PART I

THE PRE-ISLAMIC AGE

CHAPTER I

THE ARABS AS SEMITES

ARABIA THE CRADLE OF THE SEMITIC RACE

Claims on our interest

OF all the lands comparable to Arabia in size, and of all the peoples approaching the Arabs in historical interest and importance, no country and no nationality have perhaps received so little consideration and study in modern times as have Arabia and the Arabs

Here is a country that is about one-fourth the area of Europe, one-third the size of the United States of America, yet what is known about it is out of all proportion to what is unknown. We are beginning to know more, comparatively speaking, about the Arctic and Antarctic regions than we do about most of Arabia.

As the probable cradle of the Semitic family the Arabian peninsula nursed those peoples who later migrated into the Fertile Crescent and subsequently became the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Phoenicians and the Hebrews of history. As the plausible fount of pure Semitism, the sandy soil of the peninsula is the place wherein the rudimentary elements of Judaism, and consequently of Christianity—together with the origin of those traits which later developed into the well-delineated Semitic character—should be sought for. In medieval times Arabia gave birth to a people who conquered most of the then civilized world, and to a religion—Islam—which still claims the adherence of some four hundred and fifty millions of people representing nearly all the races and many different climes. Every eighth person in our world today is a follower of Muḥammad, and the Moslem call to prayer rings out through most of the twenty-four hours of the day, encircling the larger portion of the globe in its warm belt.

Around the name of the Arabs gleams that halo which belongs to the world-conquerors. Within a century after their rise this people became the masters of an empire extending from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the confines of China, an empire

greater than that of Rome at its zenith. In this period of unprecedented expansion they "assimilated to their creed, speech, and even physical type, more aliens than any stock before or since, not excepting the Hellenic, the Roman, the Anglo-Saxon, or the Russian".[1]

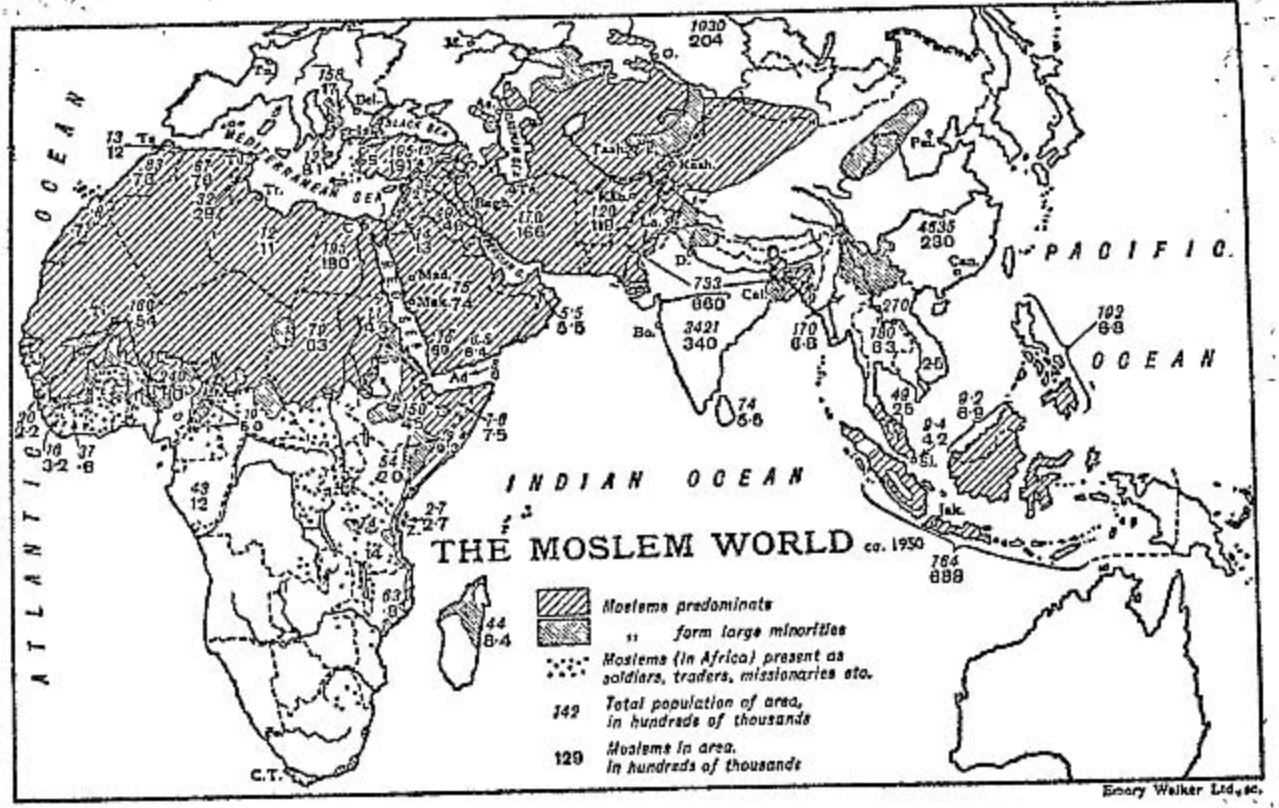
It was not only an empire that the Arabs built, but a culture as well. Heirs of the ancient civilization that flourished on the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates, in the land of the Nile and on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, they likewise absorbed and assimilated the main features of the Greco-Roman culture, and subsequently acted as a medium for transmitting to medieval Europe many of those intellectual influences which ultimately resulted in the awakening of the Western world and in setting it on the road towards its modern renaissance. No people in the Middle Ages contributed to human progress so much as did the Arabians and the Arabic-speaking peoples.[2]

