed the *alif-maqṣūrah*. Greek transcriptions indicate that this orthographic convention is rooted in actual pronunciation. In Old Arabic the *alif-maqṣūrah* is consistently transcribed with an [e] vowel. Thus at Petra the Classical Arabic word *suflā*, which is spelled in Arabic orthography as *sfly*, is transcribed as Αλσουφλη /al-suflē/.[274] Nessana (AD 562) attests Αλολκαι[ου] /al-ʿolqay/[275] for Classical Arabic ʿalqā, which is spelled in the Arabic script as ʿlqy. The first element of the theophoric name Φασαιελη /faṣay-el/ (AD 543) 'El has opened (the womb)' is a past tense verb, *faṣay*.[276] In Classical Arabic the verb would have been pronounced as *faṣā*, yet spelled as *fṣy* (=فصى).

Ahmad Al-Jallad

CONCLUSION

Thanks to the work of Ahmad Al-Jallad, Laïla Nehmé, and others we are discovering more and more about spoken Old Arabic. However, the evidence for Arabic as a *written* language in the pre-Islamic period is still very small, though it is growing. So far, we have only expressions of what might be called 'the public face' of written Arabic, and for the script to have developed there

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[271] For a discussion of the phonetics of this sound and its transcription, see Al-Jallad 2014: §3.7.3.
[272] *PUAES* IIIA 361.   [273] *PUAES* IIIA 491.   [274] *P. Petra*.17.1, 91.
[275] *P. Ness* 21.7.   [276] *PUAES* IIIA 792.1.

must have been extensive writing of private and business documents in ink. The few official inscriptions which can be linked with the Jafnids are in Greek (**4.1**, **6.23**, **6.29–32**), the language of the dominant power, but it is significant that in at least two public dedications (at Zabad and Ḥarrān) those who commissioned them wished what was presumably their own language to be used as well. This does not of itself imply that literacy in the Arabic script was widespread—public inscriptions (even those containing laws, etc.) are generally vehicles of official expression rather than communication. But it does suggest that written Arabic had a cultural significance for at least some Christians in both northern and southern Syria in the sixth century AD. The deep relationship between language and cultural identity, which is so evident among the Arabs in the Islamic period, can thus be seen to go back much further, at least to the Namāra inscription and probably beyond.[277]

Michael C. A. Macdonald

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[277] See Macdonald 2009b.

8

Arabic and Persian Sources
for Pre-Islamic Arabia

*Harry Munt, with contributions from Touraj Daryaee, Omar
Edaibat, Robert Hoyland, and Isabel Toral-Niehoff*

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a selection of Arabic and Persian sources for the history
of pre-Islamic Arabia and its inhabitants. Most of these were composed in the
Islamic era, and the vast majority at least a couple of centuries after the death,
in 632, of the Prophet Muḥammad. The majority of the chapter is devoted to
extracts from different genres of Arabic writing—prose histories and litera-
ture, the Qurʾān, and pre-Islamic poetry.

The Arabic prose sources, presented in the first section, show how
medieval Muslim scholars considered and interpreted the Arabs' past before
the advent of their Prophet. The extract from the Qurʾān in the second
section, which presents one version of the stories of the pre-Islamic Arabian
prophets Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shuʿayb, along with that of the well-known
biblical figure Lot, probably preserves legendary material already circulating
in the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula. In the third section, examples of pre-
Islamic poetry provide us with some indication of how the pre-Islamic
inhabitants of Arabia may have viewed and understood their own culture.
The fourth section provides a brief examination of how Islamic sources
viewed the Naṣrid leaders of al-Ḥīra, as well as al-Ḥīra itself. This section
also includes a translation and commentary of an eleventh-century text, the
Manāqib al-Mazyadiyya, offering another view of the conversion to Chris-
tianity of the final Naṣrid leader, al-Nuʿmān (**6.41**). Finally, the discussion
of the sources concludes with a brief selection of Middle Persian and Persian
sources that offer a slightly different perspective on some of the events and
individuals covered both in this chapter and throughout the volume more
generally.

ARABIC PROSE TEXTS

In the first half of the seventh century the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula witnessed a number of significant developments. These were all related to the extremely successful prophetic mission of Muḥammad, a man born into the tribe of Quraysh in the Ḥijāz, and to whom the Qurʾān was revealed. Over the course of his prophetic career—traditionally dated from his receipt of the first revelation near Mecca in 610 to his death in Medina in 632—he is said to have brought the majority of the inhabitants of Arabia out of their paganism and into the monotheistic worship of the one true God. After Muḥammad's death in 632 came these new Muslims' spectacular conquest, over the following century or so, of a vast swathe of territory extending from the Iberian Peninsula in the west to Transoxania in the east. The following decades saw the establishment of an empire in the conquered territories ruled by successive caliphs (from the Arabic *khalīfa*, 'deputy; vice-regent'), first of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750, based in Damascus in Syria) and then of the ʿAbbāsid dynasty (750–1258, based in Baghdad in Iraq).[1]

Within this empire, the Muslim conquerors and their descendants settled down into life in the conquered territories, and some of them, together with a small but significant number of converts to Islam from among the conquered populations, took up the task of explaining the momentous events that had come to pass since the beginning of God's revelation to Muḥammad. Although some in the late seventh and early eighth centuries were concerned with gathering and transmitting (largely orally) material about, and attempting to interpret, the history of Islam's origins and spread, it was only really from the second half of the eighth century onwards that the pace of the endeavour picked up significantly, and it was also about this time that the composition of written works came to accompany the transmission of oral learning.[2] (The one major exception to this is, of course, the Qurʾān itself.) There were several main centres where such activities took place, perhaps most famously (although by no means exclusively) Kūfa, Baṣra, and Baghdad in Iraq (after its foundation in 762), Medina in the Ḥijāz, and Old Cairo (al-Fusṭāṭ) in Egypt.

The way in which these works were presented was designed to suggest that they were based upon much older material that had already been handled and transmitted by several generations of scholars: in many extant Arabic works from the eighth and ninth centuries and beyond, individual reports are often

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[1] For the events connected to the rise and spread of Islam, and the consolidation of the Umayyad and ʿAbbāsid caliphates, see the various articles gathered in Robinson 2010.

[2] On the rise of Arabic literature in general, see Schoeler 2009. On the development of historical writing, see Donner 1998; Robinson 2003; Sizgorich 2004. For a recent view on approaches to Arabic sources see Al-Azmeh 2014. For an alternative account, see Elad 2002 and Elad 2003.

accompanied by a chain of those scholars who had transmitted it from its supposed creator, often an eyewitness to the events being reported (this chain of transmission is called an *isnād* in Arabic). Nonetheless, it is clear that the concerns of later periods affected the ways in which medieval Muslim scholars approached and understood their community's past. The exponential increase in the activities of collecting reports, composing works, and teaching about the Muslim community's early history, culture, and literature in the late eighth and ninth centuries coincided with and was in large part encouraged by the arrival of a new caliphal dynasty, the ʿAbbāsids, determined to justify its right to rule, and to have its own vision of the Muslims' past and culture publicized as far and wide as possible. The ʿAbbāsids were, however, not the only party with such a vested interest, and little of the Arabic literature that has survived from this period can be understood without reference to the sharp debates over such momentous topics as the nature of the Muslim community, and of political, religious, and legal authority, that were contemporary with its production.

This gradual evolution of interest in learning, teaching, and writing about the history and culture of the Muslim community, coupled with the often fierce nature of the contemporary debates in which those students, teachers, and writers also took part, left a clear trace in the way in which the extant Arabic sources discuss pre-Islamic Arabia.[3] Since Muḥammad's career had taken place almost exclusively within the Arabian Peninsula, and it was that region's inhabitants who became the first Muslims, the pre-Islamic background there came to form a key part of the 'salvation history' (also commonly referred to as the *Heilsgeschichte*) of the Muslim community— that narrative built up by successive generations of Muslim scholars detailing the ups and downs in the history of mankind's reception of God's revelation, and the latter's final triumphant success through the career of Muḥammad and the spread of Islam. Indeed, works about pre-Islamic Arabia are among the earliest suggested extant examples of Arabic prose.[4] In Arabic sources, the pre-Islamic period in the Arabian Peninsula is most often referred to as the 'jāhiliyya', a time in which 'jahl' predominated. Muslim authors understood this *jahl* as either 'ignorance' of true religious knowledge (ʿilm), or as 'barbarism', as lacking important virtuous and civilized qualities (ḥilm); both ʿilm and ḥilm were held to have come with God's final revelation through His Prophet Muḥammad.[5]

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[3] For valuable introductory bibliographies on pre-Islamic Arabia, see Hawting 2011.

[4] A good example is the perhaps eighth-century (at the earliest) *Akhbār al-Yaman wa-ashʿāruhā wa-ansābuhā* attributed to the rather dubious seventh-century personality ʿAbīd/ʿUbayd b. Sharya al-Jurhumī; for a partial translation and study of this work, see Crosby 2007. The studies which have done the most to introduce this idea of salvation history into the study of early Islamic Arabic texts are Wansbrough 1977; Wansbrough 1978.

[5] Goldziher, 1967, vol. 1: 201–8; Pines 1990.

Many—although certainly not all—accounts of pre-Islamic Arabia composed in the ʿAbbāsid period, therefore, display a tendency to highlight what their composers saw as the ignorant and barbarous nature of the times, a nature that was to be contrasted with the sound religious knowledge and civility brought to the inhabitants of Arabia by Islam.[6] To give just one example, this idea of the *jāhiliyya* is one of a multitude of reasons behind many Muslim scholars' insistence that the religion of most of the pre-Islamic inhabitants of Arabia was a polytheistic one, in which a wide variety of local deities were worshipped by the various tribes inhabiting the area. (A good example of this tendency is the *Kitāb al-Aṣnām*, 'The Book of Idols', by Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī, who died *c*.821–2). That there was polytheistic worship in pre-Islamic Arabia is no doubt likely, but there also seem to have been more monotheists, especially Jews and Christians, than eighth- and ninth-century scholars onwards were prepared to accept.[7]

This desire to juxtapose the *ʿilm*, *ḥilm*, and monotheism of true Muslims with the *jahl* and polytheism of the pre-Islamic Arabians was, however, far from being the only later ideological development that inspired the collection, transmission, and alteration of accounts about the Arabian Peninsula before the year 610. Discussions of, and to a large extent the creation of, what we might call 'Arab identity' were extremely important, with the roles undertaken by the pre-Islamic Arab ruling dynasties elsewhere such as the Jafnids, Naṣrids, and Ḥujrids in the 'great power' politics of the late antique Near East playing a crucial part in these. To some degree, these narratives were important because the tribal groups that came to constitute a part of the nascent Muslim community were thought to have developed during the era of these 'Arab' dynasties.[8] Written against the background of concerns such as these, Arabic accounts of pre-Islamic Arabia and its inhabitants were never likely to be politically or ideologically neutral.

Two examples are worth briefly discussing here to emphasize from the start how important these concerns were to scholars working in the ʿAbbāsid period. The first concerns the so-called *shuʿūbiyya*, a rather loose collection of interests which was labelled with a term derived from the Arabic word *shaʿb*, pl. *shuʿūb*, meaning 'people(s)'. Some of the so-called *shuʿūbī*s aimed to

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[6] For an interesting attempt to formulate a model of pre-Islamic Arabian history according to which this idea of the chaotic state of affairs presented by Muslim scholars may have reflected, in some ways, the political and social conditions brought about by the collapse of most of the important political players in the Peninsula over the second half of the sixth century, see Robin 2009a.

[7] On the deities of pre-Islamic Arabia as discussed by Muslim Arabic sources, see especially Fahd 1968; Lecker 1993. That, however, the religion of many of those who were the target of polemics in the Qurʾān was already monotheistic has been persuasively suggested now by Hawting 1999, and Crone 2010. See Chs 3 and 6.

[8] Hoyland 2009b: 388–91.

undermine the sense held by many Arab Muslims of the superiority of the Arab people over all others. The most prominent branch of the *shuʿūbiyya* sought to increase the prestige allotted to Persians, in part by highlighting the prominence of their ancient history compared to that of the Arabs before Muḥammad.[9] Thus a famous poem by Bashshār b. Burd (d. *c.*784) compared his mighty, royal, splendidly dressed, and well-fed Persian Sasanian ancestors with the pre-Islamic Arabs who had to trail behind scabby camels, drink goats' milk in leather vessels, and eat lizards off the ground.[10] Pre-Islamic history was one of the main battlegrounds over which the rival parties would compete, and much history was rewritten either to praise or vilify the Arabs, Persians, and others.

The second example relates to Mecca and the sanctuary located there. Over the seventh and eighth centuries, Mecca's status as the Islamic world's pre-eminent sanctuary, with the Kaʿba sitting at its centre, became firmly solidified, and its sanctity was justified by association with pre-Islamic prophets, in particular Abraham and his son, Ishmael. For Muslim scholars, Mecca's prominence was so obvious that it was difficult to see how things could have been otherwise in pre-Islamic Arabia: most of the inhabitants of Arabia may, over the centuries, have wavered from the true, monotheistic faith which Abraham had brought to them, but for the most part they remembered the sanctity of the shrine at Mecca, the Kaʿba, associated with him. (Those few who were believed by Muslim scholars to have remained true to Abraham's monotheism were sometimes called *ḥanīfs*.) This belief ensured that many Arabic sources discussing pre-Islamic Arabia tend to see the religious, political, and economic life of the 'Arabs' of the Peninsula as revolving around Mecca, the Kaʿba, and the annual pilgrimage or *ḥajj*. Indeed, one particularly well-known account of how the original monotheism held to have been brought to Arabia by Abraham virtually disappeared, to be replaced by polytheistic idol worship, has it that the pilgrims and visitors to Mecca would take back stones from Mecca to their home territories where they would establish them as imitations of the Kaʿba, and that over time these memorabilia came themselves to be worshipped as deities.[11] How this attempt to demonstrate the pre-Islamic centrality of the Kaʿba could even combine with some historians' desire to promote the Persian Muslims' pre-Islamic past over the Arabs' can be seen in an account preserved by ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī (d. *c.*956), in which the ancestors of the Sasanian kings of Persia used

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[9] There are several important studies of the *shuʿūbiyya*, but see, with further bibliography, Norris 1990; *EI*² s.v. 'Shuʿūbiyya' (S. Enderwitz); see too Savant 2013.

[10] Bashshār, n. 26 = Beeston, *Selections from the Poetry of Baššār*, 50–2.

[11] Ibn al-Kalbī, *The Book of Idols*, 4; see also Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 50–6 (= trans. Guillaume, 35–9).

to undertake the pilgrimage to the Kaʿba in Mecca, and donate expensive gifts towards its upkeep.[12] (And see the excerpts on Abraha, **8.10–17.**)

The articulation of an 'Arab identity', the promotion of a salvation history for the Muslim community, and the desire to undermine Arabs or their opponents were not the only later concerns that inspired scholars to investigate pre-Islamic Arabia. Other important interests driving this endeavour included the need to understand the often extremely enigmatic references to pre-Islamic practices in the Qurʾān; a wish to find exemplary moralizing tales; and at times, no doubt, simple antiquarian interest. All of this means that although Muslim scholars preserved a great deal of information about pre-Islamic Arabia and its inhabitants (the extracts that follow are only a tiny sample), they tended to be interested in very specific issues that were relevant to debates taking place in their own times—making such sources, as noted in the Editor's Introduction to this volume, 'outsider' sources for the pre-Islamic period. One early poetic critic, Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d. 846), may have thought that he could weed out the genuine pre-Islamic poetry from the false better than some others, but his criteria for authenticity were strictly ninth-century ones.[13] The information that Arabic sources preserve, therefore, has often to be understood with this in mind. The knock-on effect is that those works do not preserve for us information on so many issues and topics that we would wish to know about pre-Islamic Arabia. Although this point may not be reiterated frequently in the commentaries on the individual extracts from Arabic sources that follow in this chapter, each and every one of them needs to be read against the historical background to their production introduced here.

The literary genres in which material about pre-Islamic Arabia appears are numerous. At the same time as Muslim scholars were beginning to write works of history aimed towards explaining the spectacular rise of Islam and the vicissitudes of its fate during the caliphates that followed, they were also pioneering new approaches in other scholarly fields. Many of these provided an opportunity to discuss pre-Islamic Arabia, and in all of them the new work on the pre-Islamic period was inspired by contemporary concerns in the eighth and ninth centuries: collection of, and commentary upon, pre-Islamic poetry;[14] Qurʾānic commentary; genealogy;[15] Arabic grammar and lexicography; Prophetic biography; tribal narratives of the wars and battles fought by the inhabitants of pre-Islamic Arabia, known in Arabic as *ayyām al-ʿarab*, 'the days of the Arabs'.[16] The texts selected here provide a small, representative

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[12] Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar*, vol. 1, 283–4 (§§573–5); for a discussion, see Savant 2006: 13–14.

[13] Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī, *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ*, vol. 1, 7–9.

[14] Drory 1996.   [15] Kennedy 1997.

[16] *EI*³ s.v. 'Ayyām al-ʿarab' (A. Jones); Lichtenstädter 1935; Hoyland 2001: 224–7. Further references for material on pre-Islamic Arabia in works in some of these genres can be found throughout the remaining notes in this chapter.

sample of the vast corpus of Muslim prose texts on pre-Islamic Arabia (although readers should note that for reasons of space, some genres, e.g. *ḥadīth*, are not included here). They are divided thematically and chronologically, to address the major issues with which their authors were concerned. In them we also find a valuable complement to, and another context for, some of the events and matters discussed by Graeco-Roman and Syriac sources elsewhere in this volume. These concerns include issues such as intertribal rivalry, religious issues, and the relationship between the Romans, Sasanians, and Ḥimyarites and their Arab clients and neighbours.

Migration

We begin with four accounts which offer explanations of how the South Arabian tribes dispersed from their original territories in South Arabia to the regions further north, bringing them ultimately into contact with both the Romans and the Persians. These may explain the background to events that appear in Roman sources, such as the wars between the Roman army and various Arab tribes around the turn of the sixth century, which took place in northern Arabia (cf. **5.2–4**).

> The migration of the Arabian tribes
> [**8.1**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.745 (trans. Hoyland 2001: 231)
> When the progeny of Maʿadd and the Arab tribes multiplied and filled their land in the Tihama and adjoining areas, they were dispersed by wars that occurred among them and evils that befell them. They therefore moved out in quest of space and fertile land into the neighbouring regions of Yemen and the Syrian marches.

Although Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) was perhaps most famous during his own lifetime as a specialist in Sunnī Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and *ḥadīth*, and although some of his works in those fields have survived, he quickly became best known for his monumental Qurʾān commentary and his annalistic history. This enormous work of history began with creation and proceeded to give an overview of the pre-Islamic prophets and peoples down to the time of Muḥammad, together with an account of the latter's career, and was followed by an annalistic history of the first three Islamic centuries down to 915. Since al-Ṭabarī based much of his work around the narratives and reports collected by earlier historians whose own works are now lost, this *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, 'History of the Prophets and Kings', is probably the single most important extant witness to early Arabic historiographical production, and to the formation by the early tenth century of a triumphalist Sunnī narrative of the pre- and early Islamic history of the Middle East. Al-Ṭabarī's history rapidly became popular, and within a century

of its author's death had inspired a number of abridgements, continuations, and a Persian revision (see **8.44**).[17]

In the extract presented here, al-Ṭabarī sets himself the task of explaining how it was that the original Arab inhabitants of South Arabia ended up spread over such a wide territory, including the whole Arabian Peninsula and the desert steppes of Syria and Iraq. This was a question which intrigued several medieval Muslim historians of the Arabs' pre-Islamic past, and between them they came up with a variety of reasons to account for this migration. Al-Ṭabarī's reasoning here suggests that population increase encouraged ever more violent competition for increasingly scarce resources, which resulted in some groups migrating. In early Islamic times, Maʿadd were considered to be a genealogically constructed tribal confederation (cf. Chs 3 and 5) but it has been forcefully suggested that in pre-Islamic Arabia the term may have designated a 'particular kind, category, or class of Arabs who, according to all indications, shared certain broadly similar elements of social organisation, cultural tradition, economic and material circumstance, and geopolitical range of operation'.[18] The Tihāma can refer to the coastal Red Sea strip running most of the length of the western Arabian Peninsula, but here it perhaps refers primarily to the southern (i.e. modern Yemeni) portion. It is impossible to be precise about when this mass emigration from South Arabia is believed to have taken place, although it should be inferred that it was some centuries before the lifetime of Muḥammad.

Population increase was one explanation, but migration might also result from local catastrophes:

The breaking of the Marib Dam
[**8.2**] al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj* 3.371 (trans. Hoyland 2001: 231–2)
The water overwhelmed the lands, gardens, edifices and homes until the inhabitants of the country had perished and its citizens been wiped out.

[**8.3**] al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj* 3.214–15 (trans. Hoyland 2001: 234)
The southern tribes were compelled to leave their homes and dispersed in the land. Qudaʿa . . . were the first to settle in Syria. They allied themselves with the emperors of the Romans, who made them kings, after they had become Christians, over the Arabs who had gathered in Syria.

Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī (d. *c.*956) was a polymath. He was originally from Baghdad, but he travelled extensively throughout the Islamic world, even to such far-flung locations as the Indian subcontinent and East Africa. He may have died in Old Cairo/Fusṭāṭ. Although he appears to have

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[17] See the general introduction by Rosenthal in the first part of SUNY's multi-volume translation of al-Ṭabarī (1989). See also Shoshan 2004 and Cooperson and Toorawa 2005, s.v. 'al-Ṭabarī (839–923)'; Khalidi 2007–8 and the various articles collected in Kennedy 2008.
[18] Zwettler 2000: 225.

composed a number of works in a variety of fields of knowledge, only two have survived, and they are both concerned with what one modern scholar has termed 'general knowledge within a historical-geographical framework'. These two works provide a wealth of information on the pre-Islamic and Islamic history of the Middle East.[19]

In these two extracts here, both from the *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar*, 'The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Jewels', al-Masʿūdī deals with the reasons behind the South Arabian tribes emigrating from their homeland and some of the more important historical consequences of that migration. Unlike the reason given in the extract from al-Ṭabarī in **8.1**, the first of these two citations from al-Masʿūdī resorts to a popular disaster explanation concerning the Marib (Maʾrib) Dam. This dam was built by the kings of South Arabia (Chs 2 and 3) and was sufficiently impressive to leave a lasting impact on Arabic literature; its breach was widely considered to have been the principal reason behind the emigration of the Arab tribes from South Arabia. In the second extract, al-Masʿūdī explains how emigration from South Arabia ultimately led to a realignment of the political order in the lands further to the north. The tribal group Quḍāʿa who ended up in Syria were widely held by Arabic historians to have been the first Arab group to have entered into an alliance with the Romans, and that in return their leaders were given some sort of official recognition (in this sense, they were precursors for the Jafnids, who came later). In Arabic the term for their recognized position is usually *malik* (pl. *mulūk*), the usual translation of which in English is 'king', but this should not be interpreted too literally, and the title may have implied little more than officially recognized (by an imperial power) tribal leadership (cf. **3.10**, **6.19**, **6.26**, **7.6**).

Whatever the precise reason for any migration, the movement of peoples north had consequences:

Tribal unrest
[**8.4**] al-Aṣmaʿī, *Taʾrīkh* 88 (trans. Hoyland 2001: 236)
They did not enter a land without robbing its people of it. Khuzaʿa wrested Mecca from Jurhum; Aws and Khazraj wrested Medina from the Jews; the clan of Mundhir seized Iraq from its people; the clan of Jafna seized Syria from its people and ruled it; and the progeny of ʿImran ibn ʿAmr ibn ʿAmir (of al-Azd) seized Oman from is people. Up till then all of these [southern tribes] had been in obedience to the kings of Ḥimyar.

Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Malik al-Aṣmaʿī (d. *c.*828) was a very famous Baṣran philologist and relatively close associate of the ʿAbbāsid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (786–809), and the bio-bibliographical literature credits him with the composition of approximately 60 works, principally on Arabic lexicography and poetry. The *Taʾrīkh al-ʿarab qabl al-islām*, 'History of the Arabs before

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[19] Khalidi 1975; Shboul 1979 (quotation from Shboul 1979: 68).

Islam', from which this extract is derived, however, is incorrectly attributed to al-Aṣmaʿī; it may very well be a much later compilation to which the name of this famous early scholar came at some point to be attached. That said, there is no reason why it should not be considered a ninth-century work for the time being.[20]

This extract, which was widely known and has its parallels in many other Arabic sources, explains how the Arabs who emigrated from South Arabia came to control the other regions of the Arabian Peninsula to the north. The Aws and the Khazraj who controlled Medina later achieved fame as the two tribes who offered a new home to Muḥammad when he had been shunned and threatened by the Meccans, and thus came to be known as the Prophet's 'Helpers' (Ar. *anṣār*). The clan of al-Mundhir is better known as the Naṣrids/ Lakhmids, and the clan of Jafna, the Jafnids/Ghassānids. The kings of Ḥimyar had come to rule much of South Arabia by the late third century, having annexed the earlier kingdom of Sabaʾ around 275 (Ch. 3). The impression created by this account that the migrating Arabs simply moved into others' territories and took them with little effort is, of course, most likely an historical fiction. The lengthy process by which the Jafnids and Naṣrids came to hold their positions of authority in Syria and southern Iraq respectively has now been relatively well studied, and it appears that the Aws and the Khazraj also had a particularly protracted and turbulent history with the Jews of Medina.[21]

Ḥimyar, Kinda, and Najrān

In the following extracts we turn to events in the southern and central Arabian Peninsula, offering a later perspective on some of the material discussed in Chs 3, 5, and 6. In the first, al-Ṭabarī reports on the relationship between the Arabs of Kinda and the Ḥimyarites:

> The kings of Kinda
> [**8.5**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.880–2 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 121–5)[22]
> Information was transmitted to me from Hishām b. Muḥammad, who said: The sons of the nobles of Ḥimyar and others from the Arab tribes used to serve the kings of Ḥimyar during their period of royal power. Among those who served Ḥassān b. Tubbaʿ was ʿAmr b. Ḥujr al-Kindī, the chief of Kindah during his time. When Ḥassān b. Tubbaʿ led an expedition against the Jadīs, he appointed ʿAmr as his deputy over certain affairs. When ʿAmr b. Tubbaʿ killed his brother Ḥassān b.

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[20] *EI*[3], s.v. 'al-Aṣmaʿī' (R. Weipert).

[21] On the Jafnids and Naṣrids see now especially (and with further bibliography) Fisher 2011a. On the relations between the Aws, Khazraj, and the Jews in pre-Islamic Medina, see Lecker 2005: 50–69. On the migration narrative in general, see Ulrich 2008.

[22] Information in brackets () or [] in these extracts is provided by Bosworth. Any additions or clarifications are given in footnotes.

Tubbaʿ and assumed the royal power in his stead, he took ʿAmr b. Ḥujr al-Kindī into his personal service. ʿAmr b. Ḥujr was a man of sound judgment and sagacity. ʿAmr b. Tubbaʿ intended to honour him and at the same time to diminish the status of his brother Ḥassān's sons, and as part of this policy he gave Ḥassān b. Tubbaʿ's daughter in marriage to ʿAmr b. Ḥujr. The Ḥimyarites grumbled at this, and among them were some young men who were concerned about her, because none of the Arabs had previously been bold enough to desire a marriage alliance with that house (sc., the Ḥimyarites). Ḥassān b. Tubbaʿ's daughter bore al-Ḥārith b. ʿAmr to ʿAmr b. Ḥujr.

After ʿAmr b. Tubbaʿ, ʿAbd Kulāl b. Muthawwib succeeded to the royal power. This was because the sons of Ḥassān were only small, except for Tubbaʿ b. Ḥassān, whom the jinn had rendered mentally unbalanced. Hence Abū Kulāl b. Muthawwib assumed the royal power [temporarily], fearing lest someone outside the royal house of the kingdom might covet it. He was qualified to exercise this power through his mature years, his experience, and his excellent powers of governing. According to what has been mentioned, he was an adherent of the original form of Christianity, but used to conceal this from his people. He had been converted to that faith by a man of Ghassān who had come from Syria, but whom the Ḥimyarites had then attacked and killed.

At that point, Tubbaʿ b. Ḥassān recovered his sanity and was restored to health. He was highly knowledgeable about the stars, the most intelligent among those who had learned [the sciences] in this time, and the one with the most information and lore concerning both the past and what was to come after him in the future. Hence Tubbaʿ b. Ḥassān b. Tubbaʿ b. Malikay Karib b. Tubbaʿ al-Aqran was raised to the kingship. Ḥimyar and the Arabs stood in intense awe of him. He then sent his sister's son al-Ḥārith b. ʿAmr b. Ḥujr al-Kindi at the head of a powerful army against the lands of Maʿadd, al-Ḥīrah, and the districts adjacent to them both. Al-Ḥārith marched against al-Nuʿmān b. Imriʾ al-Qays b. al-Shaqīqah and fought with him; al-Nuʿmān and a number of his family were killed, and his companions were routed. Only al-Mundhir b. al-Nuʿmān al-Akbar, whose mother was Māʾ al-Samāʾ, a woman of the Banū al-Namir, managed to escape from al-Ḥārith. In this way the royal power of the house of al-Nuʿmān passed away, and al-Ḥārith b. ʿAmr al-Kindī succeeded to their former power and possessions.

Al-Ṭabarī's cited source for this account, as for much more of his pre-Islamic material, was Hishām b. Muḥammad, also known as Ibn al-Kalbī (d. *c.*821–2), who was one of the most prolific Muslim historians of the Arabian Peninsula in the times before Muḥammad.[23]

The narrative here provides some details about the politically important role that the descendants of Ḥujr b. ʿAmr of the central Arabian tribe of Kinda—often referred to in modern scholarship as the Ḥujrids—came to play in the politics of Arabia in the late fifth and sixth centuries. The Ḥimyarite

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[23] For Ibn al-Kalbī's material on pre-Islamic Arabia, see further Shahîd 1984b: 349–66; Shahîd 1989b: 233–42.

rulers—often referred to in Arabic by the title Tubbaʿ—had come to dominate South Arabia from the late third century.[24] Epigraphic evidence (**3.10, 3.11**) combined with Arabic accounts such as the one here suggest that from roughly the mid-fifth century the kings of Ḥimyar began to utilize the Ḥujrid chiefs of Kinda, in an attempt to control the Arab groups to the centre and north-east of the Arabian Peninsula, including Maʿadd and the Naṣrid rulers of al-Ḥīra, represented here by al-Nuʿmān b. Imriʾ al-Qays. At some point the Ḥujrids likely functioned for the Ḥimyarites much as the Jafnids did for the Romans and the Naṣrids for the Sasanians: as officially recognized tribal chiefs whose principal duty was to control the other Arabs in the borderlands of these respective realms. Ḥujr and his initial successors (his son ʿAmr and grandson al-Ḥārith) seem to have had some notable success in this regard, although the claim here that through their efforts 'the house of al-Nuʿmān passed away' is certainly an overstatement, since later Naṣrid leaders at al-Ḥīra are known to both Muslim and Graeco-Roman historians. Al-Ḥārith b. ʿAmr, however, was successful enough to attract diplomatic overtures from the Romans in the early sixth century (see **5.4**, but note problems of identification). Kinda seem to have been based around the ancient trading city of Qaryat al-Fāw (Ch. 2), on the edge of the Empty Quarter in South Arabia, and archaeological excavations undertaken there have uncovered much interesting material relating to the history of this settlement.[25] The 'original form of Christianity', to which Abū Kulāl b. Muthawwib is said to have adhered, is presumably a reference from the text's Muslim author's perspective to the version of Christianity promulgated by Jesus himself, before his followers and later generations of Christians 'corrupted' his message.

Another perspective on the relationship between Ḥimyar and the family of Ḥujr of Kinda is provided by Ibn Ḥabīb:

Ḥimyar and Kinda
[**8.6**] Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar* pp. 368–70 (trans. Munt)
When Tubbaʿ Abū Karib set out for Iraq he stopped in the territory of Maʿadd, where he established as governor over them Ḥujr b. ʿAmr, known as Ākil al-Murār. He led them in an exemplary way and so they agreed that when Ḥujr died they would establish his son as their king after him. He continued to rule over them until he became weak-minded. Among his sons were ʿAmr and Muʿāwiya, known as al-Jawn. When Ḥujr died, his son ʿAmr reigned after him; he was

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[24] See p. 144. Abīkarib Asʿad (= Tubbaʿ) had a son named Ḥaśśān Yuhaʾmin, likely the Ḥassān b. Tubbaʿ mentioned here in **8.5**.

[25] On the Ḥujrids see esp. Olinder 1927; Shahîd 1960 = Shahîd 1988, part IV; Robin 1996a; Robin 2008a; Hoyland 2001: 49–50; Fisher 2011a: 84–91. For their genealogy as constructed by a ninth-century scholar, see Caskel 1966: tables 176, 233, and 238. On Qaryat al-Fāw, see al-Ansary 1982. For this extract from al-Ṭabarī's history, and for all those that follow, the commentary and notes provided by Bosworth to his translation are invaluable sources of further information and bibliography; likewise those in Nöldeke's translation from 1879.

known as al-Maqṣūr ['the restricted'] because he was restricted to the kingdom of his father. Muʿāwiya al-Jawn b. Ḥujr was in charge of al-Yamāma.

ʿAmr died and was succeeded by his son al-Ḥārith. He was a strong ruler and preserved his territory from raids while he himself frequently raided the Banū Naṣr—the kings of al-Ḥīra—a part of whose kingdom he adjoined to his. His kingdom extended as far as Ṣarāt Jāmʾasb by Qaṣr Ibn Hubayra. Things continued that way until Imruʾ al-Qays b. al-Mundhir b. ʿAmr b. Imruʾ al-Qays b. ʿAmr b. ʿAdī b. Naṣr died in al-Ḥīra. After him his son al-Mundhir b. Imruʾ al-Qays succeeded, and al-Ḥārith rose up and called upon the Arabs who swore allegiance to him. This was in the time of Peroz b. Yazdgerd b. Bahram b. Yazdgerd b. Shapur, who had raised Imruʾ al-Qays b. al-Mundhir to the kingship. Peroz died and Kavad 'the heretic' b. Peroz reigned after him. He called upon al-Mundhir b. Imruʾ al-Qays al-Lakhmī to enter into [his] heresy, but he refused. Al-Ḥārith, however, responded favourably and so [Kavad] established him as king and banished al-Mundhir. When Kavad died, Anushirvan returned the kingship to al-Mundhir.

Kavad had established a treaty with al-Ḥārith establishing that everything between al-Ṣarāt and the land of the Arabs—the desert and the sown—belonged to al-Ḥārith. Al-Ḥārith had dispersed his sons among Maʿadd: he established Ḥujr as king over the Banū Asad b. Khuzayma; Shuraḥbīl over Tamīm and al-Ribāb; Salama over Bakr and Taghlib; and Maʿdī Karib, who was uncircumcised, over Qays and Kināna.

When al-Ḥārith died each of his sons held fast to his kingship and their rule strengthened. The Banū Asad, however, killed their king, Ḥujr the father of Imruʾ al-Qays the poet. Shuraḥbīl and Salama then rose up and went to war with each other. Shuraḥbīl was killed by Abū Ḥanash ʿUṣum b. al-Nuʿmān al-Taghlibī, who was a supporter of Salama. Salama b. al-Ḥārith then became afflicted by palsy and so he died. Maʿdī Karib became afflicted by melancholia over the death of his brother Shuraḥbīl, so he set out wandering like a madman and died. Thus was the kingdom of Kinda torn apart.

ʿAmr Aqḥal b. Abī Karib b. Qays b. Salama b. al-Ḥārith rose to the kingship and exclaimed, 'O Kinda! You have come to a place that is not proper. Your nobles have gone and your kingdom is rent apart; the Arabs will no longer entrust themselves to you. So go meet your people.' So they set out and came to Ḥaḍramawt where they have remained to this day.

Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb (d. 860) was a Baghdadi philologist with a strong interest in Arabic poetry, genealogy, and history. A few of his works survive, including the *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, a seemingly rather random collection of lore concerning pre-Islamic Arabia and early Islamic history. Patricia Crone has suggested that this work 'must rank with the *Guinness Book of Records* among the greatest compilations of useless information'.[26]

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[26] Crone 1980: 10. For more on Ibn Ḥabīb and this work, see Lichtenstädter 1939: 1–27; *EI²*, s. v. 'Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb' (I. Lichtenstädter).

The extract here deals again with the fortune of the descendants of Ḥujr b. ʿAmr, the so-called 'kings' of the central Arabian tribe of Kinda (see **3.10**). Much of Ibn Ḥabīb's account focuses on the chieftainship of al-Ḥārith b. ʿAmr b. Ḥujr, under whose leadership the family saw the greatest extent of their power, at the expense primarily of the Naṣrids in southern Iraq. (Al-Ṣarāt, the limit of al-Ḥārith's authority, was apparently a canal near the Tigris in the vicinity of the later settlement of Baghdad.) His lifetime cannot be dated precisely, but the evidence in this passage suggests that he was in charge of affairs in central Arabia, finely balancing his position between the Ḥimyarites of South Arabia and the Sasanians of Iran and Iraq, during the late fifth and early sixth centuries. The heresy of Kavadh, to which several Arabic sources mention that al-Ḥārith was favourable, was what scholars refer to today as Mazdakism.[27] Ibn Ḥabīb's account seems to confirm the supposition that the main responsibility of the Ḥujrids was to control Maʿadd, a task for which al-Ḥārith designated several of his sons. After the death of al-Ḥārith and the accession of Khusrau I Anushirvan in 531, the heyday of the Ḥujrids appears to have passed—at least in Ibn Ḥabīb's account—although they still received diplomatic overtures from the Romans (see **5.18**). Ibn Ḥabīb's account of the events surrounding the decline of the Ḥujrids need not be read literally, and the conclusion that Kinda ultimately migrated to Ḥaḍramawt in southern Arabia is an interesting reversal of the more famous accounts (**8.1–4**) that have southern Arabian tribes migrating to northern Arabia.[28] (Incidentally, Imruʾ al-Qays, the poet, was one of the most famous of the pre-Islamic Arabic poets, whose verses have remained popular ever since his own day.[29])

One particularly famous event in the Peninsula, at Najrān (Nagrān) in southern Arabia (Ch. 3, **3.16**, **3.18–19**, **6.45–8**), captured al-Ṭabarī's attention. His account is lengthy; a selection of excerpts is offered here.

The massacre at Najrān
[**8.7**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.919–20 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 192–5)
There were in Najrān remnants of people who adhered to the religion of ʿĪsā (Jesus), followers of the Gospel, virtuous and upright. They had a head, of this same faith, called ʿAbdallāh b. al-Thāmir. The place where that faith originally took root was Najrān, which at that time was in the center of the land of the Arabs; its people, like all the rest of the Arabs, were (originally) idol worshippers. At that point, a man called Faymiyūn, from the remnants of the adherents of that faith had come among them; he summoned them to his religion and they adopted it.

[27] Ch. 5 n. 8.
[28] For further commentary and references, see the discussion of al-Ṭabarī 1.880–2 = **8.5**.
[29] See *EI²*, s.v. 'Imruʾ al-Ḳays b. Ḥudjr' (S. Boustany); *EAL*, s.v. 'Imruʾ al-Qays (sixth century)' (R. Jacobi); Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 259–65; Montgomery 2006.

Hishām related: [He was] Zurʿah Dhū Nuwās, but when he became a convert to Judaism, he assumed the name of Yūsuf. It was he who had the trench (*al-ukhdūd*) dug out at Najrān and killed the Christians.

[8.8] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.925–6 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 202–5)

He (i.e. Ibn Isḥāq) related: Dhū Nuwās marched against them [the Najrānites] with his forces of the Ḥimyarites and the tribes of Yemen. He gathered the people of Najrān together, and summoned them to the Jewish faith, offering them the choice between that and being killed. They chose being killed, so he dug out for them the trench (*al-ukhdūd*). He burnt some of them with fire, slew some violently with the sword, and mutilated them savagely until he had killed nearly twenty thousand of them. Out of them there escaped only one man, called Daws Dhū Thaʿlabān, on one of his horses, who travelled through the sands until he threw his pursuers off.

[. . .] Dhū Nuwās returned with his forces to Ṣanʿāʾ in the land of Yemen. Concerning Dhū Nuwās and his troops, there narrated to us Ibn Ḥumayd— Salamah b. al-Faḍl—Muḥammad b. Isḥāq, who said: God sent down to His Messenger the words 'Slain were the Men of the Trench, with the fire abounding in fuel,' to His words ' . . . and God, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy.' It is said that ʿAbdallāh b. al-Thāmir, their leader and imām, was among those whom Dhū Nuwās killed, but it is also said that ʿAbdallāh b. al-Thāmir was killed before that event, killed by a previous ruler. He was the founder of that faith [at Najrān], and Dhū Nuwās only slew adherents of ʿAbdallāh's religion who came after him.

As for Hishām b. Muḥammad, he says that the royal power in Yemen was handed down continuously, with no one venturing to contest it until the Abyssinians[30] seized control of their land in the time of Anūsharwān.[31] He related: The reason for their conquest was that Dhū Nuwās the Ḥimyarite exercised royal power in Yemen at that time, and he was an adherent of the Jewish faith. There came to him a Jew called Daws from the people of Najrān, who told him that the people of Najrān had unjustly slain his two sons; he now sought Dhū Nuwās's help against them. The people of Najrān were Christians. Dhū Nuwās was a fervent partisan of the Jewish faith, so he led an expedition against the people of Najrān, killing large numbers of them. A man from the people of Najrān fled and in due course came to the King of Abyssinia. He informed the king of what the Yemenis had committed and gave him a copy of the Gospels partly burned by the fire. The King of Abyssinia said to him: 'I have plenty of men, but no ships [to transport them]; but I will write to Qayṣar (i.e. the Byzantine emperor) asking him to send me ships for transporting the soldiers.' Hence he wrote to Qayṣar about this matter, enclosing the [partly] burned copy of the Gospels, and Qayṣar dispatched a large number of ships.

Al-Ṭabarī relates that the sole survivor of the massacre, Daws Dhū Thaʿlabān, reached the Roman emperor and requested help. Given the distances involved, the Roman emperor explained, it would be more efficient for the king of

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[30] The Aksūmites.   [31] Khusrau I Anushirvan (531–79).

Aksūm, the Najāshī (the Negus, Kālēb: **3.18–19**), to intervene on Rome's behalf, and so a letter was dispatched to Aksūm containing these commands.

[**8.9**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.927–8 (trans. Bosworth, p. 207)
When Daws Dhū Thaʿlabān presented Qayṣar's letter to the Najāshī, ruler of Abyssinia, the latter sent a force with Daws of seventy thousand Abyssinian troops, appointing as commander over them one of their number, an Abyssinian called Aryāṭ (? Arethas) [. . .] Dhū Nuwās heard of their approach, and he collected together at his side Ḥimyar and those tribes of Yemen owing him obedience, but there were many dissensions and divisions in their ranks on account of the approaching end of the period [appointed by God], the suffering of hardships, and the coming down of punishment. There ensued no real battle and Dhū Nuwās was only able to engage in a certain amount of skirmishing, and then his troops were put to flight and Aryāṭ overran the land with his forces. Hence when Dhū Nuwās saw what had befallen him and his supporters, he headed his horse toward the sea; he whipped it onward and it went into the sea, bearing him through the shallows until it carried him into the deep water. He urged it onward into the open sea, and that was the last ever seen of him.

Here al-Ṭabarī deals with one of the most famous episodes in pre-Islamic Arabian history, the martyrdom of the Christians of Najrān at the hands of the Jewish king Joseph/Dhū Nuwās in 523, and the subsequent Aksūmite invasion of South Arabia and overthrow of the Ḥimyarite dynasty there. His main sources for these events are again Ibn al-Kalbī, but also Muḥammad b. Isḥāq (who is discussed further below). The martyrs of Najrān, the activities of Dhū Nuwās, and the subsequent Aksūmite invasion were all well known throughout the late antique Near East, and Arabic accounts of the affair closely resemble the other sources for the affair (e.g. Ch. 3, and **6.45–8**) in some ways, but also introduce much new material. The importance of the local Najrānī ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Thāmir and the wandering ascetic Faymiyūn in spreading Christianity in the region, and the role of the Jew Daws in inspiring Dhū Nuwās to take action against the Najrānī Christians, for example, are not attested outside of the Arabic sources. Joseph/Dhū Nuwās, who appears in a South Arabian inscription from 523 as Yūsuf Asʾar Yathʾar (**3.16**), appears to have been a particularly strong proponent of Judaism, but there is plenty of evidence that Judaism had already spread among the Ḥimyarites of South Arabia long before his reign.[32] Al-Ṭabarī also provides an interesting glimpse into the 'power politics' of sixth-century Arabia in his discussion of the negotiations between the Roman emperor and the king of Aksūm concerning who should assist the Christians under Ḥimyarite rule, although his account can hardly be considered a primary source. The Aksūmite ex-slave and soldier Abraha, among those in the force that invaded South Arabia, went on to seize

[32] Ch. 3.

power there himself and achieved considerable fame in his own right (Ch. 3). The Muslim sources do not provide these events with a specific date—they very rarely do for anything that happened in pre-Islamic Arabia—and the statement in this passage that they happened during the reign of the Persian king Khusrau I Anushirvan (531–79) does not fit with the contemporary evidence that we possess, which places these events during the reign of Justin I (d. 527).

The reference to 'the trench' in the vast majority of Arabic accounts about the martyrs of Najrān results from the fact that a curious reference to 'the people of the trench' (*aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*) appears in a Qurʾānic verse (Qurʾān 85.4). This is a good example of how Muslim Arabic narratives of pre-Islamic Arabia often functioned as exegeses and elaborations of rather obscure Qurʾānic passages. Most later exegetes connected that reference to the events at Najrān in the early sixth century, and it thus became the fulcrum of many Arabic accounts of the martyrdom there; al-Ṭabarī also included an account about these events in the section on this verse in his Qurʾānic commentary.[33]

The epigraphic evidence for the career of Abraha is discussed in Ch. 3 (3.21, 3.23–5). Here al-Ṭabarī recounts one incident from his life:

Abraha and the church at Ṣanʿāʾ
[8.10] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.935–6 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 220–1)
After the Najāshī had restored Abrahah to favour and had confirmed him in his charge, the latter built the church at Ṣanʿāʾ. He made it a marvelous building, whose like had never been seen before, using gold and remarkable dyestuffs and stains. He wrote to Qayṣar telling him that he intended to build a church at Ṣanʿāʾ whose traces and whose fame would last forever and asked for the emperor's aid in this. Qayṣar accordingly sent back to him skilled artisans, mosaic cubes, and marble. When the building was completed, Abrahah wrote to the Najāshī that he planned to divert to it the pilgrims of the Arabs. When the Arabs heard that, they regarded it with perturbation and it assumed momentous proportions in their eyes. A man from the Banū Mālik b. Kinānah went off until he reached Yemen, entered the temple, and defecated in it. Abrahah's wrath was aroused, and he resolved to lead an expedition against Mecca and to raze the House to the ground.

The narrative here picks up after Abraha's seizure of power in South Arabia had been recognized by the Aksūmite Negus (Ar. *najāshī*), with the former's desire to build a church in Ṣanʿāʾ to rival the Kaʿba and attract Arab pilgrims away from Mecca. The beauty of the decoration of this church, sometimes called al-Qalīs or al-Qullays (from the Greek *ekklesia*), is often highlighted in great detail, not only by al-Ṭabarī but especially by the local historian of Mecca, al-Azraqī (Ch. 3; d. *c.*865); al-Azraqī also adds that it remained standing until the governorship over Yemen of al-ʿAbbās b. al-Rabīʿ during the

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[33] Hoyland 2001: 50–6; Robin 2008b; Schiettecatte 2010: 25; Sizgorich 2010. See too Hirschberg 1939–49; Lecker 2010: Rubin 2010.

caliphate of Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr (754–75). Abraha's church was probably one of the most impressive architectural monuments of its day in the Arabian Peninsula. Its plan, so far as it can be reconstructed from mostly later literary accounts, seems to have resembled Justinian's Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and also bears striking similarities to contemporary Ethiopian churches. An eleventh-century historian of Ṣanʿāʾ, Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Rāzī (d. *c*.1068), notes that the Christians had built a church in that city on a supposed site where Jesus had prayed, but he does not explicitly connect this building with Abraha. Likewise, possible remains of an ancient church have been identified in Ṣanʿāʾ, although there is no guarantee that they are of Abraha's construction. Muslim historians were particularly interested, as is the case here, in accounts of the construction of this church, the threat it posed to the Meccans, and their subsequent confrontational response to its construction as a means to explain why Abraha launched his infamous assault on the Kaʿba in *c*.570, discussed below. Roman imperial assistance for the construction of an impressive monument in Arabia is not inherently implausible, but it is a well-known topos in Arabic histories; a Roman emperor is widely reported as having sent money, materials, and manpower to assist the caliph al-Walīd (705–15) during his renovations of the mosques of Damascus and Medina.[34] Al-Qalīs is also perhaps attested in inscriptions (e.g. **3.25**).

Abraha's church in Ṣanʿāʾ was later desecrated, and the king decided to take revenge against Mecca, as Ibn Isḥāq explains.

Abraha and Mecca
[**8.11**] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra* 33 (trans. Guillaume, p. 24)
Abraha sent an Abyssinian called al-Aswad b. Masfūd with some cavalry as far as Mecca and the latter sent off to him the plunder of the people of Tihāma, the Quraysh, and others, and among it two hundred camels belonging to ʿAbduʾl-Muṭṭalib b. Hāshim, who at that time was the leading shaykh of Quraysh. At first Quraysh, Kināna, and Hudhayl and others who were in the holy place meditated battle, but seeing that they had not the power to offer resistance they gave up the idea.

Abraha sent Ḥunāṭa the Ḥimyarite to Mecca instructing him to inquire who was the chief notable of the country and to tell him that the king's message was that he had not come to fight them, but only to destroy the temple. If they offered no resistance there was no cause for bloodshed, and if he wished to avoid war he should return with him. On reaching Mecca Ḥunāṭa was told that ʿAbduʾl-Muṭṭalib b. Hāshim b. ʿAbd Manāf b. Quṣayy was the leading notable, so he went to him and delivered Abraha's message. ʿAbduʾl-Muṭṭalib replied: 'God knows that we do not wish to fight him for we have not the power to do so. This is Allah's sanctuary and the temple of His friend Abraham—or words to that effect—if He defends it against him it is His temple and His sanctuary; and if

[34] Al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, vol. 1, 137–41; al-Rāzī, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Ṣanʿāʾ* 32; Serjeant and Lewcock 1983; Finster and Schmidt 1994; Finster 2010: 77–81.

he lets him have it by God we cannot defend it!' Ḥunāṭa replied that he must come with him to Abraha, for he was ordered to bring him back with him.

[**8.12**] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra* 34 (trans. Guillaume, p. 25)

Now ʿAbduʾl-Muṭṭalib was a most impressive, handsome, and dignified man, and when Abraha saw him he treated him with the greatest respect so that he would not let him sit beneath him. He could not let the Abyssinians see him sitting beside him on his royal throne, so he got off his throne and sat upon his carpet and made ʿAbduʾl-Muṭṭalib sit beside him there. Then he told his interpreter to enquire what he wanted, and the reply was that he wanted the king to return two hundred camels of his which he had taken. Abraha replied through the interpreter, 'you pleased me much when I saw you; then I was much displeased with you when I heard what you had said. Do you wish to talk to me about two hundred camels of yours which I have taken, and say nothing about your religion and the religion of your forefathers which I have come to destroy?' ʿAbduʾl-Muṭṭalib replied, 'I am the owner of the camels and the temple has an owner who will defend it.' When the king replied that he could not defend it against him he said, 'That remains to be seen.'

[**8.13**] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra* 34 (trans. Guillaume, pp. 25–6)

When they left him, ʿAbduʾl-Muṭṭalib went back to Quraysh and having given them the news ordered them to withdraw from Mecca and take up defensive positions on the peaks and in the passes of the mountains for fear of the excesses of the soldiers. ʿAbduʾl-Muṭṭalib took hold of the metal knocker of the Kaʿba, and a number of Quraysh stood with him praying to God and imploring his help against Abraha and his army. As he was holding the knocker of the temple door, ʿAbduʾl-Muṭṭalib said:

O God, a man protects his dwelling so protect Thy dwellings.

Let not their cross and their craft tomorrow overcome Thy craft.

[**8.14**] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra* 35–6 (trans. Guillaume, p. 26)

ʿAbduʾl-Muṭṭalib then let go the knocker of the door of the Kaʿba and went off with his Quraysh companions to the mountain tops where they took up defensive positions waiting to see what Abraha would do when he occupied Mecca. In the morning Abraha prepared to enter the town and made his elephant ready for battle and drew up his troops. His intention was to destroy the temple and then return to the Yaman. When they made the elephant (its name was Maḥmūd) face Mecca, Nufayl b. Habīb came up to its flank and taking hold of its ear said: 'Kneel, Maḥmūd, or go straight back whence you came, for you are in God's holy land!' He let go of its ear and the elephant knelt, and Nufayl made off at top speed for the top of the mountain. The troops beat the elephant to make it get up but it would not; they beat its head with iron bars; they stuck hooks into its underbelly and scarified it; but it would not get up. Then they made it face the Yaman and immediately it got up and started off. When they set it towards the north and east it did likewise, but as soon as they directed it towards Mecca it knelt down.

Then God sent up on them birds from the sea like swallows and starlings; each bird carried three stones, like peas and lentils, one in its beak and two between its claws. Everyone who was hit died but not all were hit.

[**8.15**] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra* 36 (trans. Guillaume, p. 27)

As they withdrew they were continually falling by the wayside dying miserably by every waterhole. Abraha was smitten in his body, and as they took him away his fingers fell off one by one. Where the finger had been, there arose an evil sore exuding pus and blood, so that when they brought him to Ṣanʿāʾ he was like a young fledgeling. They allege that as he died his heart burst from his body.

[**8.16**] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra* 36 (trans. Guillaume, p. 27)

When God sent Muhammad he specially recounted to the Quraysh his goodness and favour in turning back the Abyssinians in order to preserve their state and permanence.

The following chapter of the Qurʾān is also associated with this narrative:

[**8.17**] Qurʾān 105 (trans. Jones, p. 589)
1. Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the men with the elephants?
2. Did He not cause their mischiefs to go astray?
3. He sent on them birds in swarms,
4. Which pelted them with stones of baked clay,
5. And made them like devoured ears of corn.

Muḥammad b. Isḥāq (d. *c.*767) was born in Medina but later emigrated to Iraq and settled in Baghdad; his grandfather, Yasār, had been captured during the early Islamic conquests in the 630s and brought to Medina. Ibn Isḥāq was one of the first scholars to write a biography of the Prophet Muḥammad. Although this work has not survived itself (and it is in fact doubtful whether or not there was even a 'fixed' form of the work during his lifetime), several of his students transmitted versions (recensions) of his collected material about Muḥammad's life. One of those students, the Kūfan Ziyād b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Bakkāʾī (d. 799), in turn transmitted Ibn Isḥāq's material to the Egyptian ʿAbd al-Malik b. Hishām (d. *c.*834), whose *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, 'The Prophetic Biography', is the fullest and probably the best known of those extant later recensions of Ibn Isḥāq's work. Ibn Hishām's work can be divided loosely into three sections: pre-Islamic Arabian (mostly Ḥijāzī and South Arabian) history; Muḥammad's career in Mecca; Muḥammad's emigration (*hijra*) to Medina and the conclusion of his Prophetic mission there. The first section on pre-Islamic history thus serves as an introduction to the religious and political status quo in the Arabian Peninsula—as perceived by Muslim scholars of the eighth and ninth centuries—against which God would direct Muḥammad, ultimately with great success, in the second and third parts. The selective history of pre-Islamic Arabian history provided by Ibn Isḥāq and Ibn Hishām is, therefore, just as much a part of the salvation history of the Muslim community as is the career of the Prophet Muḥammad which follows.[35]

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[35] On Ibn Isḥāq and his biography of Muḥammad, see Horovitz 2002: 74–90; *EI*², s.v. 'Ibn Hishām' (W. M. Watt); s.v. 'Ibn Isḥāq' (J. Marsden B. Jones); Schoeler 2011: 26–34.

The section of the work provided here comes from the famous account of Abraha's assault on the sanctuary (Arabic *ḥaram*) and the Kaʿba at Mecca (for the dating of this event, see Ch. 3). This narrative seems to have originated— no doubt before Ibn Isḥāq's day—at least in part as an exegetical attempt to understand the meaning of one particularly mysterious chapter of the Qurʾān, *sūra* 105, known as *al-Fīl*, 'The Elephant', to which Ibn Isḥāq explicitly referred at the end of the text selected here. The Qurʾānic chapter alludes to an external attack by 'the people of the elephant' and a battle that had taken place, and to the defeat of that attack with God's help, but offers no more specific information. Muslim scholars came to establish that the attacker was Abraha (who does appear to have conducted several operations in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula to the north of his own kingdom; see **3.24**), that the place he attacked was Mecca, and that the 'people of the elephant' were his army, which included one armed elephant. This narrative thus served several functions: as well as bringing clarity to an otherwise poorly understood Qurʾānic chapter it also consolidated the ideas that Mecca was an inter-regional trade and pilgrimage centre which a powerful Arabian king would desire to control; that Mecca and the Kaʿba had always been, even during the *jāhiliyya*, God's chosen sanctuary to which He would allow no harm to come; and that the Prophet's tribe of Quraysh were the respected guardians of that sanctuary (Ch. 3). Furthermore, the principal Meccan in the account, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib b. Hāshim, is none other than the Prophet's grandfather. If the narrative does reflect a pre-Islamic legend of a South Arabian assault on Mecca, that legend was only preserved and updated because of its usefulness to early Muslim historians and exegetes. An answer to the question of whether Abraha ever led such an assault on Mecca specifically, therefore, awaits further evidence, although that he campaigned in central Arabia does seem clear enough now.[36]

The Naṣrids, the Sasanians, and al-Ḥīra

We move now from Arabia to southern Iraq, to examine material concerned with those groups who dealt with the Sasanian rulers of Iraq and Iran. The focus here is on the most prominent of those groups, the Lakhmids, and the Naṣrid dynasty of al-Ḥīra.

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[36] Kister 1965; Conrad 1987; *EI*[3], s.v. 'Abraha' (U. Rubin); Robin 2012a; Robin 2010c. For a general discussion of the relationship between early Islamic accounts of pre-Islamic Arabia, Qurʾānic exegesis, and salvation history, see Crone 1987: 203–30; cf. Rubin 2003.

The population of al-Ḥīra
[8.18] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.821–2 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 20–2)
[Hishām b. Muḥammad continues]: When Ardashīr[37] conquered Iraq and seized power there, a large part of the Tanūkh (group of tribes) disliked the prospect of remaining in his kingdom and becoming his subjects. Hence those of them belonging to the tribes of Quḍāʿah who had come with Mālik and ʿAmr, the two sons of Fahm, together with Mālik b. Zuhayr and others, went forth and eventually joined with those of Quḍāʿah already in Syria. Now there was a group of the Arabs who were guilty of committing various misdeeds among their own people, or who were becoming reduced by hardship in their daily life to extremities, so that they were moving into the agricultural lands (*rīf*) of Iraq and settling in al-Ḥīrah. [The population of al-Ḥīra] thus comprised three elements. The first element was that of the Tanūkh, who dwelled in shelters and tents of hair and skins on the western banks of the Euphrates, between al-Ḥīrah and al-Anbār and beyond. The second element were the ʿIbād ('devotees'), that is, those who had [originally] settled in al-Ḥīrah and built themselves permanent houses there. The third element were the Aḥlāf ('confederates') who had joined with the people of al-Ḥīrah and settled among them but who belonged neither to the tent-dwelling Tanūkh nor the ʿIbād, who had both submitted to Ardashīr.

Al-Ḥīra in southern Iraq (4.9) near the later Islamic foundation of Kūfa, and whose name may be related to the Syriac *ḥīrtā*, 'camp', was famous among medieval Muslim scholars as the main residence of the Naṣrid clients of the Sasanian kings, and as the principal centre of Arabic literary culture in the pre-Islamic period (see section 'Al-Ḥīra and the Baptism of al-Nuʿmān'). In this extract, al-Ṭabarī and his source, Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī, explain how the town came into being, and discuss the three main elements in its population. Tanūkh were a famous pre-Islamic Arabian tribal confederacy, some members of whom are also reported elsewhere as having been client allies of the Roman empire (cf. 1.10); some of them appear to have fought against the early Muslim armies that invaded Syria and Palestine in the 630s. The ʿIbād were generally considered to have been Christians. Later (not quoted here), al-Ṭabarī mentions the rule of ʿAmr b. ʿAdī b. Naṣr, reputedly the father of Imruʾ al-Qays of the Namāra inscription (pp. 75–6 and 7.3), and later considered to have been the first important 'Naṣrid' king. His rule, al-Ṭabarī suggests, coincided with the late pre-Sasanian and earliest Sasanian kings, and lasted for a period of over 118 years; however, his career might more plausibly be placed in the late third and early fourth centuries.[38]

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[37] Ardashir I, 224/6–42, founder of the Sasanian dynasty.
[38] On the Lakhmids in general, see Rothstein 1899; Kister 1968; Bosworth 1983; Hoyland 2001: 78–83; Fisher 2011a, 64–70, 91–5. For their genealogy, see Caskel 1966: tables 176 and 246. For Tanūkh, see *EI*², s.v. 'Tanūkh' (I. Shahîd); for a ninth-century reconstruction of their genealogy, Caskel 1966: tables 176, 274, 279, and 297–8. On the ʿIbād, see Toral-Niehoff 2010; for al-Ḥīra, see *EI*², s.v. 'al-Ḥīra' (A. F. L. Beeston and I. Shahîd), 4.9, and the discussion at the end of this chapter.

The relationship between the Naṣrids and the Sasanians carried certain expectations, as al-Ṭabarī explains in the following three extracts:

Sasanians and Naṣrids

[**8.19**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.836–7 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 51–2)

Now the lands of the Arabs were the nearest ones to Fārs, and these Arabs were among the most needy of all the nations for something to provide them with daily sustenance and with lands, because of their wretched condition and the harshness of their way of life. So a great horde of them crossed the sea from the region of the lands of ʿAbd al-Qays, al-Baḥrayn, and al-Kāẓimah, until they set up military encampments against [the town of] Abruwān, on the shores that had Ardashīr Khurrah as their hinterland and in the coastlands of Fārs. They seized the local people's herds of cattle, their cultivated lands, and their means of subsistence, and did a great deal of damage in those regions.

[**8.20**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.838–40 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 54–6)

[Shapur II, 309–79] selected one thousand cavalrymen from among the stoutest and most heroic of the troops. He commanded them to go forward and accomplish his design and forbade them to spare any of the Arabs they encountered or to turn aside in order to seize booty. Then he led them forth, and fell upon those Arabs who had threated Fārs as their pasture ground while they were unaware, wrought great slaughter among them, reduced [others of] them to the harshest form of captivity, and put the remainder to flight. Then he crossed the sea at the head of his troops and reached al-Khaṭṭ. He marched through the land of al-Baḥrayn, killing its people, not letting himself be bought off by any kind of payment and not turning aside to plunder. He went back on his tracks and reached Hajar, where there were Bedouins from the tribes of Tamīm, Bakr b. Wāʾil, and ʿAbd al-Qays. He spread general slaughter among them, and shed so much of their blood that it flowed like a torrent swollen by a rainstorm. Those who were able to flee realized that no cave in a mountain nor any island in the sea was going to save them.

After this he turned aside to the lands of the ʿAbd al-Qays and destroyed all the people there except for those who fled into the desert sands. He passed on to al-Yamāmah, where he made general slaughter like that of the previous occasion. He did not pass by any of the local Arabs' springs of water without blocking them up, nor any of their cisterns without filling them in. He approached the neighbourhood of Medina and killed the Arabs whom he found there and took captives. Then he turned aside to the lands of the Bakr and Taghlib, which lie between the land of Persia and the frontier fortresses of the Romans in the land of Syria. He killed the Arabs he found there, took captives, and filled in their water sources. He settled members of the tribe of Taghlib, who were in al-Baḥrayn, at Dārīn and al-Samāhīj, and at al-Khaṭṭ; members of the ʿAbd al-Qays and some groups of the Banū Tamīm in Hajar; and those members of the Bakr b. Wāʾil who were in Kirmān (the so-called Bakr Abān) and those of them from the Banū Ḥanẓalah at al-Ramaliyyah in the province of al-Ahwāz.

[**8.21**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.853 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 79–80)

Hishām has related: This al-Nuʿmān had raided Syria many times and had brought down numerous calamities on its people, taking captives and plunder. He was one of the most violent of kings in inflicting hurt on his enemies and one

of the most effective in penetrating deeply into their lands. The king of Persia had given him two corps of troops, one called Dawsar—these being from Tanūkh—and the other one called al-Shahbāʾ ('the Brightly Gleaming Ones'), these being Persians. These are the two groups known as 'the two tribes.' He used to raid the land of Syria and the Arabs who did not recognize his authority, by means of these troops.

These accounts provide an overview of the main reasons the Sasanians (and the parallel can no doubt extend to the Romans as well) wanted to employ Arab client rulers to defend their desert frontier in southern Iraq against the incursions of others. The group of Arabs who attacked the Sasanian lands in **8.19** were from eastern Arabia: ʿAbd al-Qays were associated with eastern Najd and the Arabian coastline of the Persian Gulf; al-Baḥrayn is the area of the eastern Arabian Peninsula along the Gulf coast roughly down to Abu Dhabi; and al-Kāẓima is in modern Kuwait. The Persian king Shapur II was eventually able to retaliate (**8.41–2** for a Persian view) and subjugated vast sections of the Arabian Peninsula, as far as al-Yamāma (around modern Riyādh) and, apparently, Medina. It is hard to know if Shapur's army really campaigned as far into western Arabia as Medina, or whether this notice reflects the tendency of early Islamic scholars to put famous Islamic cities at the heart of pre-Islamic Arabian affairs. In any case, that Shapur is said to have captured and resettled many Arabs in lands not originally their own fits perfectly well with the known Sasanian propensity to resettle conquered peoples.

Part of the compact between the Persians and Naṣrids also included the expectation that they would take part in raids on Roman territory (Ch. 5). Although al-Ṭabarī's account in **8.21**—illustrating one such raid—suggests that the protagonist was the same al-Nuʿmān (I)[39] who was behind the construction of al-Khawarnaq (see commentary on **8.24**), it is perhaps more likely that it was actually his great-grandson, al-Nuʿmān (II), whose brief career came at the turn of the sixth century (i.e. perhaps the same al-Nuʿmān fighting in Mesopotamia in **5.5–6**). This extract is particularly interesting since we have so little information elsewhere about the composition of the Naṣrid armies who raided the Roman empire with Sasanian encouragement and support: they appear here to have included a mixture of Arab and Persian soldiers. It is significant that the Naṣrid leaders could here call upon outsiders to fight on their behalf. Indeed, Robert Hoyland has noted that it appears that as the Arab ruling clans allied with the great empires of late antiquity became more powerful, they would depend increasingly less upon

[39] Numbers in brackets after the names of Naṣrid rulers follow the list elaborated by Rothstein 1899, and are drawn from the Muslim source tradition. They are offered here as an illustration of the perceived longevity of the Naṣrid line. As noted in the introduction, there is no basis in the pre-Islamic, Graeco-Roman, and Syriac sources for a long unbroken line of kings at al-Ḥīra. See Fisher and Wood forthcoming for further discussion and analysis.

their own tribesmen for military support (cf. **6.12**, where Roman soldiers appear to fight with or under Jafnid command).[40]

The relationship between the Sasanian kings and the Naṣrids was, like that between the Roman empire and the Jafnids, of considerable complexity. An indication of this is given by al-Ṭabarī, who describes how the Sasanian king Bahram V (420–38) was raised at al-Ḥīra, and received support from the Naṣrid al-Mundhir during a civil war. (A Persian perspective on this is provided by **8.46**).

> Bahram V and al-Ḥīra
> [**8.22**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.855 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 82–3)
> It is mentioned that his [Bahrām's] birth took place on Hurmuzd day in the month of Farwardīn at the seventh hour of the day. At the instant of Bahrām's birth, his father Yazdajird[41] summoned all the astrologers who were at his court and ordered them to cast his horoscope and to explain it in such a clear way that what was going to happen to him in the whole of his life would be indicated. They measured the height of the sun and observed the ascension of the stars. Then they informed Yazdajird that God would make Bahrām the heir to his father's royal power, that he would be suckled in a land not inhabited by the Persians, and that it was advisable that he should be brought up outside his own land. Yazdajird had it in mind that he should commit the child for suckling and reading to one of the Romans or Arabs or other non-Persians who were at his court. It now seemed best to Yazdajird to choose the Arabs for reading and bringing him up. Hence he summoned al-Mundhir, b. al-Nuʿmān and he committed to his charge the upbringing of Bahrām. He lavished on al-Mundhir signs of nobility and honour and gave him rule over the Arabs, and he bestowed on him two high ranks, one of them called Rām-abzūd Yazdajird, meaning 'Yazdajird's joy has increased,' and the other called Mihisht, meaning 'chiefest servant.' He also singled him out for presents and robes of honour befitting his high rank, and he ordered al-Mundhir to take Bahrām to the land of the Arabs.
>
> So al-Mundhir went with Bahrām to his dwelling place in the land of the Arabs. He selected for suckling him three women, daughters of the nobles, with healthy bodies, keen intelligence, and acceptable education: two of them from the Arab ladies and one Persian lady. He gave orders for them to be provided with all the clothing, carpets, food, drink, and other items they needed, and they then took turns in suckling him over a period of three years.