The religion of the Arabians, after Judaism and Christianity, is the third and latest monotheistic religion. Historically it is an offshoot of these other two, and of all faiths it comes nearest to being their next of kin. All three are the product of one spiritual life, the Semitic life. A faithful Moslem could with but few scruples subscribe to most of the tenets of Christian belief. Islam has been and still is a living force from Morocco to Indonesia and a way of life to millions of the human race.

The Arabic language today is the medium of daily expression for some hundred million people. For many centuries in the Middle Ages it was the language of learning and culture and progressive thought throughout the civilized world. Between the ninth and the twelfth centuries more works, philosophical, medical, historical, religious, astronomical and geographical, were produced through the medium of Arabic than through any other tongue. The languages of Western Europe still bear the impress of its influence in the form of numerous loan-words. Its alphabet, next to the Latin, is the most widely used system in the world. It is the one employed by Persian, Afghan, Urdu, and a number of Turkish, Berber and Malayan languages.

[1] D. G. Hogarth, *The Penetration of Arabia* (New York, 1904), p. 7.

[2] On the distinction between Arabians and Arabs (Arabic-speaking peoples) as used in this book see below, p. 43, n. 3.


ATLANTIC OCEAN
PACIFIC OCEAN
INDIAN OCEAN
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
BLACK SEA
THE MOSLEM WORLD ca. 1950
Moslems predominate
" form large minorities
Moslems (in Africa) present as soldiers, traders, missionaries etc.
342 Total population of area, in hundreds of thousands
129 Moslems in area, in hundreds of thousands
Emery Walker Ltd. sc.

The Babylonians, the Chaldaeans, the Hittites, the Phoenicians were, but are no more. The Arabians and the Arabic-speaking peoples were and remain. They stand today as they stood in the past in a most strategic geographical position astride one of the greatest arteries of world trade. Currently their international position is importantly medial in the tug of cold war between East and West. In their soil are treasured the world's greatest stores of liquid energy, oil, first discovered in 1932. Since World War I these peoples have been nationally aroused and have achieved full independence. For the first time since the rise of Islam most of the Arabian peninsula has been consolidated under one rule, the Su'ūdi. Egypt, after experiencing a period of monarchy, declared in 1952 in favour of the republican form. In this it followed Syria—whose capital Damascus was once the seat of the glorious Umayyad empire—which seven years earlier had freed itself from the French mandate. Al-'Irāq, after installing a king in Baghdād, kingless since 'Abbāsid days, abolished the monarchy and declared itself a republic. Lebanon was the first to adopt the republican form. Transjordan and a part of Palestine developed in 1949 into the Hāshimite Kingdom of Jordan. In North Africa Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania and Algeria shook off the French and Libya the Italian tutelage in the 1950s and 1960s. The phœnix, a bird of Araby, is rising again.

Modern explorations

Classical Europe knew southern Arabia: Herodotus, among others, mentions its western coast. The chief interest of the Greeks and the Romans lay in the fact that the South Arabians inhabited the frankincense and spice land and acted as a connecting link with the markets of India and Somaliland. But late medieval and early modern Europe forgot Arabia in great part and had in recent times to discover it anew. The pioneers were adventurers, Christian missionaries, traders, French and British officers attached to the Egyptian expeditions between 1811 and 1836, political emissaries and scientific explorers.