In later centuries, Bahram V—who acquired the nickname 'Gūr' (Persian for 'onager')—came to be one of the most famous of the Sasanian kings of Persia, whose tale was told in such works as the *Shāhnāmeh*, 'The Book of Kings', by the great Persian poet Abū al-Qāsim Firdawsī (d. *c.*1020). A part of that tale was his upbringing at the court of the Naṣrid rulers at al-Ḥīra. (The palace of

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[40] See further Kister 1968: 165–8; Shahîd 1989b: 29–30; Hoyland 2009b: 394–5; Hoyland 2014: 270.
[41] Yazdegerd I, 399–420.

al-Khawarnaq (see **8.24**) may have been built for Bahram's stay with the Naṣrids.) The Ḥīran ruler in question is al-Mundhir (I), who ruled *c*.418–62, according to Muslim accounts. It has been suggested that the Naṣrid support for Bahram Gūr's candidacy for the Sasanian throne was part of their attempt to maintain a tricky neutrality between the Zoroastrian Sasanian state officials and the relatively large local Christian population in southern Iraq. That they later helped Bahram inherit his father's throne presumably ensured the Sasanian king's favour for the Naṣrids during his two decades of rule, and al-Mundhir features heavily in accounts of the Roman–Persian war of 420–2 (Ch. 1).[42]

Intertribal rivalries, especially those played out against the background of late antique superpower politics, were common, and feature both in Graeco-Roman sources and in the Arabic histories written later. One of the most prominent of these enmities was the sixth-century intermittent warfare between al-Ḥārith, Jafnid leader *c*.529–69, and al-Mundhir (III), Naṣrid ruler at al-Ḥīra, *c*.504–54. Al-Mundhir's energetic raids into the Roman empire had been the primary reason, reported by Procopius, for Roman support of al-Ḥārith (**5.15**). The Jafnid leader eventually got the better of his enemy, killing him in battle (see **5.23**, **6.12**).

Tensions between Jafnids and Naṣrids
[**8.23**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.958–9 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 252–4)
It is related that there was a peace and a truce between Kisrā Anūsharwān[43] and Yakhṭiyānūs (Justinian), king of the Byzantines. Discord and enmity arose between a man of the Arabs called Khālid b. Jabalah[44] whom Yakhṭiyānūs had appointed over the Arabs of Syria, and a man from Lakhm called al-Mundhir b. al-Nuʿmān whom Kisrā had appointed over the lands extending from ʿUmān, al-Baḥrayn and al-Yamāmah to al-Ṭāʾif and the rest of Ḥijāz and all the Arabs of the intervening lands. Khālid b. Jabalah raided al-Mundhir's territory and wrought great slaughter among his subjects and seized as plunder extensive lands of his. Al-Mundhir laid a complaint about this before Kisrā, and asked him to write to the king of the Byzantines requesting the latter to secure justice for him against Khālid. Kisrā therefore wrote to Yakhṭiyānūs mentioning the agreement regarding the truce and peace between the two sides[45] and informing him of what al-Mundhir, his governor over the Arabs [within the Persian sphere of influence] had suffered at the hands of Khālid b. Jabalah, whom Yakhṭiyānūs had appointed governor over the Arabs within his dominions. He further asked him to command Khālid to return all the plunder he had driven off from al-Mundhir's territory and lands and [to command Khālid] to hand over the blood price for the Arabs whom he had killed and who were in al-Mundhir's jurisdiction and to furnish justice to al-Mundhir against Khālid. Yakhṭiyānūs was not to treat what Kisrā had written lightheartedly and contemptuously; [if he were to do so] then

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[42] Firdawsī, *Shahnameh*, 600–78; Shahîd 1989b: 28–30; Fisher 2011a: 67–8.
[43] Khusrau I.   [44] Al-Ḥārith.   [45] The 'Eternal Peace' of 532. See Ch. 5.

this would be the cause of the rupturing of the agreement and truce between them. Kisrā sent a stream of letters to Yakhṭiyānūs urging him to furnish justice to al-Mundhir, but Yakhṭiyānūs paid no heed.

Al-Ṭabarī here provides a version of how the rivalry between the Jafnids and Naṣrids resulted in 540 in the breaking, after only eight years, of the so-called 'Eternal Peace' (see **5.21** and, for a Persian account from the *Shāhnāmeh*, **8.45**). The Jafnid ruler here called Khālid b. Jabala is more properly known as al-Ḥārith b. Jabala; Theodor Nöldeke suggested how the ambiguities of the Middle Persian Pahlavi script could have resulted in 'al-Ḥārith' being rendered as 'Khālid', and in the form here of the name Justinian, 'Yakhṭiyānūs'; this in turn suggests that either al-Ṭabarī or his informants had access to a Middle Persian source. The Naṣrid ruler is, as mentioned above, al-Mundhir (III), whose time in office witnessed one of the greatest expansions of Ḥīran, and thus Sasanian, control over Arabia. Al-Ṭabarī's note that al-Mundhir had been given control (in theory at least) of much of the Arabian Peninsula would provide a reason for another intertribal rivalry, the intense hostility in the early sixth century between the Naṣrids and the Ḥujrids under al-Ḥārith b. ʿAmr b. Ḥujr. Given the possibility of a Persian source, it is conceivable that al-Ṭabarī's account reflects the Persian version of events. Another indicator of this may be the fact that whereas al-Ṭabarī's version has the Roman client ruler al-Ḥārith/ Khālid as the original aggressor, Procopius (**5.21**) suggests that al-Mundhir was seeking to start a war at his Sasanian master's request.[46]

As indicated in Ch. 4, there is a small amount of archaeological evidence for the construction of buildings by the Arab clients of both empires. Al-Ṭabarī provides a perspective on one of the most celebrated constructions connected to the Naṣrids of al-Ḥīra, al-Khawarnaq (**4.10**):

The palace of al-Khawarnaq
[**8.24**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.850–1 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 74–6)
When ʿAmr b. Imriʾ al-Qays al-Badʾ b. ʿAmr b. ʿAdī died during the time of Sābūr, the latter appointed to his office Aws b. Qal(l)ām, according to Hishām [Ibn al-Kalbī]; Aws was one of the Amalekites, from the tribe of ʿAmr b. ʿAmalīq (or ʿImlīq). But Jaḥjaba b. ʿAtīk b. Lakhm rose up against him and killed him, Aws having reigned for five years. His death fell in the time of Bahrām, son of Sābūr Dhū al-Aktāf.[47] There was appointed to succeed him in the office Imruʾ al-Qays al-Badʾ, the son of ʿAmr b. Imriʾ al-Qays [al-Badʾ] (?) b. ʿAmr, [who ruled for] twenty-five years; he died in the time of Yazdajird the Sinful One.[48] The latter appointed in his stead his son al-Nuʿmān b. Imriʾ al-Qays al-Badʾ b. ʿAmr b.

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[46] See comments by Nöldeke in his translation of al-Ṭabarī (= *Geschichte der Perser und Araber*), 238, nn. 2–3; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 209–18; Fisher 2011a: 116–17. On the extent of the Sasanian reach into the Arabian Peninsula, in part through the Naṣrids, even as far as Medina, see Kister 1968: 145–9; Bosworth 1983: 600–1; Lecker 2002.

[47] Bahram IV, 388–99, son of Shapur II, 309–79.   [48] Yazdegerd I, 399–420.

Imriʾ al-Qays al-Badʾ b. ʿAmr b. ʿAdī, whose mother was Shaqīqah, daughter of Rabīʿah b. Dhuhl b. Shaybān, [al-Nuʿmān being] the rider of [the celebrated horse] Ḥalīmah and the builder of al-Khawarnaq.

The reason for his building al-Khawarnaq, according to what has been mentioned, was that Yazdajird the Sinful One the son of Bahrām the Kirmān-Shāh, son of Sābūr Dhū al-Aktāf, had [at that time] no surviving son. Hence he made enquiries concerning a spot that was healthy and free from diseases and maladies. As a result, he was directed to the elevated region of al-Ḥīrah, and he sent his [subsequently born] son Bahrām Jūr[49] to this al-Nuʿmān, ordering the latter to build al-Khawarnaq as a residence for him. He made him reside there, and instructed him to send out Bahrām Jūr into the deserts of the Arabs. The actual builder of al-Khawarnaq was a man called Sinnimār. When Sinnimār had completed its construction, people were amazed at its beauty and the perfection of its workmanship. Sinnimār, however, commented, 'If I had believed that you (sc. al-Nuʿmān) would pay me the whole of my due and would have treated me as I deserve, I would have constructed a building which would have gone round with the sun, wherever it went in its course.' The king then exclaimed, 'So you could have built something more splendid than this, yet you didn't do it?' and he ordered him to be thrown down from the top of al-Khawarnaq.

The brief headship of the 'Amalekite' Aws b. Qal(l)ām in the late fourth century seems to have been the first break in the Naṣrid supremacy over al-Ḥīra. The Amalekites were a people famous from the accounts of the Israelites in the Bible, and many Muslim commentators associated them with northwest Arabia, although of course the biblical Amalekites had died out long before Aws b. Qal(l)ām's birth. Al-Khawarnaq was reputedly the palace of the Naṣrid rulers, to the east of al-Ḥīra, and its fame was extensive among early Muslim historians of pre-Islamic Arabia. The account here has it constructed by al-Nuʿmān (I), who probably reigned during the first two decades of the fifth century. Nothing further is known about the Sinnimār who is said to have led the construction of al-Khawarnaq, nor can the historicity of the suggestion that it was built originally for Bahram Gūr be verified.[50]

Eventually, the alliance between the Sasanians and the Naṣrids came to an end, not long after the dissolution of Rome's agreement with the Jafnids. As noted in Ch. 5 (**5.31–2, 5.35**) and Ch. 6 (**6.25–7**), there is a range of reasons why both empires removed their clients. Here al-Ṭabarī provides his own version of the fate of the Naṣrids and its consequence (cf. **8.44**), in a lengthy discussion concerned with the relationship between the final Naṣrid leader al-Nuʿmān, and his patron, 'Kisrā', that is, Khusrau II Parvez (590–628). Excerpts from this narrative are offered here.

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[49] Bahram V 'Gūr', 420–38, son of Yazdegerd.   [50] See **4.10**.

al-Nuʿmān and Khusrau II

[**8.25**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.1018 (trans. Bosworth, p. 343)

When al-Nuʿmān went into Kisrā's presence, the latter perceived an ugly and ill-favoured person. Nevertheless, when Kisrā addressed him and asked, 'Can you control the Arabs for me?' he answered 'Yes!' Kisrā asked, 'How will you deal with your brethren?' Al-Nuʿmān replied [mockingly], 'If I can't cope with them, then I can't cope with anyone!' Kisrā thereupon appointed him ruler, gave him robes of honour and a crown valued at sixty thousand dirhams and set with pearls and gold.

Al-Nuʿmān soured his relationship with Khusrau by imprisoning the famous poet ʿAdī b. Zayd, favoured by the king. While in prison, ʿAdī b. Zayd composed poems, with many of them understood by later commentators as intended to mock al-Nuʿmān and his family. In one example, he refers to a successful raid on al-Ḥīra by the Jafnid al-Mundhir.[51]

Finally al-Nuʿmān realized that Khusrau II had taken the side of ʿAdī b. Zayd in this dispute, and, to save his position, engaged in deceit:

[**8.26**] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.1024 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 350–1)

Meanwhile, someone went along to al-Nuʿmān to let him know what was happening. This person came to al-Nuʿmān and told him, 'Kisrā's envoy has been to visit ʿAdī, and is going to bring ʿAdī with him. If he does that, he will not spare any of us, neither yourself or anyone else.' Al-Nuʿmān thereupon sent ʿAdī's enemies to him, and they smothered him till he died, and then buried him. The envoy came into al-Nuʿmān's presence with the letter. Al-Nuʿmān hailed him with the words 'Good fortune and welcome!' and sent him four thousand mithqāls [coins] and a slave girl, saying to him, 'When you go along to ʿAdī the next morning, go in to him and bring him back personally.' But when the envoy rode out to there next morning and entered the prison, the guards told him, 'He has already been dead for several days, we didn't, however, dare to tell the king out of fear of him, since we knew that he did not desire ʿAdī's death.' The envoy returned to al-Nuʿmān and said, 'I went into his presence [yesterday] and he was still alive!' Al-Nuʿmān told him, 'The king sends you to me, and you go to ʿAdī before me? You're lying, and you're only seeking bribe money and stirring up mischief!' He threatened him but then gave him increased largesse and marks of favour, and extracted a promise from him that he would merely tell Kisrā that ʿAdī had died before he could go to him. So the envoy returned to Kisrā and informed him that ʿAdī had died before he could get access to him. Al-Nuʿmān was filled with remorse at ʿAdī's death, but ʿAdī's enemies behaved menacingly towards him, and he was violently afraid of them.

ʿAdī's son, Zayd, now took over his father's role at the court of Khusrau II. He courted the Sasanian king's favour, and when Khusrau was looking for a concubine, Zayd shrewdly suggested considering the women of the house of

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[51] Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.1021.

al-Mundhir at al-Ḥīra. Zayd insinuated himself into this mission, and when al-Nuʿmān refused to provide Khusrau with the kind of woman he was looking for, he was ordered to tell the Sasanian monarch that no such woman existed at al-Ḥīra—the implication being, of course, that al-Nuʿmān did not want to obey the king. Seeking his revenge, Zayd persuaded his companion, a royal envoy, to tell Khusrau that al-Nuʿmān had uttered, 'Hasn't [Khusrau] got enough [women] from the wild cows of the Sawād without seeking after what we ourselves have?'[52] The end result was, of course, predictable, especially once news of Khusrau's anger reached al-Ḥīra.

[**8.27**] al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* 1.1027–9 (trans. Bosworth, pp. 355–8)
Kisrā then remained silent regarding this topic for several months. Al-Nuʿmān, meanwhile, was preparing for whatever might befall and was expecting [the worst], when Kisrā's letter reached him [containing the command]: 'Come here, for the king has business with you!' He set off when the king's letter reached him, taking with him his weapons and whatever else he was able [to carry]. He arrived at the two mountains of Ṭayyiʾ[53] [. . .] Al-Nuʿmān made for the land of the Ṭayyiʾ, hoping that they would take him in among themselves and protect him, but they refused to do this [. . .] Al-Nuʿmān went onward, but no one would receive him except for the Banū Rawāḥah b. Saʿd from the Banū ʿAbs, who said, 'We will fight at your side, if you wish' [. . .] However, he[54] replied, 'I don't want to bring about your destruction, for you don't have the strength to prevail over Kisrā.' So he travelled onward until he encamped secretly at Dhū Qār amongst the Banū Shaybān. Here he met Hāniʾ b. Masʿūd b. ʿĀmir b. ʿAmr b. Abī Rabīʾah b. Dhuhl b. Shaybān, who was a mighty chief. At that time, the sheikhly rule in Rabīʾah was among the house of Dhū al-Jaddayn, held by Qays b. Masʿūd b. Qays b. Khālid b. Dhī al-Jaddayn. Kisrā had made a grant to Qays b. Masʿūd of al-Ubullah, hence al-Nuʿmān was fearful of entrusting his family and dependents to him because of that fact; whereas, he knew that Hāniʾ would protect him as he would his own life.

Al-Nuʿmān then (i.e. after leaving his family and dependents with Hāniʾ) proceeded toward Kisrā's court. On the stone bridge of Sābāṭ he met Zayd b. ʿAdī[55] who said to him, 'Save yourself, [if you can,] O Little Nuʿmān (Nuʿaym)!' Al-Nuʿmān replied, 'You have done this, O Zayd, but by God, if I manage to survive, I shall do with you what I did with your father!' Zayd told him, 'Go on, Little Nuʿmān, for by God, I have prepared for you at Kisrā's court bonds to hobble your feet which even a high-spirited colt couldn't break!' When the news of his arrival at court reached Kisrā, the latter sent guards to him who put him in fetters, and he consigned him to Khāniqīn. There he remained in gaol until an outbreak of plague occurred and he died in prison. People think that he died at Sābāṭ on account of a verse by al-Aʿshā,

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[52] Al-Ṭabarī, 1.1027, trans. Bosworth p. 355. Cf. **5.35**.
[53] According to Bosworth, p. 355 n. 846, this is the Jabal Shammar, near Ḥāʾil.
[54] Al-Nuʿmān.   [55] The son of the dead poet.

It happened thus, and he was not able to save his master (i.e. al-Nuʿmān, the master of the noble steed addressed in the preceding verses) from death at Sābāṭ, dying while he was incarcerated.

In fact, he died at Khāniqīn, just a short while before the coming of Islam. Soon afterward, God sent His prophet; al-Nuʿmān's fate was the cause of the battle of Dhū Qār.

Al-Ṭabarī here provides a romanticized account of the causes and course of the Battle of Dhū Qār, which saw an Arab army of various subgroups of Bakr b. Wāʾil defeat a Sasanian army (which also included some Arabs of other tribes) in the field. Although this battle may have been relatively insignificant at the time, in subsequent centuries it became one of the most famous of the so-called 'battle days of the Arabs' (*ayyām al-ʿarab*). Like many *ayyām al-ʿarab* accounts (see also, for example, the excerpt from Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, **8.34**), al-Ṭabarī's narrative of Dhū Qār presents an elaborate background story leading up to the battle itself. This background story is particularly interesting, since it also covers the relatively abrupt end to the Naṣrid alliance with the Sasanians, and hints at the disastrous effects which could befall an empire not protected from tribal raids by Arab clients of its own. In this sense, the narrative of Dhū Qār also helped to explain the background to the success of the permanent Arab-Islamic conquest of Iraq and Iran in the 630s–50s. Abū ʿUbayda Maʿmar b. Muthannā (d. 824), one of al-Ṭabarī's stated sources for this section, was a very famous Arabic philologist particularly associated with the collection of *ayyām al-ʿarab* narratives.[56]

Dhū Qār was south of the later site of Kūfa and near the Euphrates river. No precise date is offered for the battle, but since the final Naṣrid ruler referred to in the account, al-Nuʿmān, died in c.602, it presumably took place shortly thereafter.[57] ʿAdī b. Zayd, whose death at the hands of al-Nuʿmān is said here to have helped to bring about the end of the Naṣrid–Sasanian partnership, was an extremely famous Christian Tamīmī Arab Sasanian bureaucrat and poet of al-Ḥīra. His biography and some of his poetry were preserved by transmitters and collectors of the Islamic period; his use of the *ubi sunt* motif (the nostalgic and moralizing discussion of now gone but previously powerful peoples) is well known, and his 20-line account of Creation and the fall of Adam and Eve is particularly worth mentioning.[58]

The Naṣrid leaders seem to have remained pagan until the conversion of al-Nuʿmān (**6.41** and **8.40**). It is unlikely that his religious choice was the primary cause of his demise, or that of the Naṣrids in general. Al-Nuʿmān's reported

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[56] On Abū ʿUbayda, see Madelung 1992; Lecker 1995.

[57] On the fall of the Nasrids and Dhū Qār, see with further references Bosworth 1983: 607–8; Donner 1980; Hoyland 2001: 30; Fisher 2011a: 184–6.

[58] On ʿAdī b. Zayd, see Horovitz 1930; Toral-Niehoff 2008; Dmitriev 2010; *EI*³, s.v. ''Adī b. Zayd' (T. Seidensticker).

adoption of Christianity does, however, reflect the wider Christian world of which al-Ḥīra was a part (Ch. 6). A later tradition, examined here, preserves the memory of a monastery at al-Ḥīra directly connected to the Naṣrids themselves, offering further testimony to the relationship between the leaders of al-Ḥīra, and Christians in the Persian empire:

Hind the Elder
[8.28] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam* 2, p. 709 (trans. Munt (prose) and Talib 2013: 141–2 (poem))
The monastery of Hind the elder, also in al-Ḥīra. It was built by Hind, the mother of ʿAmr b. Hind, who is Hind bt. al-Ḥārith b. ʿAmr b. Ḥujr Ākil al-Murār al-Kindī. In its main part is inscribed:

Hind bt. al-Ḥārith b. ʿAmr b. Ḥujr, the queen, the daughter of kings, the mother of the king ʿAmr b. al-Mundhir, handmaid of the Messiah, mother of His servant and daughter of His servants, built this church during the reign of the king of kings Khusraw Anushirvan, in the time of Mar Ephrem the bishop. May the God for whom she built this monastery forgive her sin and have mercy upon her and upon her descendants, and bring her and her people under His true protection. May God be with her and with her descendants for ever and ever.

ʿAbd Allāh b. Mālik al-Khuzāʿī said: I entered [the monastery] with Yaḥyā b. Khālid when we set out with al-Rashīd for al-Ḥīra. We had intended to take a walk around there and to see the remains of al-Mundhir. He [i.e. al-Rashīd] entered the monastery of Hind the younger and saw the remains of the grave of al-Nuʿmān together with hers alongside. Then he left for the monastery of Hind the elder, which is at the edge of Najaf. He saw something written on the side of its walls, and so called for a ladder and ordered that it be read out. [The following] was written there:

1   The line of al-Mundhir has come to nought
     Where once the monks raised churches.
     Perfumed behind the ears with musk
     And amber one would mix with wine,
     Silk and linen were their robes;
     No one could make them wear wool.
     Glory and kingship were their due,
     And wine strained through cloth.
     Lo but they've faded and no one asks them
10   For charity anymore; the timid no longer dread.
     It's as if they were only a toy—
     Where has the rider taken them to?
     They've become—after once being blessed—
     like all other ordinary men.
     The one who outlives them has it worst of all,
     He's helpless and put upon; his fortune run out.

He cried until tears flowed into his beard and said, 'Yes, that is the way of this world and those who inhabit it.'

Yāqūt b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Rūmī (d. 1229) was originally from Anatolia before he was captured and sold as a slave at Baghdad. After his manumission he travelled widely throughout the eastern Islamic world, but then fled back west after the initial Mongol invasion of 1219. His *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 'Encyclopaedia of Lands', is an alphabetically organized dictionary of toponyms.[59]

This passage is the entry from the *Muʿjam* on the 'Monastery of Hind the Elder' (*Dayr Hind al-Kubrā*). This is not to be confused with the more famous 'Monastery of Hind the Younger' (*Dayr Hind al-Ṣughrā*), built by the daughter (or, according to some sources, the sister) of the last Naṣrid ruler al-Nuʿmān (**6.42–3**) and into which she is said to have retired later in life as a recluse. In later tradition, Hind the Elder was the great-granddaughter of Ḥujr b. ʿAmr, the first of the Ḥujrid rulers from Kinda, and she reportedly married the Naṣrid ruler of al-Ḥīra, al-Mundhir (III, 504–54). Hind was the mother of al-Mundhir's son and successor, ʿAmr (Ar. ʿAmr b. Hind; Gr. Ambrus, 554–69). Yāqūt's entry on the Monastery of Hind the Elder is particularly interesting since it provides what is claimed to be the text of its foundation inscription. (A very slightly different text of this inscription is also provided by Abū ʿUbayd al-Bakrī, who died in 1094.[60]) According to this inscription, the monastery would have been built sometime during the 15-year rule of Hind's son ʿAmr. The bishop Ephrem mentioned in the inscription is usually presumed to have been a bishop of al-Ḥīra. If the account of Hind's foundation of the monastery and the text of the inscription is genuine, then it perhaps suggests a closer relationship between the Naṣrids and Christianity in the mid-sixth century than might be assumed: the inscription does explicitly refer to ʿAmr as a servant of the Messiah, although this need not necessarily be read literally.[61] (See **8.44** for a Persian mention of the *Dayr Hind al-Kubrā*.)

In any case, the historicity of the inscription can hardly be taken for granted, even if there are no immediate grounds for rejecting it. As the story in Yāqūt's text that follows of the trip undertaken by the ʿAbbāsid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (786–809) in the company of the Barmakid vizier Yaḥyā b. Khālid to the monasteries of the two Hinds, and the subsequent discovery of a poetic *ubi sunt* inscription, demonstrates, al-Ḥīra, its adornments, and its fall loomed large in the memory of ʿAbbāsid-era scholars and rulers, and they were keen to fashion a memory of the city's lost but impressive pre-Islamic

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[59] *EI*², s.v. 'Yāḳūt al-Rūmī' (C. Gilliot).

[60] al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam mā istaʿjama*, vol. 2, 606–7.

[61] On the Monastery of Hind the Younger, see, for example, Rothstein 1899: 23, 125; for a Christian Arabic account of its foundation, see *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 13, 442). On the Monastery of Hind the Elder, and this foundation inscription, see Rothstein 1899: 23, 24, 139; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 156; Fisher 2011a: 69, 149. That this appears to be the only reference to a bishop Ephrem of al-Ḥīra, see Fiey 1993: 90.

history, one which in their mind showed the heights to which Arab civilization could reach.[62]

The Jafnids in Muslim Sources

The Jafnids are the most visible of Rome's Arab allies in Graeco-Roman sources, but the individual leaders, and the tribe from which they originated, Ghassān, also feature in later Muslim accounts of the pre-Islamic period.

> Rome and Ghassān forge an alliance
> [**8.29**] Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, p. 370 (trans. Hoyland 2001: 239–40)
> [The tribe of] Salīḥ would tax those of Muḍar and other Arab tribes who settled in their territory on behalf of the Byzantines. Ghassān approached in a great multitude heading for Syria and then settled in it. Salīḥ said to them: 'If you agree to pay the tax you can stay, if not we will fight you.' Ghassān refused and so Salīḥ fought and defeated them . . . the chief of Ghassān at that time was Thaʿlaba ibn ʿAmr . . . Then Ghassān accepted to pay the tax to them. They would tax them one, one and a half, or two dinars per head annually according to their rank. They continued to tax them until Jidhʿ ibn ʿAmr of Ghassān killed the tax-collector of Salīḥ . . . Then Salīḥ called one another to arms, as did Ghassān, and they engaged at a place called Muḥaffaf, and Ghassān destroyed them. The king of the Byzantines feared that they would side with Iran against him, so he sent to Thaʿlaba saying: 'You are a very courageous and numerous people and you have destroyed the tribe who were the most vigorous and numerous of the Arabs. I now appoint you in their place and shall write an agreement between us and you: if a raiding party of Arabs raid you I will support you with 40,000 armed Roman soldiers, and if a raiding party of Arabs raid us then you must provide 20,000 soldiers, and you must not interfere between us and the Iranians.'

Ibn Ḥabīb here explains how it was that the Jafnids and Ghassān came to be the main Arab client allies of the Roman empire. On the whole the Arabic prose sources have less to tell us about the Jafnids and Ghassān of Syria than they do about the Naṣrids of southern Iraq. The tribal grouping known as Ghassān was thought by early Muslim scholars to have originated in South Arabia and then migrated to the north (cf. **8.1–4**).[63] Most Arabic accounts explain that Ghassān was not a person, but was the name of a watering hole around which this group settled, and based their collective identity. The version of events which Ibn Ḥabīb provides here is a fairly common story across early Arabic histories of pre-Islamic Arabia, although some of the names can vary between the accounts. Salīḥ may have served the Romans as

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[62] On the ʿAbbāsid-era memory of al-Ḥīra and its Naṣrid rulers, see Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 392–403; Talib 2013, and the further discussion on al-Ḥīra, below.
[63] Hoyland 2009b: 376.

the latter's principal Arab client allies during the fifth century until their replacement by the Jafnids in the early sixth. The precise location of al-Muḥaffaf, the site of the final confrontation between Ghassān and Salīḥ, according to the Arabic accounts, is unknown, although it was probably somewhere near Bostra, as al-Yaʿqūbī implies (**8.30**). The reports in non-Arabic sources of a flurry of conflicts and treaties in about 497–500 (see **5.2–4**) might reflect the same events described here.[64]

Another source, al-Yaʿqūbī, preserves a story of the emergence of Ghassān:

[**8.30**] al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh* 1, pp. 234–6 (trans. Munt)
Quḍāʿa were the first Arabs to come to Syria. They came to the Roman emperors who established them as kings. The first king was Tanūkh b. Mālik b. Fahm b. Taym Allāh b. al-Asad b. Wabara b. Taghlib b. Ḥulwān b. ʿImrān b. al-Ḥāf b. Quḍāʿa. They became Christians and so the Roman emperor established them as kings over the Arabs in Syria. The first of them to reign was al-Nuʿmān b. ʿAmr b. Mālik. Then the Banū Salīḥ, i.e. the Banū Salīḥ b. Ḥulwān b. ʿImrān b. al-Ḥāf b. Quḍāʿa, overthrew them. The Banū Salīḥ were then established over all that for a time.

When the Azd dispersed, and some of them came to Tihāma and others to Yathrib, Oman and other lands, Ghassān came to Syria and arrived in the land of the Balqāʾ. They asked Salīḥ that they be allowed to join them in obedience to the Roman emperor, to establish themselves in the land and to share in all that they had [from the Romans]. So the chief of Salīḥ, who was at that time Duhmān b. al-ʿAmlaq, wrote to the Roman emperor, who was at that time Nūshir [Anastasius?] and who resided in Antioch. He gave his consent to them and imposed certain conditions upon them. And so they were established.

Then a quarrel came to pass between them and the Roman emperor, caused by the tribute which the Roman emperor took and which led a man of Ghassān, called Jidhʿ, to strike one of the Roman emperor's men with his sword and kill him. Someone said, 'Take from Jidhʿ what he gave you', and that has become proverbial. So the ruler of the Romans waged war against them. They stayed fighting him for a while in Bostra in the region of Damascus, but then they withdrew to al-Muḥaffaf. When the Roman emperor came to understand their patience in war and their ability to match his armies, he loathed that a breach would arise between them. The people [i.e. the Arabs] sought a peace accord on the condition that they never have a king over them who was not one of them, and the Roman emperor agreed to that. He established as king over them Jafna b. ʿAliyya b. ʿAmr b. ʿĀmir and set right what was between them and the Romans. Their affairs thus became one.

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[64] On the Jafnids and Rome's other 'Arab' client tribes in general, see *EI²*, s.vv. 'Ghassān' and 'Salīḥ' (I. Shahîd); Shahîd 1984b; Shahîd 1989b; Shahîd 1995–2010; Whittow 1999; Hoyland 2001: 78–83; Hoyland 2009b; Fisher 2011a. On the fall of Salīḥ and the rise of Ghassān, see especially Shahîd 1989b: 282–9; Fisher 2011a: 95–6. For one ninth-century Muslim's reconstruction of the genealogies of Ghassān and Salīḥ, see Caskel 1966: tables 176, 193, 274, and 326. For a more detailed study of the treatment of one Jafnid leader in medieval Arabic sources, see Bray 2010.

Al-Yaʿqūbī later hints at the establishment of the Jafnids in Syria, and adds, in a different work, that this was an arrangement of some permanence, noting that 'Damascus was the residence of the kings of Ghassān, and there are many traces there of the family of Jafna.'[65]

Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Abī Yaʿqūb, known as al-Yaʿqūbī, was born in Baghdad but eventually settled in Egypt where he died after 905. His *Taʾrīkh* is an Arabic universal history, one of the oldest to have survived. The second volume deals with Islamic history, but the first dealt in often considerable detail with pre-Islamic peoples and dynasties. His *Buldān* is a geographical work, and much of the information it contains is perhaps based upon his own travels and career as a bureaucrat. He is often said to have been a Shīʿī, although quite how accurate this label is, and how his doctrinal beliefs impacted upon his work, are as yet poorly understood.[66]

This extract from al-Yaʿqūbī's *Taʾrīkh* offers another account of how it was believed that Ghassān came to replace Salīḥ as the Romans' most important client allies in Syria. In many respects it supports that provided by Ibn Ḥabīb, above, but also adds some more detail. For example, it provides the note that before Salīḥ came to power, the Romans had recognised the supremacy of another group, albeit one from the same Quḍāʿa confederacy as Salīḥ, namely Tanūkh. The brief mention here of Tanūkh includes the suggestion that conversion to Christianity was an important step in becoming recognised allies of the Romans, a supposition supported by the sources discussed in Ch. 6. Al-Yaʿqūbī notes that Ghassān migrated north as part of the general migration of South Arabian tribes ('the Azd') to the north, and then that they overthrew Salīḥ, ultimately because of a revenue dispute, perhaps during the reign of the Emperor Anastasius. While the specifics of these narratives cannot be verified, it is of interest that the general situation they describe resembles that preserved in Graeco-Roman sources which discuss the disturbances in northern Arabia at the end of the fifth century (5.2–4).

Later (not quoted) al-Yaʿqūbī provides a list of the rulers of Ghassān. There, he does not mention Thaʿlaba b. ʿAmr, whom Ibn Ḥabīb had play a key role, and although he has the first Jafnid 'king' as the eponymous Jafna, he notes that the latter's successor was actually only a rather distant relative, al-Ḥārith b. Mālik, who was of the Khazraj (a tribe much more prominently associated with Medina) and therefore not strictly speaking a 'Jafnid'. In any case, however, the names and genealogies provided by al-Yaʿqūbī for most of the Jafnid kings he mentions do not agree with those provided by many other medieval Muslim scholars, and where there is no external evidence it is difficult to check if any one version is correct.

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[65]   Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Buldān*, p. 326 (trans. Munt).
[66]   *EI*², s.v. 'al-Yaʿḳūbī' (M. Qasim Zaman); Daniel 2004.

Al-Yaʿqūbī's works provide some quite specific topographical information for the main areas in which the Jafnids held sway. He states that the residential centre of some of the family was Damascus itself, and, elsewhere, he suggests that the principal power base of the Jafnids was around Damascus and Bostra, the Balqāʾ and the Golan. By associating different Jafnid individuals with such a variety of locations, al-Yaʿqūbī suggests that at times the area under Jafnid control could be divided between members of the ruling family.

Another prominent source for the Jafnids is Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī. Here we offer some brief excerpts from his *Taʾrīkh* covering the activities of individual Jafnids. (This excerpt is divided into six parts for ease of cross-referencing.)

> The Jafnid dynasty
> [**8.31a–f**] Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *Taʾrīkh*, pp. 117–21 (trans. Munt, excerpts; see Ch. 4)
> a. *ʿAmr b. Jafna.* After him [i.e. Jafna] ʿAmr b. Jafna reigned for five years. He built several monasteries, including Dayr Ḥālī, Dayr Ayyūb and Dayr Hunād . . .
> b. *Jabala b. al-Ḥārith.* After him [i.e. al-Ḥārith b. Thaʿlaba] his son Jabala b. al-Ḥārith reigned for ten years. During his reign he built al-Qanāṭir, Adraj [*sic*; Adhruḥ?], and al-Qasṭal.
> c. *al-Ḥārith b. Jabala.* After him his son al-Ḥārith b. Jabala reigned. His mother was Māriya Dhāt al-Qurṭayn ('she of two earrings') bt. ʿAmr b. Jafna. He resided in al-Balqāʾ and built there al-Ḥafīr and his stronghold between Daʿjān, Qaṣr Ubayr and Maʿān. He reigned for ten years . . .
> d. *ʿAmr b. al-Ḥārith.* After him [i.e. al-Ayham b. al-Ḥārith] his brother ʿAmr b. al-Ḥārith b. Māriya reigned. He took up residence at al-Sadīr and built Qaṣr al-Faḍā, Ṣafāt al-ʿAjalāt, and Qaṣr Manār. Then he died having reigned for twenty-six years and two months . . .
> e. *al-Nuʿmān b. al-Ḥārith.* After him [i.e. Jafna the Younger] al-Nuʿmān b. al-Ḥārith reigned. He restored the cisterns of al-Ruṣāfa which one of the kings of Lakhm had destroyed. He reigned for eighteen years . . .
> f. *al-Ayham b. Jabala.* After him [i.e. al-Nuʿmān b. al-Ḥārith] al-Ayham b. Jabala b. al-Ḥārith b. Abī Shimr reigned for twenty-seven years and two months. He was the lord of Tadmur, Qaṣr Birka, Dhāt Anmār, and the place between the 'two graves', Jisr and ʿĀmila.

Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī was a native of Iṣfahān in Persia and the author of, among other works, the *Taʾrīkh sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa-al-anbiyāʾ*, a book on the chronology of pre-Islamic dynasties and the Islamic period in ten sections. Three of these sections were devoted to the Jafnids, Naṣrids, and Ḥujrids. Although he wrote in Arabic (as was usual in his time), he apparently held very strong pro-Persian, anti-Arab views, and this suggestion is to some extent supported by material in his chronological history. He died no earlier than 961.[67]

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[67] *EI²*, s.v. 'Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī' (F. Rosenthal). Peacock 2012: 6265.

Ḥamza's brief chapter on the Jafnids is particularly interesting since he lists there a number of building works attributed to that family. Although this cannot be read as a simple list of historical Jafnid architectural patronage (see Ch. 4), it is interesting that the family of Jafna remained associated with buildings in the Syrian steppe for centuries after the demise of Jabala b. al-Ayham, their last 'king'. Some of the Jafnid 'kings' mentioned are well known from other sources, but others are not. Irfan Shahîd has suggested that Ḥamza's main source for this section was a work entitled the *Akhbār mulūk Ghassān*, 'Reports about the Kings of Ghassān', which may have been written in the Umayyad period, but there is no good evidence for any of these premises. Suspicion regarding the historical accuracy of Ḥamza's account is bolstered by the fact that it mentions 32 Jafnid rulers over a period of 616 years, which is a considerable leap from the handful of individuals visible over a period of roughly a century and a quarter in sixth- and seventh-century Graeco-Roman and Syriac sources. The chronology is further confused by the fact that Ḥamza too appears to have had the Jafnids enter into their initial treaty with the Romans only during the reign of Anastasius.[68]

Graeco-Roman sources are largely silent on the buildings associated with the Jafnids, and, indeed, on any sort of settled society which may have existed. As we have seen, Muslim sources offer a more detailed view, such as here:

The opulence of the Jafnid court
[**8.32**] Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* 17.166–7 (trans. Hoyland 2001: 241)
I [an observer at the Jafnid court] have seen ten singing-girls, five of them Byzantines, singing Greek songs to the music of lutes, and five from Hira who had been presented to [the Jafnid] king Jabala by [the chief of Tayyiʾ] Iyas ib Qabisa, chanting Babylonian melodies. Arab singers used to come from Mecca and elsewhere for his delight. And when he would drink wine he sat on a couch of myrtle and jasmine and all sorts of sweet-smelling flowers, surrounded by gold and silver vessels full of ambergris and musk. During winter aloes-wood was burned in his apartments while in summer he cooled himself with snow. Both he and his courtiers wore only light, single garments in the hot weather and fenek fur or the like in the cold season. And by God I was never in his company but he gave me the robe which he was wearing on that day, and many of his friends were thus honoured. He treated the rude with forbearance; he laughed without reserve and lavished his gifts before they were sought.

Abū al-Faraj ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Iṣfahānī was born and spent most of his life in Iraq, and died around 972. He is credited with the composition of about 25 works, which dealt mainly with history, genealogy, literature, and music. His *magnum opus* is the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* ('Book of Songs'), one modern edition of

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[68] For a positivist discussion of Ḥamza's material on the Ghassānids, and his possible use of the so-called *Akhbār mulūk Ghassān* as a source, see Shahîd 1995–2012, vol. 2: 306–41, 364–74.

which runs to 24 volumes. As its title suggests, the work deals principally with songs and their composers, and with the poems which gave these songs their lyrics and their poets. As part of this, it offers an abundant wealth of information on literary, musical, and historical subjects from pre-Islamic Arabia to ʿAbbāsid Iraq.[69]

This extract from the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* presents what is claimed to be a first-hand report of the luxuries of the court of Jabala b. al-Ayham. Medieval Muslim scholars often presented the Jafnid and Naṣrid rulers as enthusiastic patrons of culture and the arts at their courts, especially of those such as poetry that could be connected to the rise of the Arabic language. Al-Ḥīra was particularly famous for its poets and singers, as was Mecca during the first two Islamic centuries, and this report connects the Jafnids with the prominence of those two centres. Some of this pre-Islamic court poetry has survived (see section 'Pre-Islamic poetry') and there can be little doubt that to some extent this picture of the luxuriousness and culture of the pre-Islamic Arab courts reflects a certain reality; after all, their Roman and Sasanian imperial masters provided a clear model for imitation in this respect. It is, however, worth bearing in mind that there may be some exaggeration involved in such accounts, as part of an attempt to highlight the cultural feats of pre-Islamic Arabia and its inhabitants, but also their focus on contemporary achievements.[70]

Miscellaneous

Two miscellaneous extracts complete our survey of the prose sources.

Ideas about Arab identity
[**8.33**] al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj* 3.248–9 (trans. Hoyland 2001: 244)
An Arab skilled in oratory was sent to [the Persian emperor] Khosro [Khusrau I] who asked him about the Arabs, why they lived in the desert and chose the nomadic life. The Arab replied: 'O king, they are masters of their land rather than mastered by it, and they have no need for fortification walls, since they can rely on trenchant blades and pointed lances for their protection and defence.' . . . 'And what is the Arabs' main sustenance?' 'Meat, milk, date-wine, and dates.' 'And what are their qualities?' 'Might, honour, magnanimity, extending hospitality to the guest, providing security to the client, granting refuge to the weak, repaying favours and dispensing generosity. They are travellers of the night, masters of the stealth attack, denizens of the desert, the good hosts of the wilderness. They are accustomed to temperance and averse to subservience; they practise vengeance, disdain ignominy, and preserve their honour.'

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[69] *EI*³, s.v. 'Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī' (S. Günther); Kilpatrick 2003.
[70] See with further bibliography *EAL* s.vv. 'Ghassānids', 'Ḥīra', and 'Lakhmids' (all by L. I. Conrad); see Shahîd 1995–2010 throughout; Hoyland 2001: 198–247.

This passage from al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab* encapsulates nicely how those who sought to fortify Muslim Arabs' identity by appealing to the nobility of the pre-Islamic inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula went about their task. Passages such as this clearly fit into the debate generated in the early ʿAbbāsid period by the so-called *shuʿūbiyya* movement (discussed in the introduction to 'Arabic prose texts') and were no doubt generated in part by a desire to put a positive spin on what *shuʿūbī* attacks presented as the simplicity and boorish nature of Arab Bedouin culture. Many, although by no means all, proponents of the *shuʿūbiyya* had pro-Persian inclinations, and so that it is the Persian king Khusrau I Anushirvan who is being lectured to in this anecdote is significant.

Another important component of later ideas of Arab identity was the collections of stories known as the 'battle days' of the Arabs:

> Warfare between the tribes
> [**8.34**] Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* 22.55–6 (trans. Hoyland 2001: 225–6)
> The reason for this [particular battle-day] was that some young men of [the tribes of] Quraysh and Banu Kinana were feeling amatory when they espied a pretty graceful girl from the [tribe of] Banu ʿAmir. She was sitting at the market of ʿUkaz, wearing a single long gown, with nothing underneath, and a veil . . . the youths of Quraysh and Kinana came and surrounded her, and they asked her to unveil. She refused, then one of them took up position behind her. He worked free one edge of her garment and fastened it above her waist with a thorn without her knowing. So when she stood up her bottom was exposed. The youths laughed and said: 'you prevented us from seeing your front, but you granted us a view of your rear.' She at once called out: 'oh people of ʿAmir!', whereupon these stirred themselves and took up arms. Kinana did likewise and they fought a fierce battle and blood flowed between them. Then Harb ibn Umayya stepped in to mediate and he took upon himself the blood money of the people, and he gave Banu ʿAmir satisfaction with respect to the insult of their kinwoman.

A sizeable quantity of the extant Arabic literature on pre-Islamic Arabia is dedicated to accounts of the various *ayyām al-ʿarab*, the 'Days of the Arabs', which recount the multitude of inter- and intra-tribal conflicts that were waged by the region's inhabitants. Most *ayyām* accounts provide an introductory story explaining the feuds which led to the battles, and it is not uncommon for disputes over the honour of women to feature prominently. This extract from Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī* offers one version of the origins of one of the conflicts during the so-called 'Sinful Wars' (*ḥurūb al-fijār*), which is tentatively dated to the end of the sixth century, partly on the grounds that Muḥammad is said to have been involved to some degree before he received the first Qurʾānic revelation. The incident recounted here took place at ʿUkāẓ (a market fair near Mecca) and is said to have involved Ḥarb b.

Umayya, a prominent leader of the Meccan tribe of Quraysh and the grand-father of the future Umayyad caliph Muʿāwiya (661–80).[71]

THE QURʾĀN

The Qurʾān is believed by Muslims to be God's final revelation to mankind, which He provided through the intermediary of Gabriel over a period of 22 years, between 610 and 632, to the Prophet Muḥammad. The Qurʾānic text as it stands comprises 114 chapters (Arabic *sūra*, pl. *suwar*), each of which consists of a number of verses (Arabic *āya*, pl. *āyāt*). Loosely speaking, the chapters are presented in order of length, with the longest at the start, although the very first chapter—known as 'The Opening' (Arabic *al-fātiḥa*)—is actually one of the shortest and an important exception to this rule. The chronological order in which the chapters and verses were originally revealed is contested.[72]

Muslims and modern historians tend to agree that the text of the Qurʾān was not codified during the lifetime of Muḥammad into the form in which we have it today, but rather that this text is the result of a process which lasted well beyond 632. How far beyond 632 is a matter of serious debate. Most Muslim scholars tended to attribute the final canonization of the consonantal skeleton (*rasm*) of the Arabic text to the period of rule of ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, one of the Prophet's companions and later ruler (caliph) of the Muslim community from 644 to 656; they recognized, however, that several competing systems of applying vowels to that consonantal skeleton continued long after that time. Modern historians offer a wide variety of interpretations, although the major-ity now seem to agree that the structure (i.e. the order of the chapters and the verses) and the consonantal skeleton of the text were probably fixed before the end of the seventh century.[73]

Broadly speaking, the material in the Qurʾān can be divided thematically into four groups: [1] eschatological verses, warning of the imminence of God's judgement and the punishment awaiting those who deserve it; [2] sections outlining legal regulations to which the nascent Muslim community was expected to adhere; [3] polemics against other religious groups, variously

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[71] As well as the references for *ayyām al-ʿarab* literature offered above, see also *EI*[2], s.v. 'Fidjār' (J. W. Fück); Landau-Tasseron 1986.

[72] For two recent attempts to address this question, with further bibliography, see Sinai 2010 and Reynolds 2011a. Good overviews of all of the issues raised here are provided by the essays collected in McAuliffe 2006; Reynolds 2008; Reynolds 2011b; Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx 2010.

[73] For a recent article which suggests a very early (mid-seventh-century) date for an extant fragment of a version of the Qurʾān that is very similar but not completely identical to the more widely accepted, 'standard' text, see Sadeghi and Bergmann 2010. For a recent discussion of the earliest extant Qurʾānic manuscripts, see Déroche 2014.

named and identified (but who certainly included Jews and Christians); and [4] narratives, usually of the prophets sent by God before Muḥammad. In all of these thematic groups, the Qurʾān can be an extremely enigmatic text and it not often clear what it is actually referring to; this is one of the reasons why a huge body of exegetical literature came to be compiled over the following centuries. Although, therefore, the Qurʾān has much material to offer for any student of pre-Islamic Arabia, it is frustratingly hard to understand and, subsequently, to put to use as a historical source.[74] We provide here an extract from *sūra* 7:

The peoples of pre-Islamic Arabia
[**8.35**] Qurʾān 7.65–102 (trans. Jones, pp. 154–7)

65. To ʿĀd [We sent] their brother Hūd.
    He said, 'O my people, serve God.
    You have no god other than Him.
    Will you not protect yourselves?'
66. The notables of his people,
    who were unbelievers, said,
    'We see you [caught up] in foolishness,
    and we think you one of the liars.'
67. He said, 'O my people, there is no folly in me.
    I am a messenger from the Lord of all beings.
68. I convey to you the messages of my Lord,
    and I am a faithful adviser for you.
69. Do you wonder that a reminder from your Lord has come to you
    through a man from among you,
    that he may warn you?
    Remember when He made you successors after the people of Noah
    and gave you generous increase in strength;
    and remember God's bounties,
    so that you may prosper.'
70. They said, 'Have you come to us
    that we should serve God alone
    and forsake what our forefathers used to serve?
    Then bring us what you promise us,
    if you are one of those who tell the truth.'
71. He said, 'Abomination and anger from your Lord have fallen on you.
    Do you argue with me about names that you have named,
    you and your forefathers,
    for which God has sent down no authority?
    Wait. I am one of those who will wait with you.'