The first modern scholar to describe the land was Carsten Niebuhr, a member of a scientific expedition sent by the king of Denmark in 1761. Al-Yaman in South Arabia, the part best known to classical Europe, was the first to be rediscovered. The north-western part of the peninsula, centring in al-Ḥijāz, though geographically nearer to Europe, was left to the end. Down to the present day no more than a dozen Europeans of those who

left records have succeeded in penetrating into this religiously forbidden area.

In 1812 Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, a Swiss, discovered Petra for the learned world, and under the name Ibrāhīm ibn-'Abdullāh visited Makkah and al-Madīnah. His description of the places visited has hardly since been improved upon. Burckhardt's Moslem tomb stands today in the great cemetery of Cairo. The only other European until 1925 who had a chance to study Makkah in its normal life was Professor Snouck Hurgronje of Leyden, who was there in 1885–6. In 1845 a young Finno-Swedish scholar, George Augustus Wallin, paid a visit to Najd for linguistic study. Napoleon III, after withdrawing his troops from Lebanon in 1861, sought a new sphere of influence in central Arabia and thereinto sent, two years later, an Englishman, William Gifford Palgrave, who was a Jew by birth and who at that time, as a member of the Jesuit order, was stationed at Zahlah, Lebanon. Palgrave claimed that he covered more ground south of Najd than he actually did. In 1853 Sir Richard F. Burton, famous as the translator of *The Arabian Nights*, visited the holy cities as a pilgrim—al-Ḥājj 'Abdullāh. Lady Anne Blunt, one of two European women to penetrate north Arabia, reached (1879) Najd on several odd missions, including the quest of Arabian horses. In 1875 an Englishman, Charles M. Doughty, traversed northern Arabia as a "Nasrâny" (Christian) and "Engleysy". His record of the journey, *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, has become a classic of English literature. T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* has been greeted as a work of special merit in the literature of the first World War. Among the latest explorers may be mentioned a Czechoslovak, Alois Musil, who specialized on the northern territory; and among the recent travellers, the Lebanese-American Ameen Rihani, who interviewed all the kings of the peninsula, and Eldon Rutter, who visited Makkah and al-Madīnah in 1925–6. A special reference should be made to the brave feat of Bertram Thomas, the young English orientalist, who in January 1931 crossed for the first time the great southern desert of Arabia, al-Rab' al Khāli, and bared one of the largest blank spots left on the world's map His adventure was matched by H. St.J B. Philby, al-Ḥājj 'Abdullāh, who, starting at al-Hufūf near the Persian Gulf on January 7, 1932, crossed al-Rab' al-Khāli from east to west in ninety days.

The Ḥimyarite inscriptions which afforded us the first opportunity to hear what the South Arabians had to say about themselves were discovered by a Frenchman disguised as a Jewish beggar from Jerusalem, Joseph Halévy, 1869–70, and by an Austrian Jew, Eduard Glaser, between 1882 and 1894 (see below, p. 51). The copious but late and not fully authentic Islamic literature in Arabic, the sporadic Greek and Latin references and the few hieroglyphic and cuneiform statements in the annals of the Pharaohs and the kings of Assyro-Babylonia, supplemented by the recently deciphered Ḥimyarite material and by the reports of the modern travellers and explorers, constitute our chief sources of knowledge of ancient Arabia.

Ethnic relationship the Semites

Of the two surviving representatives of the Semitic people, the Arabians, in a larger measure than the Jews, have preserved the characteristic physical features and mental traits of the family. Their language, though the youngest among the Semitic group from the point of view of literature, has, nevertheless, conserved more of the peculiarities of the mother Semitic tongue —including the inflection—than the Hebrew and its other sister languages. It therefore affords the best key for the study of the Semitic languages Islam, too, in its original form is the logical perfection of Semitic religion. In Europe and America the word "Semite" has come to possess a primarily Jewish connotation, and that on account of the wide dispersion of the Jews in these continents The "Semitic features" often referred to, including the prominent nose, are not Semitic at all. They are exactly the characteristics which differentiate the Jew from the Semitic type and evidently represent an acquisition from early intermarriages between the Hittite-Hurrians and the Hebrews.[1]