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[74] See further *EQ*, s.v. 'Pre-Islamic Arabia' (G. R. Hawting). On the Qurʾān's own view of history, a good place to start is *EQ*, s.v. 'History and the Qurʾān' (F. Rosenthal).

72. We saved him and those with him by a mercy from Us,
    and we cut the last remnant of those who denied Our signs and were not
    believers.

73. And to Thamūd [We sent] their brother Ṣāliḥ.
    He said, 'O my people, serve God.
    You have no god other than Him.
    A clear proof from your Lord has come to you.
    This is the she-camel of God as a sign for you.
    So let her eat in God's land,
    and do not touch her with evil,
    lest a painful torment seize you.

74. Remember when He made you successors after ʿĀd
    and lodged you in the land,
    and you took castles in its plains
    and hewed the mountains into houses.
    Remember God's bounties and do not make mischief,
    causing corruption in the land.'

75. The notables of his people, who were weak and haughty,
    said to those who were thought weak,
    to those of them who believed,
    'Do you know that Ṣāliḥ has been sent from his Lord?'
    They said, 'We are believers in [the message] with which he has been sent.'

76. Those who were haughty said,
    'We do not believe in what you believe in.'

77. So they hamstrung the she-camel
    and turned with disdain from their Lord's command;
    and they said, 'O Ṣāliḥ, bring us what you promise us,
    if you are one of those who have been sent.'

78. So the earthquake seized them,
    and in the morning they were prostrate in their dwelling place.

79. So he turned from them and said, 'O my people,
    I conveyed to you the message of my Lord
    and I gave you good advice,
    but you do not love those who give good advice.'

80. And [We sent] Lot when he said to his people,
    'Do you commit such immoral acts
    as no created beings committed before you?

81. You approach men in lust rather than women.
    You are a people of excess.'

82. The only answer of his people was to say,
    'Expel them from your settlement,
    for they are a people who would be pure.'

83. So We saved him and his family,
    apart from his wife, who was one of those who tarried.

84. We caused a rain to fall on them.
    See how was the consequence for the sinners.

85. To Madyan [We sent] their brother Shuʿayb.
    He said, 'O my people, serve God.
    You have no god other than Him.
    A clear proof from your Lord has come to you.
    Give full weight and full measure
    and do not defraud the people of their things
    and do not cause mischief in the land
    after it has been set right.
    That is better for you if you are believers.

86. Do not lurk on every path,
    threatening and barring from God's path
    those who believe in Him,
    seeking to make it crooked.
    And remember when you were few
    and He made you numerous;
    and see how was the consequence for those who did mischief.

87. And if there is a party of you who believe in what I have been sent with,
    and there is a party who do not believe,
    be patient till God judges between us.
    He is the best of those who judge.'

88. The notables of his people, who were haughty, said,
    'We shall drive you out, O, Shuʿayb,
    and those who believe with you,
    from our settlement,
    or else you will return to our religion.'
    He said, 'even if we are unwilling?

89. We would be inventing lies against God
    if we return to your religion
    after God has saved us from it.
    It is not for us to return to it
    unless God, our Lord, wishes.
    God embraces all things in [His] knowledge.
    We put our trust in God.
    Our Lord, decide with truth between us and our people.
    You are the best of those who decide.'

90. The notables of his people, who were unbelievers, said:
    'If you follow Shuʿayb, you will then be of the losers.'

91. So the earthquake seized them,
    and in the morning they were prostrate in their dwelling place.

92. Those who denied Shuʿayb
    —[it was] as if they had never dwelt there;
    those who denied Shuʿayb
    —They were the losers.

93. So he turned from them and said, 'O my people,
    I conveyed to you the messages of my Lord

and I gave you good advice.
How can I grieve for a people who are unbelievers?'

94.   We have not sent any prophet to a settlement
without seizing its people with misery and adversity
so that they might become humble.

95.   Then We have substituted good in place of evil
till they forgot and said,
'Both affliction and happiness touched their forefathers.'
So We have seized them suddenly, when they were unaware.

96.   Had the people of the settlements believed and been god-fearing,
We would have opened to them
blessings from the sky and the earth;
but they gave the lie,
and so We seized them for what they had been amassing.

97.   Do the people of the settlements feel secure
that Our might will not come upon them at night
while they are sleeping?

98.   Or do the people of the settlements feel secure
that Our might will not come upon them in the forenoon
while they play?

99.   Do they feel secure against God's devising?
Only people who are losers feel secure against God's devising.

100. Is it not a guidance
for those who inherit the land after [those] people
that if We wish, We can smite them for their sins
and put a seal on their hearts
so that they do not hear?

101. These are the settlements,
the tidings of which We recount to you.
Their messengers had come to them with the clear proofs
but they would not believe what they had previously denied.
Thus God sets a seal on the hearts of the unbelievers.

102. We found no covenant with most of them.
We found most of them reprobates.

These verses comes from the seventh *sūra* of the Qurʾān, called *al-Aʿrāf*, 'The Heights', and they relate the stories of four of the pre-Islamic prophets and the fates of those who refused to take heed of their messages. The story of Lot and the fate of his people, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, like those of most of the other Qurʾānic prophets, is well known from the Bible (Gen. 19). The other three prophets here—Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shuʿayb—appear in the Qurʾān, however, as indigenous Arabian prophets and are not equated with biblical figures (although a later tradition would come to equate Shuʿayb, the Prophet to Madyan, with Moses' father-in-law and priest of Midian, Jethro). It seems as though the Qurʾānic narratives of Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shuʿayb were based upon myths and legends circulating in the pre-Islamic Ḥijāz. ʿĀd, the

people of Hūd, were thought by many medieval commentators to have inhabited an area in southern Arabia, perhaps more specifically Ḥaḍramawt in south-east Yemen, which became one of the locations of Hūd's tomb. Ṣāliḥ and his people, Thamūd, are more generally thought to have resided in north-west Arabia, around the ancient city of Ḥegrā, the ruins of which are known today as Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, 'the towns of Ṣāliḥ' (Ch. 7). It is of course possible that these legends of the fallen peoples of the past were in part inspired by the impressive and visible ruins of ancient settlements in Arabia such as Ḥegrā. Madyan/Midian is also usually placed by Muslim scholars and modern historians alike in north-west Arabia. One verse of the Qurʾān (11.89) offers a relative date for Shuʿayb's career by having him preach about the fates that had already afflicted the peoples of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Lot. Hūd is generally considered to have been the first Arabian prophet, whose destroyed people ʿĀd were replaced by Ṣāliḥ's, Thamūd; both of their careers are usually considered to have predated that of Abraham.

The main intention of these narratives in the Qurʾān is evidently not simply to report events of the past. Rather, as verses 94–102 emphasize, the purpose was to use narratives about the fates of those who denied God's earlier prophets to inspire listeners in the seventh-century Ḥijāz to take heed of the eschatological warnings of the latest apostle. Post-Qurʾānic storytellers and commentators, however, hugely expanded upon the brief narratives provided about these four figures in the Qurʾān (as well as these verses provided here, other sections of the Qurʾān also offer material concerning them), and these enlarged tales played a role in bringing the legends of these prophets within an even more 'Islamicized' vision of pre-Islamic Arabia. At the end of his account of Hūd's career, al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035) noted the dispute over the location of that prophet's tomb. To many it was in Ḥaḍramawt; however, 'According to other accounts, any prophet whose people were destroyed while he and the pious with him were saved, would come to Mecca with his companions to worship God until they died.'[75]

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[75] For further discussion and bibliography, see *EQ*, s.vv. ''Ād'; 'Ṣāliḥ'; 'Shuʿayb' (all by R. Tottoli); 'Midian'; 'Thamūd' (both by R. Firestone); Hūd (P. M. Cobb); 'Lot' (H. Busse); Tottoli 2002: 27–8, 45–50. That pre-Islamic inscriptional evidence associates ʿĀd with southern Jordan, see with further bibliography Healey 2001: 56–9. A poem which deals with the story of Thamūd attributed to the pre-Islamic Ḥijāzī poet Umayya b. Abī al-Ṣalt offers extra-Qurʾānic evidence for some features of this legend in circulation in pre-Islamic Arabia; see Sinai 2011. For an eleventh-century collection of extended narratives about the pre-Islamic prophets, see al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, trans. Brinner as *Lives of the Prophets*, 105–23, 174–80, 274–7, for Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, and Shuʿayb; the quotation here comes from 113. The Qurʾānic framework of mankind's covenant with God, subsequent betrayal followed by devastating punishment, and then ultimate redemption, partially displayed through verses such as these here, went on to inspire some medieval Muslim historians' models of early Islamic history; see Humphreys 1989.

PRE-ISLAMIC POETRY

ʿAbbāsid-era philologists of the late eighth century onwards collected, compiled, and transmitted a very large quantity of Arabic poetry said to have originated in pre-Islamic Arabia. Much of it is, more specifically, thought to have been composed by poets operating during the sixth and early seventh centuries in the northern half of the Arabian Peninsula, particularly the Ḥijāz, Najd, and the courts of the Jafnid and Naṣrid rulers on the desert fringes of Syria and southern Iraq. If, however, the poetry collected from the late eighth century onwards does indeed mostly date to the sixth century at the earliest, then we should assume that there was also earlier Arabic poetry since virtually all of that which is preserved displays a certain degree of conformity to already clearly established conventions of structure and prosody, i.e. the metres and rhyming patterns (Arabic ʿarūḍ). Put very briefly, these conventions ensured that most Arabic poems of this period were divided into a varying number of verses, each in two parts, were fitted to one of a select number of syllabic metres, and that the last syllable of each verse should rhyme. The length of the poems can vary considerably.[76] A large number, if by no means all, of the longer poems, often referred to as *qaṣīdas*, or odes, have traditionally been understood as adhering to a tripartite structure: verses expressing memory of a now lost or distant love (the *nasīb*), followed by a description of a journey and the mount used to undertake it (the *raḥīl*), followed by a final section dedicated to a particular task, frequently self-praise or praise of one's tribe (*fakhr*), panegyric (*madīḥ*), or a hostile rebuke (*hijāʾ*).[77]

Whether or not the majority of these poems were actually composed in pre-Islamic Arabia has become a vexed question among modern scholars, with sceptics pouncing, for example, on the fact that a number of poems survive in several rather different versions, often attributed to different poets. Other studies, however, have shown how such variations could be accounted for by a variety of performance and transmission practices, and thus while we are probably dealing with poetry that continued to evolve after its initial creation, we need certainly not think of widespread fabrication in the ʿAbbāsid period. That said, some outright forgery may have happened; perhaps the most famous collector and transmitter of the early ʿAbbāsid period, Ḥammād al-Rāwiya (d. 770s), was accused, albeit by a rival, of writing his own verses and attributing them to pre-Islamic poets. A related question concerns whether or not the biographical material that was collected in the ʿAbbāsid period about pre-Islamic poets actually developed primarily as exegesis of their poetry, and not independently transmitted data.

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[76] See, for example, *EAL*, s.vv. 'Prosody' (W. Stoetzer); 'Qaṣīda' (R. Jacobi); Frolov 2000.
[77] Jacobi 1996.

In any case, we should expect the collection and preservation of pre-Islamic poetry in the ʿAbbāsid period to have been encouraged by the same trends that saw the growth of interest in prose material about pre-Islamic Arabia and its inhabitants. Pre-Islamic poetry was a particularly important source for understanding the Qurʾān, Arabic grammar, and Arabian topography, among many other fields of study. According to an eleventh-century critic, the famous early Qurʾān scholar ʿAbd Allāh b. al-ʿAbbās (d. *c.*687) used to say, 'If you read anything in the Book of God which you could not understand, then go look in the poetry of the Arabs.'[78] This idea that poetry could help not only with the exegesis of individual Qurʾānic verses, but also with the endeavours of early Islamic grammarians—themselves often Qurʾān readers/reciters or closely associated with such groups—to define 'classical Arabic' and demonstrate that the Qurʾān was the most perfect example of that language, was an historical development of the late seventh century and later which played a huge role in the drive to collect as much pre-Islamic poetry as possible.[79] Pre-Islamic poetry was also useful for those seeking to articulate what the noblest qualities of the Arabs were, with its frequent focus on loyalty, courage, generosity, and hospitality (which were subsumed under the Arabic term *muruwwa*, 'manliness'), and its attribution of all of these to the idealized and 'Bedouinized' inhabitants of pre-Islamic Arabia. Some form of many of the extant poems attributed to the pre-Islamic period may well have been first recited then, but they continued to be of interest in the Islamic period—and were therefore preserved—because they remained relevant to scholars then with other concerns.[80]

This section provides several examples of pre-Islamic poetry to illustrate its style and characteristics, as well as to discuss its utility as an historical source, beginning with al-Nābigha.

[**8.36**] al-Nābigha, *Dīwān*, pp. 89–93 (trans. Edaibat, excerpts)
1   From Mayya leave now or in the early morrow,
        in haste, with or without your share of farewells?

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[78] Ibn Rashīq, *al-ʿUmda fī maḥāsin al-shiʿr*, vol. 1, 30; also cited in Hoyland 2001: 212.
[79] A classic study of the link between the exegesis and canonization of the Qurʾān, on the one hand, and the development of classical Arabic grammar, on the other, is Wansbrough 1977: 85–118; for a more recent overview, see Rippin 2013: 179–84. A detailed study of the connection between early Islamic grammarians and the Qurʾān readers/reciters is Shah 2003a; Shah 2003b.
[80] The bibliography on pre-Islamic poetry is enormous. For a good introduction to the earlier authenticity debate in modern scholarship, see Arberry 1957: 228–54. For more recent approaches to the performance and transmission of pre-Islamic poetry, see for example with many further references Schoeler 2006: 87–110; Schoeler 2009: 18–24; Montgomery 1997. On the role that poetry may have played in the creation of a sense of Arab identity, see Hoyland 2007: 236–7. Other important studies of early Arabic poetry are Stetkevych (S. P.) 1993, Stetkevych (J.) 1993; Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 306–30; Montgomery 2006. A useful introductory discussion is Hoyland 2001: 211–19. See also Gamal 1993.

The departure hovers, our mounts
lay saddled still, yet 'tis as though
the crow proclaims our departure be the morrow;
thus also has the dark raven concurred.
Not welcome is the morrow, nor with greetings met,
if the parting of loved ones be on that day.
The departure has come, yet Mihdad bids no goodbye.
10   How many mornings and evenings till our next appointment!
This just as the treasured one shot you with her arrow,
piercing your heart, yet failing to kill.
Sufficient be this for her, from a neighbourly distance:
an affectionate letter and displays of love.
Verily, his heart has been struck by her love,
as an arrow shot from the bow, piercing it through.
She glanced with the eye of a young tamed gazelle,
of two dark stripes and jet-black eyes, in tethers adorned.
A necklace of beads adorning her neck;
20   gold that glistens as a shooting star.
Saffron coloured as the silk garment, thus perfected is her form,
as the overtopping tree branch in its graceful sway.
The belly creased, of gentle folds,
raised by a chest of sizable bust.
Her lower back smooth, her belly slim;
a bottom that is full, soft white when denuded.
From between the curtains she displayed her beauty,
as the sun's rising with the constellation of Aries;
or the pearl of an oyster, its diver
30   elated at its sight, shouting and prostrating;
or a marble statue raised high,
with fired bricks erected and plastered.
Her veil fell off in surprise unintended;
she caught it, self-consciously covering her face with a hand,
a hand well-dyed, as if its slender fingers
were of the ʿ*anam* tree, its tender clusters knotted through.
She shot you a timid glance, her need unfulfilled,
as the ill one unable to greet visitors upon their return.

Al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī was a very famous pre-Islamic poet and, for a time, a confidant of the last Naṣrid ruler of al-Ḥīra, al-Nuʿmān. A relatively sizeable number of poems and fragments of poems attributed to him are preserved in several recensions of his *dīwān*, but he is most famous for his panegyrics for the rulers of the Jafnids and the Naṣrids. He is also famous for one particular poem, from which we offer an excerpt, above, said to be about al-Nuʿmān's wife, and to have caused that ruler such great offence that al-Nābigha was banished from al-Ḥīra (although this story may have developed as part of the commentary on this particular poem).

Eventually, however, thanks to his poetry in praise of al-Nuʿmān, he was allowed to return.[81]

[**8.37**] al-Akhnas b. Shihāb al-Taghlibī (trans. Lyall 1918, vol. 2: 149–51)

  1 The Daughter of Ḥiṭṭān son of ʿAuf left her dwellings plain
      like lines drawn by skilled hands fair on a volume's opening page.
    Daylong I stood there, while swept me a tremor and burning heat,
      as a vehement hot fit comes on a sick man in Khaibar town.
    All day feed therein dust-coloured ostriches unafraid,
      as though they were handmaids homeward driven with wood at eve.
    My friends there were twain—a camel light-hearted, nimble of pace,
      and a blade marked with grooves, a fellow whose company none mislikes.
    An age have I lived, my comrades vagabonds light of life—
10 yea, these were my chosen friends of whom I was ever fain,
    A fellow to him whose follies wore out his patient kin,
      at last cast away by his nearest, wearied of his misdeeds.
    But now have I paid off all I borrowed from wanton Youth:
      my herds find in me one bent on husbandry, prudent, wise.
    All men of Maʿadd, all tribes that wander our Arab soil,
      have somewhere a place of strength, a refuge in time of need:
    Lukaiz hold the sea-coast and the shore of the twin-sea Cape;
      but if there should come danger from India's threatening mien,
    They fly on the rumps of beasts untamed to the Upper land,
20 as though they were cloud-wisps hurrying home after heavy rain.
    And Bakr—all ʿIrāq's broad plain is theirs: but if so they will,
      a shield comes to guard their homes from lofty Yamāmah's dales.
    Tamīm, too—a place lies far between the tossed dunes of sand
      and uplands of rugged rock where safety for them is found.
    And Kalb hold the Khabt and the sands of ʿĀlij, and their defence
      is steeps of black basalt rock where footmen alone can go.
    And Ghassān—their strength, all know, is other than in their kin
      —for them fight the legions and the squadrons [of mighty Rome]
    And Bahrā—we know their place [in warfare and time of peace]:
30 to them lie the ways unbarred that lead to Ruṣāfah's hold.
    Iyād has gone down to dwell in the mid-river Plain, and there
      are squadrons of Persians seeking to fall on their enemy.
    And Lakhm are the kings of men, who pay them the tribute due:
      when one of them speaks his will, all others must fain obey.
    But we are a folk who have no shelter in all our land:
      we spread ourselves where rain falls, and so fares the mighty man!
    Around where our tents are pitched our steeds roam for all to see
      as goats in the high Ḥijāz, too many to be penned in.
    At even they drink our milk, at dawn they are fed again,

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[81] See, with further bibliography, *EI²*, s.v. 'al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī' (A. Arazi); *EAL*, 'al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī (sixth century)' (R. Jacobi); Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 221–32.

40   and, day after day ridden forth, their bodies are lithe and lean.
     Their riders are sons of Taghlib, offspring of Wāʾil's stem,
        defenders, assailers, none among them of doubtful stock.
     They make straight for him who leads the foe in his shining helm:
        his face streams with blood—they rain their blows as they press him sore.
     A host are they, dark with steel, star-helmeted: he who comes
        to water the first must leave to make for the last a place.
     And if we should find our swords too short to attain the foe,
        we have but to press one step the closer, and strike him home.
     Among men that are not kings our folk are the first of tribes
50   when men crowd the Courts and shout their claims to the primacy.
     To them turn the eyes of all in wonder at mighty deeds:
        the chiefest of other stocks attain not to their great fame.
     While others in caution bind the stallion that serves their herds,
        our camel alone goes forth untrammelled whereso he will.

In spite of the fame which this poem achieved, almost nothing is known about al-Akhnas b. Shihāb al-Taghlibī. The version offered here is that preserved in the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, one of the most important of the early ʿAbbāsid anthologies of pre- and early Islamic poetry compiled by al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (d. *c*.780), although it is also included in another famous ʿAbbāsid-era anthology, the *Ḥamāsa* of Abū Tammām (d. *c*.845). On the basis of some of the information about various tribes it contains, Charles Lyall tentatively dated the poem to *c*.550, but this should not be taken as too firm a date. The poem provides a good example of the 'idealized' pre-Islamic Arabian lifestyle often encountered in compilations of the eighth century and later. It is a poem in praise of Taghlib, the poet's own tribe, as comes across in lines 35–54. It is, however, particularly interesting as an historical document for the information it provides about the various tribes of northern Arabia. The Ghassānids and Lakhmids, as may be expected, come across as particularly powerful groups, although it is worth emphasizing how tentative the reading offered here in lines 27–8 (about the Ghassānids) actually is and that there are other ways of understanding it. The words in square brackets, 'of mighty Rome', are not in the original poem but are Lyall's own addition based upon a later commentator's interpretation of the verse.[82]

[8.38] ʿAlqama (trans. Lyall 1918, vol. 2: 329–31)
1   A heart quick to thrill when touched by Beauty has drawn thee far,
       although Youth has sped long since, and grey hairs invade thy brow.
    It fills all my thought with Lailà, distant though now her home,
       and matters of weight stand twixt us, obstacles manifold.
    In comfort she dwells—no speech with her is for me to gain:

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[82] For further information and commentary on this poem, the best place to start remains Lyall's own detailed commentary to his translation (1918), vol. 2: 151–4.

a guard waits before her door, forbidding all visitors.
When as forth her husband fares, no secret of his she tells;
    and when he again comes home, yea, sweet is his home-coming.
But what boots the thought of her to thee who art far away?
10   the well where she draws is dug to serve her in Tharmadā.
Nay, deem me not scant of wit, untaught in Love's mysteries
    —on thee may the rain-fraught clouds send down their life-giving streams!
    —A mass from the South, piled up, presenting a towering side,
    borne North by a gentle wind, when downward the Sun inclines.
And if ye seek lore of women, verily I am skilled
    in all their devices, wise to probe to the root their ails:
When grey grows a man's head, or his substance gets less and less,
    no share can he hope to win of friendship with womankind;
They long for abundant wealth, and look where they think to find,
20   and freshness of youth takes chiefest place in their wondering eyes.
So leave her, and cast care from thy heart with a sturdy mount
    —a camel that ambles tireless, carrying riders twain;
To Ḥārith, the generous Lord, I drive her unsparing on,
    with pantings that shake her breast and throb through her ribs and flanks:
A fleet runner, whose flesh over sides and where neck meets hump
    has vanished beneath noon-tide's hot breath and the onward press;
And yet after night's long toil the dawn breaks and finds her fresh
    as an antelope, young and strong, that flees from the hunters' pack:
They crouched by the *arṭà*-brake the hunters, and thought to win
30   a safe prey: but she escaped their shafts and pursuing hounds.
So travels my beast, and makes her object a man far off,
    and little by little gains the way to his bounteous hand.
Yea, thou wast her labour's end—God keep thee from curse, O King!
    and through all the desert's sameness sped she, beset with fears.
Towards thee the Polestars led, and there where men's feet had passed,
    a track plain to see that wound by cairns over ridges scarred.
There bodies of beasts outworn lay thickly along the road,
    their bones gleaming white, their hides all shrivelled and hard and dry.
I bring her to drink the dregs of cisterns all mire and draff;
40   and if she mislikes it, all the choice is to journey on.
Withhold not, I pray, they boon from one who has come so far,
    for I am a stranger here, unused to the tents of kinds;
And thou art a man tow'rds whom my trust has gone out in full:
    before thee have masters lorded me, and my cause was lost!
The Children of Ka'b and 'Auf brought safe home their nurseling Lord,
    while there lay another, left amidst of his legions, dead.
By God! Had not he that rides the Black horse been one of them,
    ashamed had his troops slunk back, right glad to be home again.
Thou pushest him onwards till the white rings are hid in blood,
50   while ever though rainiest blows on helmets of men in mail.
Two hauberks of steel enwrap thy body, and from them hang

two choicest of blades, well named 'Keen-cutter' and 'Sinker-in'.
Thou smotest them till they put before them their champion
  to face thee, when near had come the moment of sun-setting.
There battled all of Ghassān's best, the bravest that bear the name,
  and with them were Hinb and Qās, stout fighters, and bold Shabīb:
The men of al-Aus stood serried there 'neath the charger's breast,
  and all the array of Jall, and with them 'Atīb their kin.
Upon them the mail-coats rustled, steel grinding hard on steel,
60 as when through the ripe corn-fields a southerly wind sweeps on.
The sky's camel-calf roared loud above them: one slipped and fell
  with arms clashing, not yet spoiled: another lay stripped and bare.
It seemed that a cloud o'erhead poured down mighty floods of rain,
  with crashes that shook heaven's dome, and glued to the ground the birds.
None 'scaped but the tall mare flying, nought but her bridle left,
  or stallions of race, outstretched in flight like a slender spear:
Yea, none but the warrior brave stood fast in that deadly close,
  all dyed red with blood that flowed from edges of whetted blades.
A man thou whose foes know well the marks that they impact leaves:
70 on these, scars of deadly wounds, but traces of bounty too.
Among men is none thy like, save only thy prisoner:
  yea, near is he, but none else of kindred can claim his place.
They favours on every tribe thou sendest in shower of boons:
  I pray to thee, let Sha's be one to draw from the flood his share!