The reasons which make the Arabian Arabs, particularly the nomads, the best representatives of the Semitic family biologically, psychologically, socially and linguistically should be sought in their geographical isolation and in the monotonous uniformity of desert life Ethnic purity is a reward of the most ungrateful and isolated environment, such as central Arabia affords. The Arabians call their habitat *Jazīrat al-ʿArab*, "the Island of the Arabs", and an island it is, surrounded by water on three sides

[1] George A Barton, *Semitic and Hamitic Origins* (Philadelphia, 1934), pp 85-7, Ignace J. Gelb, *Hurrians and Subarians* (Chicago, 1944), pp. 69-70

and by sand on the fourth. This "island" furnishes an almost unique example of uninterrupted relationship between populace and soil. If any immigrations have ever taken place thereinto resulting in successive waves of settlers ousting or submerging one another—as in the case of India, Greece, Italy, England and the United States—history has left us no record thereof. Nor do we know of any invader who succeeded in penetrating the sandy barriers and establishing a permanent foothold in this land. The people of Arabia have remained virtually the same throughout all the recorded ages.[1]

The term Semite comes from Shem in the Old Testament (Gen. 10 : 1) through the Latin of the Vulgate. The traditional explanation that the so-called Semites are descended from the eldest son of Noah, and therefore racially homogeneous, is no longer accepted. Who are the Semites then?

If we consult a linguistic map of Western Asia we find Syria, Palestine, Arabia proper and al-'Irāq populated at the present time by Arabic-speaking peoples. If we then review our ancient history we remember that beginning with the middle of the fourth millennium before our era the Babylonians (first called Akkadians after their capital Akkadu, Agade), the Assyrians and later the Chaldaeans occupied the Tigro-Euphrates valley; after 2500 B.C. the Amorites and Canaanites (including the Phoenicians) populated Syria; and about 1500 B.C. the Aramaeans settled in Syria and the Hebrews in Palestine. Down to the nineteenth century the medieval and modern world did not realize that all these peoples were closely related. With the decipherment of the cuneiform writing in the middle of the nineteenth century and the comparative study of the Assyro-Babylonian, Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic and Ethiopic tongues it was found that those languages had striking points of similarity and were therefore cognates. In the case of each one of these languages the verbal stem is triconsonantal; the tense has only two forms, perfect and imperfect; the conjugation of the verb follows the same model. The elements of the vocabulary, including the personal pronouns, nouns denoting blood-kinship, numbers and certain names of members of the body, are almost alike. A scrutiny of the social institutions and religious beliefs and a comparison of

[1] Cf. Bertram Thomas in *The Near East and India* (London, Nov. 1, 1928), pp. 516-17; C. Rathjens in *Journal asiatique*, ccxv. No 1 (1929), pp 141-55

the physical features of the peoples who spoke these languages have revealed likewise impressive points of resemblance. The linguistic kinship is, therefore, but a manifestation of a well-marked general unity of type. This type was characterized by deep religious instinct, vivid imagination, pronounced individuality and marked ferocity. The inference is inescapable: the ancestors of these various peoples—Babylonians, Assyrians, Chaldaeans, Amorites, Aramaeans, Phoenicians, Hebrews, Arabians and Abyssinians—before they became thus differentiated must have lived at some time in the same place as one people.

Arabia, the cradle of the Semites

Where was the original home of this people? Different hypotheses have been worked out by various scholars. There are those who, considering the broad ethnic relationship between Semites and Hamites, hold that eastern Africa was the original home; others, influenced by Old Testament traditions, maintain that Mesopotamia provided the first abode; but the arguments in favour of the Arabian peninsula, considered in their cumulative effect, seem most plausible The Mesopotamian theory is vitiated by the fact that it assumes passage of people from an agricultural stage of development on the banks of a river to a nomadic stage, which is the reverse of the sociological law in historic times. The African theory raises more questions than it answers.