As with al-Akhnas, surprisingly little is actually known about ʿAlqama b. ʿAbada in spite of the very widespread fame that this particular poem—also included in the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* among several other places—went on to receive. It is said that he knew the renowned poet Imruʾ al-Qays, but also that he met Ḥassān b. Thābit and al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī at the court of Jabala b. al-Ayham—in later tradition, the final Jafnid leader. That said, if the historical background provided by the early Muslim commentators on this poem is accurate (and it is of course possible that this background story only developed as part of the poem's exegesis), then its composition could be dated quite specifically to 554. The poem is traditionally understood as having been recited by ʿAlqama before the Jafnid ruler al-Ḥārith, who had just defeated and killed his arch-rival the Naṣrid al-Mundhir in a battle remembered in Arabic sources as having taken place at ʿAyn Ubāgh, a *wādī* in Iraq not far from al-Ḥīra (see **5.23**, **6.12**). Among the prisoners from the Naṣrid army taken that day was Sha's, the brother of ʿAlqama b. ʿAbada; the latter recited this poem before al-Ḥārith to persuade him to release Sha's (see especially lines 69–74). Al-Ḥārith is said to have responded positively to this beautifully put request, and the poem seems to have been preserved in part because it embodied for early Muslim Arabs a sense of the proper relationship between a ruler and his subjects. Given the circumstances said to be behind the poem's recital, it comes as no surprise that al-Ḥārith's personal role in the Jafnid

victory is considerably inflated (lines 45–54). Apparently, the greeting used in line 33, 'God keep thee from curse, O King!', was a traditional way of addressing the Naṣrid rulers, in which case it would have been extremely significant that here it was applied to a Jafnid.[83]

We conclude this brief discussion of poetry with an important and rather interesting poem:

[**8.39**] Ḥassān b. Thābit (trans. Conrad 1994: 48)
  1   To whom belongs the abode rendered desolate in Maʿān,
       From the heights of al-Yarmūk unto al-Khammān,
       Then al-Qurayyāt down from Balās, then Dārayyā,
       Then Sakkāʾ, then the compounds close by,
       Then the hinterland of Jāsim, then the wadis
       Of al-Ṣuffar, where herds of horses and fine white thoroughbreds feed?
       That was the abode of him whose tent is raised in lofty poles,
       The one dear unto me beyond the measure of his friendship and favour.
       Their mother was bereaved, and was bereaved of them
  10 On the day they stopped to camp at Ḥārith al-Jawlān.
       Easter approached, so the young girls
       Sat to arrange garlands of coral,
       Gathering saffron-dyed gowns of linen,
       And not busying themselves with resin, nor with gum,
       Nor with the seeds of the colocynth.
       That was a home of Āl Jafna when calamity struck.
       As the vicissitudes of the ages claimed their due.
       I did indeed consider that there I behaved as a resolute man should,
       When the place where I sat and stayed was in the presence of the
  20 wearer of the crown.

Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. before 661) is one of the most famous of the so-called *mukhaḍram* poets, those whose career spanned the end of the pre-Islamic era and the early Islamic period. He was a native of Medina, a member of Khazraj, and a contemporary of Muḥammad, as whose 'court poet' he is sometimes presented. A large number of poems and fragments of poems are attributed to him across a wide range of sources, but the authenticity of many is by no means easy to accept. Notable among his 'Islamic' poetry is an elegy which he recited for Muḥammad after his death in 632. He is said to have been acquainted with the Jafnid rulers in the pre-Islamic period, and this poem here is connected to his time in Syria. Two rather different versions of this poem survive, of which the one presented here seems to be the earlier. Although the calamity which it mentions was thought by Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 1176) to have referred to the battle of al-Yarmūk during the early Islamic

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[83] *EI*[3], s.v. ''Alqamaʾ (A. Arazi); Stetkevych (S. P.) 1994: 2–20; Montgomery 1997: 10–51. See also again Lyall's further commentary in Lyall 1918, vol. 2: 331–3.

conquests, Lawrence Conrad has more convincingly connected it to an out-
break of the plague sometime between 590 and 610.[84] As short as the poem is,
it contains much interesting information for historians, especially the wealth
of toponyms with which it associates the Jafnid rulers (here explicitly called
the *āl Jafna*, 'family of Jafna'), all of which have been extensively studied by
Conrad and which, with the exception of Maʿān, are in the Golan and the
Ḥawrān—reflecting, interestingly, the distribution of sites known from arch-
aeological or epigraphic evidence found in northern Jordan and the Ḥawrān to
be linked to the Jafnids (Chs 4 and 6, Fig. 6.1). Its subject matter is unusual for
a court poem, although there is some more usual panegyric, such as the
reference to the ruler as 'the wearer of the crown'. Also important is the
poet's clear reference to the local population's Christianity and some of their
practices at Easter. In fact, as Conrad demonstrated, six of the toponyms
mentioned were associated with monastic sites, and the second version of
this poem actually mentions prayers to Christ in a Jafnid monastery.[85]

Harry Munt, with contributions from Omar Edaibat and Robert Hoyland

AL-ḤĪRA AND THE BAPTISM OF AL-NUʿMĀN

Before turning to the brief overview of Persian sources on the pre-Islamic
period, we conclude this survey of Muslim Arabic sources with a further
discussion of the city of al-Ḥīra (cf. **4.9**) as well as the story of the baptism
of al-Nuʿmān, al-Ḥīra's final Naṣrid king, as told in the eleventh-century *al-
Manāqib al-Mazyadiyya*.[86]

Al-Ḥīra in the Arab Islamic Tradition

The history of al-Ḥīra, the site of half-legendary kings and illustrious poets,
occupied an eminent place in the Arab-Islamic imagination of the so-called
jāhiliyya. In spite of the pejorative, pagan religious connotations of the
expression (as noted above), this era was also approached with some ambiva-
lence. Whereas the Islamic religious authorities might discard it for its im-
morality and barbarism, the Iraqi philologers of the early ʿAbbāsid period
looked on the *jāhiliyya* as a mythical, heroic Arab past—the place, for

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[84] For more on the plague, see essays in Little 2007, as well as Stathakopoulos 2004.

[85] On Ḥassān b. Thābit in general, there are a number of important articles by Walid Arafat,
e.g. Arafat 1955; Arafat 1958; Arafat 1967. On this particular poem, see Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2:
244–6, and especially Conrad 1994.

[86] For two recent, more detailed studies, see Toral-Niehoff 2014 (focused on the narrative
motifs and models outside the Arab world) and Toral-Niehoff 2012, as well as 2013a.

example, of highly venerated pre-Islamic poets, such as Imruʾ al-Qays.[87] It is, therefore, not surprising that most of the Arab-Islamic material on the Naṣrids, whose court became closely associated with the production of poetry, was collected in the early ʿAbbāsid period. This was carried out in the context of the development of Arabic philology, and against the background of the ongoing *shuʿūbiyya* debate (discussed in the introduction to 'Arabic prose texts') wherein the period of *jāhiliyya* and the pre-Islamic poetry merged as a cultural reference for the Arabs and became considered the birthplace of ʿarabiyya—the pure Arabic language.

The Arab-Islamic material referring to the Arabs of al-Ḥīra is especially rich when compared to the accounts about some of the other pre-Islamic Arab dynasties. The Naṣrids were particularly attractive to the Arab elites of the early ʿAbbāsid period; the reason for this is most probably that the ʿAbbāsid cultural and political centres where philological studies began—especially Kūfa—were located close to al-Ḥīra, which meant that information on the Naṣrids and their activities was easily available.[88] Furthermore al-Ḥīra, which continued to exist as a Christian suburb to Kūfa well until the eleventh century,[89] became a famous and very popular site located on the main pilgrim and commercial route that led from central Iraq to the Ḥijāz.[90] Al-Ḥīra's numerous monasteries, with their adjacent wine-houses, attracted many visitors, notably the *jeunesse dorée* of the great Iraqi cities. As relaxing places of pleasure (and forbidden amusements) the Ḥīran monasteries fired the imagination of many generations of litterateurs.[91]

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[87] For the term *jāhiliyya*, see the discussion at the beginning of this chapter. For its reassessment among ʿAbbāsid scholars of philology, letters, and grammar and its establishment as a cultural icon, including a study of the further cultural implications of this process, see Drory 1996 and Talib 2013.

[88] In the Arab-Islamic sources, the last decades of the city's history are mainly portrayed from the perspective of the ʿIbād (Toral-Niehoff 2010) who seemingly dominated the memory of al-Ḥīra in Islamic times—in particular the family of the Banū Ayyūb, whose most famous member was the poet ʿAdī b. Zayd. See Toral-Niehoff 2014: 21 and 99, and Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 1: 318–25. One member of the family seems to have been an informant for al-Ḥīra's history: see Horovitz 1930: 68.

[89] The site of al-Ḥīra was located some miles south of Kūfa and south-east of present Najaf. Talbot Rice 1932b offers an account of the only archaeological excavation in the site so far, although there were several later in the surrounding area, for which see Toral-Niehoff 2013a: 28–30. See too *EI*² s.v. 'al-Ḥīra' (I. Shahîd). For a discussion regarding location and the physical environment, see Toral-Niehoff 2014: 33–42, with further references. For al-Ḥīra in Islamic times, see also Shahîd 1995–2010, vol. 2: 392–403 ('Abbasid Caliphs and Lakhmid Hira') and Talib 2013.

[90] The so-called *darb Zubayda*: Finster 1978, with further references.

[91] Thus establishing the popular genre of the *Kutub al-Diyarāt* ('books on monasteries'). For this genre see Shahîd 1995–2012, vol. 2: 156–64; Fowden (E. K.) 2007: 28. One of the first books of this type was composed by Hishām b. al-Kalbī, very focused on Iraqi monasteries. His book—not preserved—was to be the source of most of the information preserved in Arab-Islamic sources, the most famous being the *Kitāb ad-Diyārāt* by al-Shābushtī, in which he mentions 37(!) monasteries for al-Ḥīra. See the Introduction to the *Kitāb*, 36ff.

The numerous *akhbār* ('traditions', 'reports', or 'notices') about the Naṣrids are scattered in a diversity of textual contexts, such as in the literary collections and encyclopedias of *adīb* scholars; in biographies of poets; in literary anthologies; in universal chronicles; and in the *ayyām al-ʿarab*, the accounts of warfare between the pre-Islamic Arab tribes. The largest coherent passages are recorded in the monumental universal history by al-Ṭabarī and in the 'Book of Songs' by al-Iṣfahānī (both of whom are discussed above).[92] Both authors base their accounts mainly on the traditions of two Kūfan scholars, namely on Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (*c.*737–*c.*821/2) and his father Muḥammad, who both drew from local Ḥīran informants. Al-Kalbī's traditions about al-Ḥīra became pervasive in Arab tradition, and were incorporated by later collectors. Other Ḥīran accounts are also based on Kūfan transmitters such as Ḥammād al-Rāwiya, and his rival, Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī. It is not a coincidence that Kūfa occupies such an eminent place in the traditions relative to al-Ḥīra, since the Iraqi city offered a most favourable cultural environment for its memory: Kūfa was not only al-Ḥīra's Islamic successor city, founded nearby, but it had also emerged in the eighth and ninth centuries as a main centre of historiographical and philological studies.[93]

Al-Nuʿmān and the *al-Manāqib al-Mazyadiya*

Amongst the Arab-Islamic sources which discuss al-Ḥīra, one particularly interesting text stands out: the *al-Manāqib al-Mazyadiya*.[94] The *Manāqib* is a late work, from the early twelfth century, and is not particularly well known. It was first published in 1984, although Michael J. Kister had already made regular use of the manuscript in articles prior to that date.[95] We know little about the author, Abū al-Baqāʾ Hibat Allāh al-Ḥillī, who makes only a scarce appearance in biographical dictionaries. It seems that he came from a famous Shīʿī family of scholars rooted in al-Ḥilla; this was an Arab city founded in the early twelfth century near to the ancient site of Babylon, not far from the site of al-Ḥīra, and Abū al-Baqāʾ lived there between the end of the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth century.[96] The full title of this, his only preserved work, is *al-Manāqib al-Mazyadiya fī akhbār mulūk al-Asadiyya* ('Praiseworthy Deeds of the Mazyadids, (from the) Accounts of the Tribe of Asad').

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[92] See also Horovitz 1930, who correlates al-Ṭabarī and al-Iṣfahānī. For the importance of both al-Kalbīs in the historiography of al-Ḥīra, see Toral-Niehoff 2014: 18–20, and cf. Sezgin 1975: 268–71.

[93] For an evaluation of the Arab-Islamic material see Toral-Niehoff 2014: 10–23.

[94] There is only one manuscript (Brit. Mus. 23296). See Abū al-Baqāʾ, *al-Manāqib,* Introduction, 5.

[95] Esp. Kister 1968: 151–8, on Abū al-Baqāʾ; see also Toral-Niehoff 2012: 101–3.

[96] *Al-Manāqib,* Introduction, 9–15.

In it, he occasionally directly addresses his patron and sponsor,[97] Ṣadaqa b. Manṣūr al-Mazyadī, whose royal name was Sayf al-Dawla (r. 1086–1108). He was the most successful ruler of the Shiite Mazyadids, a small Bedouin dynasty from the northern Arab tribe of Asad, which dominated the Middle Euphrates area during the eleventh century, first under Buyid and then under Seljuk patronage.[98]

Despite the title of the work, which promises the praise of the Mazyadids, the *Manāqib* does not focus on them, but, rather, on the pre-Islamic kings of al-Ḥīra. It uses them as historical *exempla* to emphasize the great achievements of the contemporary Mazyadids. There were several important parallels between both dynasties that made such a comparison appropriate. First, Ṣadaqa b. Manṣūr al-Mazyadī was one of the first Arab rulers in the late ʿAbbāsid period who was bold enough to take the hitherto-despised title *Malik al-ʿArab* ('king of the Arabs'),[99] which had, until then, only been associated with pre-Islamic Arab rulers, such as the Naṣrids. Secondly, both the Mazyadids and Naṣrids were faced with the challenge of how best to manage the Bedouin tribes of the Syrian Desert and the Arabian Peninsula. Finally, both ruled over nearly the same area—the Middle Euphrates. Interestingly, the Naṣrids are not portrayed in the *Manāqib* as rulers worthy of imitation, but rather as negative, pagan examples of poor leadership, a contrast which highlights the praiseworthy, Muslim Mazyadids. Like other Arab authors, Abū al-Baqāʾ is biased against the kings of al-Ḥīra, who are generally portrayed in the *Manāqib* as weak, tyrannical petty-kings, completely dependent on their Sasanian suzerains. Yet even in spite of this negative focus, Abū al-Baqāʾ was eager to collect all available information on the Naṣrids, and so he added to the broadly circulating Islamic traditions—essentially, the well-known material from Ibn al-Kalbī—and several local and Christian traditions, perhaps for the sake of completeness. This resulted in his inclusion of an extended version of the baptism legend of al-Nuʿmān, a story certainly lifted from Christian sources.

The Christian conversion and baptism of the last Naṣrid king is a well-attested event dated to the early 590s.[100] It appears that al-Nuʿmān b. al-Mundhir

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[97] The manuscript lacks the first pages, so the formal dedication is lost; however, the patron is addressed several times in the text.

[98] *EI²* s.v. Ṣadaḳa b. Manṣūr b. Dubays b. ʿAlī b. Mazyad, Sayf al-Dawla Abū ʾl-Ḥasan al-Asadī (K. V. Zetterstéen) and *EI²* s.v. 'Mazyad , Banū, or Mazyadids' (C. E. Bosworth); see too Bosworth 2004: nos 36, 87f.; and Makdisi 1954.

[99] From an Islamic point of view, legitimate authority was only possible as a caliphate (the emir and the sultan being a delegate of the caliph). In the eleventh-century, however, the title *malik* starts to be used again by Muslim rulers. See *EI²* s.v. 'Malik' (A. Ayalon). For the use of the title by the Mazyadids see the entry by Zetterstéen.

[100] The sources are contradictory about who was the ruling Sasanian king during the baptism, either Hormizd IV (579–90) or Khusrau Parvez (590–628) and, accordingly, the event is either dated before 590 or after 592. See the discussion in Toral-Niehoff 2014: 206–8.

had been crowned king in *c.*580 with the support of the local Christian elites, who had become increasingly powerful in the preceding decades.[101] His conversion to Christianity, and official baptism some years later, were in part consequences of this alliance; however, it was perhaps a risky step that might compromise his relationship with the Sasanians, whose policy towards Christians remained ambivalent.[102] The Arab-Islamic collections do not pay too much attention to the conversion of al-Nuʿmān, which is only reported in a short story that goes back to al-Kalbī.[103] As in many other narratives about the late Naṣrid kings, the focus is instead on the Christian Arab poet ʿAdī b. Zayd. It is thus the verbal power of ʿAdī's elegiac poetry—whose verses are the main theme—that moved the king to convert.

The Christian legends concerning al-Nuʿmān (e.g. **6.41**) are much more extensive and complex than their Arab-Islamic counterparts, having as their main protagonists the king al-Nuʿmān, the local bishop Shamʿūn/Simeon, the bishop of Lashom and future *catholicos* Sabrīshōʿ,[104] and the Persian king.[105] An earlier version of the story, contained in an adaptation of the *Life of Sabrīshōʿ*, was briefly considered in the commentary following **6.41**. The original version of the *Life* was probably composed at the beginning of the seventh century in Iraq, soon after the event itself,[106] and some central motives indicate that the story was inspired by the most ubiquitous baptism legend of a king in late antiquity—that of the emperor Constantine.[107] Two slightly different variants of the story are also contained in the Arabic Nestorian *Chronicle of Seert* (Ch. 6).[108] Although basically offering the same story, they differ in some tiny details from the version of *Life*.[109] The complicated relationship between all these versions is beyond the scope of the brief analysis here; it is sufficient to point out that the versions in the *Chronicle of Seert* focus more on the miraculous aspects of the event, and less on the dogmatic disputes. It is also noteworthy that a little-known Christian chronicle of the twelfth century—the *Mukhtaṣar al-akhbār al-bīʿiyya*, or *Haddad Chronicle*—which seems to contain much material from the ninth and tenth centuries, and

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[101] Toral-Niehoff 2014: 194–9.

[102] The religious policy of the Sasanians regarding the Christians alternated between persecution, acceptance, and integration. See Brock 1982; Asmussen 1983; cf. also the survey of Sasanian religious policy in Morony 1974.

[103] See n. 91.

[104] For the title *catholicos*, see the Introduction to Ch. 6; for Sabrīshōʿ (*catholicos* 596–604) see Tamcke 2007 and Tamcke 1988.

[105] Either Hormizd IV or Khusrau Parvez. See n. 100.

[106] The baptism legend is found at 322–7 in the edition of Bedjan. The first mention of the baptism is found in Evagrius, *HE* 6.22.

[107] Toral-Niehoff 2013b.

[108] The notices are in *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 13, pp. 468–9 and pp. 478–80).

[109] The main differences concern the different dating (Petros under Hormizd, i.e. before 590, *Chron. Seert* under Khusrau (after 592)), attribution of the baptism (Petros to Sabrīshōʿ, *Chron. Seert* to bishop Simeon), and the details of the miracle itself.

is closely related to the *Chronicle of Seert*, does not contain any version of the story, although it transmits a most interesting passage about the way Shamʿūn/Simeon was ordained as bishop.[110]

The version transmitted by Abū al-Baqāʾ is related to the accounts in the *Chronicle of Seert*, but does not directly derive from them. Furthermore, it pays less attention to the supernatural aspects than it does to hierarchical and political issues. As a result, it is enriched by extended quotations from the letters that supposedly circulated between the king al-Nuʿmān, the bishop, the Persian king, and the *catholicos* (a correspondence which is mentioned, but not quoted, in the *Chronicle of Seert*).[111] The version given by Abū al-Baqāʾ conveys the message that al-Nuʿmān did not decide anything substantial without seeking the (written!) permission of his suzerain.

Abū al-Baqāʾ tells the story of al-Nuʿmān's baptism under the heading *Tanaṣṣur al-Nuʿmān wa-siyāḥātuhu* ('The Christian Conversion of al-Nuʿmān and his Pilgrimage').[112] After summing up the main outline of the well-known Islamic version from al-Kalbī, including the famous verses by ʿAdī, he continues by quoting an extended version of the Christian legend, introducing them with the words *al-wajh al-ākhar* (another version), whereby he declares his source as anonymous or unknown, and thus, probably, as not particularly reliable.

[**8.40**] *al-Manāqib*, pp. 268–72 (trans. Toral-Niehoff)
According to another version, Nuʿmān had become seriously ill, so that his body was emaciated, and his mind obfuscated. He remained so for a while, until Shamʿūn b. Jābir came (otherwise called Samāʿa b. Jābir), who was the bishop of the Christians in al-Ḥīra and a Nestorian [*nasṭūrī*], and who used to pray for him. Nuʿmān commanded him to plead for his healing.

There were also in al-Ḥīra some people of heretics [*harātiqa*],[113] namely Jacobites [*yaʿqūbiyya*],[114] who came to him and said, 'O king, God will heal you through the prayers of the Jacobites; do not accept what Shamʿūn, the Nestorian bishop, tells you.'

And he [the king] remained in this [ill] state for a long while, until Shamʿūn the Nestorian approached him and told him: 'You will not be cured unless you

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[110] *Mukhtaṣar/Haddad Chronicle*, LXXXVI (135–40). See Wood 2010b; Teule 2009.

[111] *Chron. Seert* (PO 13, p. 480).

[112] *Al-Manāqib*, 267ff., and the translation of the version told in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* in Horovitz 1930: 54–6. The story recalls the one about the legendary conversion of king al-Nuʿmān (I) (died *c.*418), who had received the surname 'al-Sayyāḥ', the pilgrim.

[113] 'harātiq' = heretic (in the edition misread as 'harānīq'—al-Manāqib, 269). The common expression in Christian Arabic texts is 'harāṭiqa' (e.g. *Chron. Séert*, (PO 13, p. 480)), with emphatic *ta*, and refers clearly to the Miaphysites, seen as heretics by the Nestorians.

[114] *yaʿqūbiyya* = 'Jacobites', i.e. Syriac Miaphysites. The name 'Jacobite' refers to Jacob Baradeus (see Ch. 6). It is the common denomination for this community in Arab-Islamic sources. The presence of Miaphysites in al-Ḥīra is well attested; see Toral-Niehoff 2014: 168–74, Toral-Niehoff 2010: 337–41, and Ch. 6.

convert [to Christianity].' As he turned towards them [the Nestorians] and away from the Jacobites, he accepted his speech and decided to convert [to Nestorian Christianity].

However, he feared the Kisrā [Persian king][115] and said to Shamʿūn: 'I will not decide this without the consent of the Kisrā.' He [the bishop] replied: 'Write to him a letter and ask him for permission, and hopefully he allows it [the baptism].' Then Nuʿmān wrote to the Kisrā, informing him of his illness, and telling to him what had been told to him, namely that he would not be healed unless he converted to Christianity. And he continued: 'I wish to know what are the king's position and opinion about this. If he decides to give me permission, and agrees with what I have written, then I convert, and when he refuses, then I will abstain from converting.' And he sent the letter along with ʿAmr b. ʿAmr b. Qays b. al-Ḥārith of the Banū Buqayla,[116] because he was an intelligent and educated man, and he ordered him to proceed with diplomatic sensitivity when he presented his request . . . until he [the Persian king] replied to Nuʿmān's letter where he gave him his permission.

The reply [of the Persian king] read as follows: 'Your letter has reached me, and I understood what you mentioned about your medical condition and about the various illnesses that have befallen you, and that you cannot find a cure for your disease except by baptism. And you want to know my opinion and to know my will, because you do not want to do anything without my permission. I like that attitude, because you give priority to my opinion about your religion. For I ask that you give priority to me in religious matters. I hereby permit you to become a Christian, and that you take hold of the religion you want, because the adoption of Christianity or other religions that approach you to the Almighty God will not reduce your position with me, and will not change your status; on the contrary, this will increase your reputation with me, because you have thus taken a religion that has previously taken no Arab before you; you hit it and hit correctly, so do what you want and so you're highly regarded for me.'

Once King Nuʿmān had received the approving response [of the Persian king], he sent immediately for Shamʿūn [the bishop of al-Ḥīra], and he came. He announced to him that Kisrā [the Persian king] had given him the permission [to convert]. [Because of this good news], Bishop Shamʿūn and the Christians of al-Ḥīra greatly rejoiced and jubilated, the church bells rang, and the people gathered to witness his baptism. Then Bishop Shamʿūn baptised the king, his wife and his children; and the members of his family and several Arabs went to the church erected by Bishop Shamʿūn which is known as the Cathedral. And Bishop Shamʿūn n wrote to the *catholicos* Īshōʿyābh[117] and told him the good news, namely, that king Nuʿmān had converted to Christianity.

Nuʿmān accompanied the Bishop's letter with one of himself, in which he informed him that he had converted, and asked him [the *catholicos*] to pray for

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[115] Arabic form of the Persian personal name Khusrau, via syr. *Kesrā*, which became to be understood as the title of the Persian king (in remembrance of the two last great kings of the dynasty, Khusrau I (531–79) and Khusrau II (590–628)). See *EI*² s.v. 'Kisra' (M. Morony).

[116] A well-attested Christian family in al-Ḥīra. See Toral-Niehoff 2014: 103–5.

[117] *Catholicos* from 582–95.

him and bless him. The *catholicos* rejoiced, and wrote to him in reply: 'To our brother, the new beloved of the Messiah, Nuʿmān b. al-Mundhir, the king, famous for his kindness and his true belief in the religion of Jesus Christ, from Īshōʿyābh, the *catholicos*. The peace of Christ shall be with you for all eternity. Amen. Your letter reached me, in which you tell of your illness and the reason why you have embraced the faith of Christ, received by Shamʿūn, bishop of al-Ḥīra, the pure and blessed, and I have learned it and I am looking forward to your commitment to the Church of the Messiah, the Savior, and the advocacy of your sons, your family and other Arabs, as you have approached the praise of the Messiah and His religion. I'm so happy, as I've never been before since I sit on the throne of the Church. And I ask the Savior to provide you with a long life and to heal you, and to care that nothing harms you as long as you live. And I trust in the Messiah that he does this for you, and regarding my prayer, consider that I am praying day and night for you.'

Then Nuʿmān's disease intensified. They [the Christians] then told him of a bishop in Mosul[118] called Sabrīshōʿ, and the Christians said to him: 'If he prays for you, then you will be healed.' Then the king wrote to the Kisrā [the Persian king] by asking him that he should command this bishop to come, and he did it. Sabrīshōʿ came to Nuʿmān. And as soon as he arrived, the king said, 'Have mercy on me, and only ask the Messiah for my healing. I have learned that he concedes you anything you ask of him.'

[The Christians told their decision?]. Then Sabrīshōʿ entered the church and knelt before the altar, and he was deeply moved and prayed. There came another man who was with him.[119] He loosened his belt and opened his arms and stood on one leg, facing the sun, on a very hot August day, and swore by the Messiah, that he would not stop doing so until Nuʿmān the king of the Arabs was healed of the demon [*shayṭān*] tormenting him. Then the demon came out with a loud roar out of Nuʿmān. His palace trembled and Nuʿmān was healed. The idols burst [or he broke the idols] and the Arabs turned away from them [the idols].

Among the people who converted together with him were his sisters Hind and Māwiya, the daughters of al-Mundhir. Their allegiance to Christianity was so strong that they asked the bishop Shamʿūn b. Ǧābir to write to the *catholicos* Īshōʿyābh asking him to donate his body to them after death. As he wrote to him, Īshōʿyābh ordered that, after his death, his body should only be available to them [to Hind and Māwiya] alone and he forbade it to all others; and he wrote a letter [attesting this]. When he died, Shamʿūn sent for him and he brought him [his corpse] from the church of the *catholicos* to al-Ḥīra and gave it to them [to Hind and Māwiya]. And they buried him in the church of Dayr al-Hind.[120] This church is known in al-Ḥīra till today for its blessing, and may they both be in its protection.

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[118] An anachronism: Mosul (Arab. *Mawsil*, lying opposite the ancient city of Nineveh) is an Islamic foundation from the seventh century. The bishop's see of Sabrīshōʿ was Lashom, in the south of later Mosul, near present Kirkuk. See Tamcke 1988: 21–3.

[119] A reference to the monk Īšōʿzeḥā (Išoʿzkha) mentioned by Petros (*al-Manāqib*, 277) and the *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 13, p. 481) whose help in the exorcism was essential for the healing of al-Nuʿmān. Apparently the name was lost in this version, perhaps because the figure did not achieve the fame of Sabrīshōʿ.

[120] Most probably the *Dayr Hind al-Ṣughrā*.

Abū al-Baqāʾ eventually makes it clear that the story does not change his negative assessment of al-Nuʿmān's qualities, and he evidently does not place much credence in al-Nuʿmān's commitment:

[**8.40**, cont.] *al-Manāqib*, p. 272 (trans. Toral-Niehoff)
After Nuʿmān had left idolatry, he returned to quite the same [idolatrous creed/practice]. The listener [reader] is amazed by this and by this example of hypocrisy.

We do not know via which channels this Christian legend reached Abū al-Baqāʾ, since he omits his source, and, as noted earlier, his version is neither a direct quotation of the *Chronicle of Seert*, nor of any other Muslim author. It is probable that he relied either on some lost local Christian version, or on oral accounts of the story circulating among Iraqi Nestorian Christians in his period.

Isabel Toral-Niehoff

MIDDLE PERSIAN AND PERSIAN SOURCES

This chapter concludes with a very brief survey of several Persian texts that offer alternative viewpoints on events, and individuals, who appear throughout this chapter and this volume.

Texts written in Middle Persian, produced predominantly by Zoroastrian priests, have their origins in the late fifth and the early sixth centuries. They were copied after the Arab conquest of the Sasanian empire, and subsequently new texts were composed to serve as a guide for the followers of the Zoroastrian religion.

The *Bundahišn*, or *The Book of Primal Creation*, is a ninth-century encyclopaedic text on various subjects (based on the *Zand*, or commentary on the *Avesta*), explained from the world-view of the Zoroastrians. This extract is taken from a section that recounts the sacred history of the Sasanians according to the Zoroastrian tradition, entitled the *Calamities Which Befell Iranshahr during Each Millennium*. This part of the *Bundahišn* deals with the situation discussed in **8.19–21**.[121]

Shapur II and the Arabs
[**8.41**] *Bundahišn* 33.2–6/pp. 367–8 (trans. Daryaee, excerpts)
The rulership of Shapur (II), the son of Hormizd, the Arabs came, they took Khorīg Rūdbār, for many years with contempt [they] rushed till Shapur came to rulership, he destroyed the Arabs and took the land, and destroyed many Arab rulers and pulled out many number of shoulders [. . .]

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[121] See Macuch 2009: 137.

Shapur II earned a reputation for the zeal with which he prosecuted warfare against the Arabs who had been raiding Persian territory, and his fearsome manner secured him the sobriquet the 'piercer' or 'separator' of shoulders; in addition to dispersing a number of warlike tribes, as al-Ṭabarī notes above, he also appears to have built a defensive moat or wall. This was called (in Middle Persian) the *war ī tāzīgān*, or the 'moat of the Arabs' (also known as the *Khandaq ī Shapur*).

Persian sources written after the Muslim conquest of Persia also address the relationship between Arabs and the Sasanian kings, and the bloody conflict between Shapur and the Arabs once again appears in the *Zayn al-Akhbār* of Gardīzī, who lived in the eleventh century during the reign of Sultan Mahmoud of Ghazna. This text carries a perspective drawn not just from the broader canvas of Persian historiography, but specifically from the province of Khurāsān.

> [**8.42**] *Zayn al-Akhbār*, pp. 88–9 (trans. Daryaee)
> The king of Arabs during his time (Shapur II) was al-Harith b. al-Aqar al-Ayadī and when the news of the death of Hormoz (King Hormizd) came to the Arabs, from the land of Abd al-Qays and Kazmeh and Bahrain they came and sat on the side of Iranshahr and raided and pillaged and attacked and killed and took and sold people and things belonging to people and brought much disorder. When Shapur Dhul Aktaf became sixteen years old, he collected an army and went to the Arab land and killed many of the Arabs so that the land of the Arabs was cleared and he made it so anywhere any Arabs they brought, he ordered to pierce the shoulder and put a ring in it, and for this reason he has the epithet of Dhul Aktaf, which in Persian is Hubah Sunbān.

In a later section Gardīzī refers to the position of Monzar (al-Mundhir) in terms which recall the privileged position of al-Ḥārith under Justinian (5.15).

> Monzar
> [**8.43**] *Zayn al-Akhbār*, p. 96 (trans. Daryaee)
> And his first act was that he [the Persian king] made Monzar b. Amriʾ al-Qays the king of the Arabs, he was the head of all the Arabs. He and his descendants made much contribution to the king of Persians (ʿAjam).

The 'descendants' are presumably the Naṣrid kings, believed to have ruled in an unbroken line for centuries; the family link to Amriʾ (Imruʾ) al-Qays reflects the genealogical information offered by al-Ṭabarī.

Another perspective on the relationship between the Sasanian leaders and the Arabs is provided by the *Tārīkh Balʾamī*, composed as a translation of al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk* in the early tenth century at the Sāmānid court in Khurāsān. It is important to note, however, that this work is not simply a translation of al-Ṭabarī's history, as material was added from sources that are now lost to us; in fact, there were probably several editions of this work in circulation, with individual versions reflecting several differing

historiographical traditions.[122] The passage below from the *Tārīkh Balʾamī* addresses the death of al-Nuʿmān, the final Naṣrid leader, at the hands of Khusrau II. In common with many of the sources discussed throughout this volume, this part of the *Tārīkh* reflects the complex relations between the various peoples of the Arabian Peninsula in the power politics of the late antique period.

> The demise of al-Nuʿmān
>
> [**8.44**] *Tārīkh Balʾamī*, pp. 818–19 (trans. Daryaee)
>
> Kisrā [Khusrau II] ordered the arrest of Nuʿmān for three days and on the fourth day, he threw him under the feet of elephants and killed him. And when Hadiqah, the daughter of Nuʿmān heard this (story), she became sad. And Nuʿmān and all of his children had become Christian (Persian *tarsā* i.e. 'God-fearing') and had left the Arab religion. Then when Hadiqah heard that they killed her father, she got up and went to Hind's convent. And Hind was the elder daughter of Monzar [Mundhir]. She is called ibn Maʾ al-Ismaʾ and she had become Christian and had made a convent and she prayed there till she died there as a Christian. And today they call that convent *Dayr of Hind*. And this Hadiqah was also there and till the end of her life she remained a Christian. Then when Kisrā killed Nuʿmān, he wrote to Ayās b. Qabisah to take the family of Nuʿmān and send them (to him). Ayās sent a message to Hani b. Nasūd and said: 'You must send the family of Nuʿmān (to me).' Hani answered that 'till I am alive I will not send any of the relatives (of Nuʿmān).' Ayās wrote to Kisrā and said: 'The tribes of bani Shayban and bani Bak and bani ʿAjal are numerous and militant and warlike, and the king knows well, and if I wage war with them, they have a large force.'

This extract is notable for an alternative view of al-Nuʿmān's death, which differs slightly from that related by al-Ṭabarī; a number of the figures appearing here feature in al-Ṭabarī's version of this chain of events, such as Hani, while others seem to be new interpolations.

Arabs also appear in the famous *Shāhnāmeh*, the 'Book of Kings', of Firdawsī. Written in rhyme, the *Shāhnāmeh* is an epic history of Iran composed in Classical Persian in the tenth century; it was based in part on a Sasanian royal narrative, the *Khwadāy-Nāmag* ('Book of Lords'), created in the sixth century on the order of Khusrau I. The *Khwadāy-Nāmag* provides a valuable Persian perspective on the events and wars of the sixth century, describing the conflict between the Sasanians and Romans, as well as the involvement of the Arabs in imperial competition for the Arabian Peninsula. In this section Monzar—al-Mundhir—appeals to Khusrau I against the injustice of the Roman emperor, which ultimately leads to war between the two adversaries. After diplomatic relations break down, Monzar is entrusted with Sasanian forces to attack the Roman empire.

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[122] Daniel 2012: 107.

Monzar and Khusrau

[**8.45**] *Shāhnāmeh*, pp. 420–72 (trans. Daryaee, excerpts)

From Gilan he rushed to Madaʾin, the number and end of his army he did not see, on the road and the endless troop, became manifest from afar, a rider came in the manner of heroes, as there was courageous in the abundant army, he came down from his horse and said thus: 'Behold Monzar of the Arabs, he has come to see the king, to kiss the earth of the court' . . . [. . .] Monzar came and kissed the ground, all that he had heard he mentioned it all . . . The veteran Monzar spoke of Rome and Caesar, he said to him: 'If you are the king of Iran, if you are the supporter and backer of nobles, why are the Romans ruling, in the plain of riders they ride (Arabia Peninsula?)' [. . .] From the speech of Monzar the king [Khusrau I] became angered, that the Caesar still holds up his crown, he chose an eloquent (messenger) from the army, who can comprehend their language, he [Khusrau] told him: 'From here go to Rome, do not rest at all in any place [. . .] tell the Caesar: "Do you not have wisdom? Because of your intelligence your decision will be punished, if a fighting lion attacks an onager, the lion will roast it in the salty plain, from Monzar if you receive justice"' [. . .] the messenger of Anushirvan [Khusrau] came in the manner of the wind, he came to Caesar, gave him his message, the worthless Caesar shouted and coiled (like a snake), he did not give any answer, except deceit [. . .] he [Caesar] thus said, 'if you believe that speech Monzar of Hira continues to wail, in this way his pain continues, in this manner in the plain of lance holders, they will wail from end to end, we will make the elevated plain flat, from that waterless plain we will make a sea.' The messenger listened and came back like the dust, all the words he had heard he recounted, Khusrau became angry and said, 'there is not wisdom in the head of Caesar' [. . .] he ordered the trumpets to be sounded, the army came from everywhere, from the court rose the sound of drums, the earth became blackened and the sky ebony, he chose from that famed army 30,000 cavalry horsemen, he entrusted that large army (to Monzar), he ordered that from the plain of lance holders, the army of fighters go to Rome, to raise fire from that boundary and land . . .

The appearance of Khusrau I favours the identification of Monzar with al-Mundhir (III; 504–54), a key actor in many of the texts in this volume. This extract might preserve a Persian recounting of the 'strata' dispute, where al-Mundhir was used by Khusrau to break the treaty of 540 which had been made with 'Caesar', i.e. Justinian (**5.21** and **8.23**). Once again the Naṣrid kings are portrayed as holding a special relationship with the Sasanian leaders; notably, the image in the text of al-Mundhir as a trusted advisor is supported by Roman sources.[123]

We conclude our very brief survey of Persian sources with an extract from the *Fārsnāme Ibn Balkhī*:

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[123] E.g. Proc. *BP* 1.17.29–40.

Bahram and Monzar

[**8.46**] *Fārsnāme Ibn Balkhī*, pp. 75–6 (trans. Daryaee)

When Bahram Gūr was two years old, his father [Yazdegerd I] entrusted him to Monzar, who was at the time the ruler of the Arabs, so that he would take him to a place which is called Ḥīra and which has fair weather, and he ordered him to teach him riding and acquire culture, and Monzar trained him well and his son, Nuʿmān b. Monzar, was present at his service continually. When he became five or six, he (Bahram) said to Monzar, 'bring me teachers to instruct me in science.' Monzar said, 'you are small and cannot learn.' He responded that 'do you not know that I am a prince, and the work of the king is science and art?' Monzar very much liked this speech from him, and brought teachers and wise men to instruct him, and he acquired much knowledge; he learned to ride, and to handle weapons, riding, and lancing, and archery, so much so that he became a warrior of the world in many arts, then Monzar took him to his father . . . and when Yazdgerd passed away, his army and people looked down on him, and said that his son has been brought up amidst the Arabs, and did not know the way of the Persians. They placed on the throne another person with the name of Kisrā from the descendants of Ardashir, son of Babak, and when this news came to Bahram he told Monzar, 'you are responsible for this infamy.' Monzar said, 'I am a servant and at your service, whatever you order.' In that time his son, Nuʿmān, along with ten thousand riders, were selected to go to the vicinity of Ctesiphon and to the borders of Persia and began to pillage and kill, and the grandees of Persia sent a messenger to Monzar so that he would return his son. Monzar told the messenger 'your coming to me is of no use; I am the servant and follow the orders [of Bahram], go and talk to the lord.' He sent him to Bahram, and when the messenger saw Bahram, he showed much respect, and said that the Persians made a mistake to give the kingship to another . . . and Monzar, with thirty thousand, came to Bahram, and when the messenger returned, the grandees of Persia learned of him and they came to the border and in-between both armies they placed a seat made of gold and with jewels and Bahram sat on that seat. The grandees of Persia came forth, and when they saw him with such grandeur and place and honor and esteem, and Monzar on the right hand was standing and Nuʿmān on the left, all performed proskynesis and followed his order.

The *Fārsnāme* is an early twelfth-century anonymous work whose author was from the region of Balkh (Bactra), in what is now Afghanistan. The chronicle concentrates, however, on the province of Fārs, and offers important details on Sasanian history. This passage focuses on Bahram Gūr, the fifth-century king who was raised in the Arab court of al-Ḥīra (**8.22**), and shares many details with the continuation (not quoted here) of the text in **8.22**. Al-Ṭabarī notes, for example, Bahram's request for teachers and instructors in archery, and also records the way that the Persian grandees viewed, with distaste, Bahram's 'Arab upbringing'.[124]

Touraj Daryaee

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[124] Al-Ṭabarī 1.858.

Epigraphic and Papyrological Sigla

This list includes the most commonly used sigla in this volume (see also in-text references for individual inscriptions throughout).

AÉ	*Année Épigraphique*
As	Old Syriac inscriptions from Edessa in Drijvers and Healey 1999; see also Healey 2009
Bayt al-Ashwal	Inscriptions from Bayt al-Ashwal in Garbini 1970
BÉ	*Bulletin Épigraphique*
B-Mur	Barāqish inscriptions: Fortification Wall (forthcoming)
CIH	*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars IV. Inscriptiones Ḥimyariticas et Sabaeas continens.* Paris, 1899–1930
CIS ii	*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars II. Inscriptiones Aramaicas continens.* Paris, 1889–1954
CIS v	*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars V. Inscriptiones Saracenicas continens, Tomus 1. Inscriptiones Safaiticae.* Paris, 1950–1
DASI	*The Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions*: http://www.dasiproject.eu/index.php?id=2
Diaries	Cuneiform texts in Sachs and Hunger 1988–2006
Fa	Inscriptions recorded by Ahmed Fakhry; see Ryckmans 1952
H	Inscriptions from Ḥaṭrā in Healey 2009
Ḥaṣī	Inscriptions from Ḥaṣī in Robin 2001b
HE	Taymanitic, Dadanitic, and Thamudic inscriptions in Harding 1971
IGLS	*Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, eds L. Jalabert, R. Mouterde et al. Paris, 1929–
Ja	Inscriptions recorded by Albert Jamme
JSLih	Dadanitic inscriptions in Jaussen and Savignac 1909–22
JSNab	Nabataean inscriptions in Jaussen and Savignac 1909–22
JSTham	Taymanitic, Hismaic, and Thamudic B, C, and D inscriptions in Jaussen and Savignac 1909–22
KRS	Safaitic inscriptions recorded by G. M. H. King on the *Basalt Desert Rescue Survey* and published via http://krc2.orient.ox.ac.uk/aalc/index.php/en/basalt-desert-rescue-survey
L	Calvet and Robin 2007
LPNab	Inscriptions in Littmann 1914a

M	Minaic inscriptions in Garbini 1974
MAFRAY	*Mission archéologique française en République arabe du Yémen*
Maʾsal	see Ry
Murayghān 1	see Ry
Murayghān 3	Robin and Ṭayrān 2012
P. Ness.	Papyri in Kraemer 1958
P. Petra	Papyri in Frösén et al. 2002 (I); Koenen et al. 2013 (II); Arjava et al. 2007 (III); Arjava et al. 2011 (IV)
PTer.	Inscriptions in Meimaris and Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou 2005
PUAES IIIA	Greek and Latin inscriptions in Littmann 1907
R	Inscriptions recorded by the Ryckmans–Philby–Lippens expedition (Gonzague Ryckmans, Jacques Ryckmans, Harry St John B. Philby, and Philippe Lippens) in Saudi Arabia, between the end of October 1951 and mid-February 1952 (the letter R corresponds to the region of Ḥimà)
RES	*Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique*. Paris, 1900–68
RIÉth	Inscriptions in Bernand et al. 1991–2000
Ry	Inscriptions recorded by Gonzague Ryckmans: 506 (Murayghān 1), 509 (Maʾsal 1), 510 (Maʾsal 2) = Ryckmans 1953
SEG	*Supplementum epigraphicum graecum*. Leiden/Amsterdam, 1923–
Wadd.	*Inscriptions grecques et latines recueillies en Grèce et en Asie Mineure*, eds P. Le Bas and W. H. Waddington, 3 vols. Paris, 1853–70
WH	Safaitic and Greek inscriptions in Winnett Harding 1978
YM	*Yemen Museum*
ẒM	*Ẓafār Museum*

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