The surface of Arabia is mostly desert with a narrow margin of habitable land round the periphery. The sea encircles this periphery. When the population increases beyond the capacity of the land to support it the surplus must seek elbow room. But this surplus cannot expand inward because of the desert, nor outward on account of the sea—a barrier which in those days was well-nigh impassable. The overpopulation would then find one route open before it on the western coast of the peninsula leading northward and forking at the Sinaitic peninsula to the fertile valley of the Nile. Around 3500 B.C. a Semitic migration followed this route, or took the east African route northward, planted itself on top of the earlier Hamitic population of Egypt and the amalgamation produced the Egyptians of history. These are the Egyptians who laid down so many of the basic elements in our civilization. It was they who first built stone structures and developed a solar calendar. At about the same time a parallel migration followed the eastern route northward and struck root

in the Tigro-Euphrates valley, already populated by a highly civilized community, the Sumerians.[1] The Semites entered the valley as barbarian nomads, but learned from the Sumerians, the originators of the Euphratean civilization, how to build and live in homes, how to irrigate the land and above all how to write. The Sumerians were a non-Semitic people. The admixture of the two races here gave us the Babylonians, who share with the Egyptians the honour of laying down the fundamentals of our cultural heritage. Among other innovations, the Babylonians bequeathed to us the arch and the vault (probably of Sumerian origin), the wheeled cart and a system of weights and measures.

About the middle of the third millennium before Christ another Semitic migration brought the Amorites into the Fertile Crescent. The component elements of the Amorites included the Canaanites (who occupied western Syria and Palestine after 2500 B.C.) and the coastal people called by the Greeks Phoenicians. These Phoenicians were the first people to popularize an exclusively alphabetic system of writing, comprising twenty-two signs, properly styled the greatest invention of mankind (cf. below, p. 71).

Between 1500 and 1200 B.C. the Hebrews made their way into southern Syria, Palestine, and the Aramaeans (Syrians) into the north, particularly Coele-Syria.[2] The Hebrews, before any other people, revealed to the world the clear idea of one God, and their monotheism became the origin of Christian and Moslem belief.

About 500 B.C. the Nabataeans established themselves north-east of the Sinaitic peninsula. The height to which their civilization later attained under Roman influence may be gauged by the magnificent ruins of their rock-hewn capital, Petra.

The seventh century of our era saw a new and final migration under the banner of Islam, in the course of which the dam broke and not only the lands of the Fertile Crescent, the region forming an arc between the head of the Persian Gulf and the south-east corner of the Mediterranean Sea, but even Egypt, northern Africa, Spain, Persia and parts of central Asia were flooded.[3]

This last migration, which took place within the full light of history, is cited as an historical argument by the supporters of

[1] Cf. C. Leonard Woolley, *The Sumerians* (Oxford, 1929), pp. 5 6.
[2] Hollow Syria, modern al-Biqā', between the two Lebanons.
[3] Hugo Winckler, *The History of Babylonia and Assyria*, tr. James A. Craig (New York, 1907), pp. 18-22.

the theory of Arabia as the Semitic home; they further reinforce their case by the observation that the Arabians have preserved the Semitic traits more purely and have manifested them more distinctly than any other members of that racial group, and that their language is most nearly akin to what scholars believe the primitive form of Semitic speech to have been.

A comparative examination of the dates quoted above suggested to certain Semitists the notion that in recurrent cycles of approximately one thousand years Arabia, like a mighty reservoir, became populated to the point where overflow was inevitable. These same scholars would speak of the migrations in terms of "waves". It is more likely, however, that these Semitic movements partook in their initial stages more of the nature of the European migrations into the New World: a few persons would start moving, others would follow, then many more would go, until a general popular interest was aroused in the idea of going.

This transplantation *en masse* or in bands of human groups from a pastoral desert region to an agricultural territory constitutes a common phenomenon in the Near East and provides an important clue to the understanding of its long and checkered history. The process by which a more or less migratory people imposes itself upon a people which has become rooted in the soil usually results in the invaders assimilating to some degree the main features of the previously existing civilization and in infusing a certain amount of its blood, but hardly ever in the extermination of the indigenous population. This is exactly what happened in the ancient Near East, whose history is to a certain extent a struggle between the sedentary population already domiciled in the Fertile Crescent and the nomadic Arabians trying to dispossess them. For immigration and colonization are, as has been well said, an attenuated form of invasion.

It should be noted in connection with these migrations that in almost every case the Semitic tongue survived. This is a determining factor. If in Mesopotamia, for example, the agglutinative Sumerian language had survived it would have been difficult for us to classify the people of the valley as Semitic. In the case of the ancient Egyptians a Semito-Hamitic language evolved, and we cannot very well include the Egyptians among the Semites. The term "Semite", therefore, has more linguistic

than ethnological implication, and the Assyro-Babylonian, Aramaic, Hebrew, Phoenician, South Arabic, Ethiopic and Arabic languages should be viewed as dialects developing out of one common tongue, the *Ursemitisch*. A parallel may be found in the case of the Romance languages in their relation to Latin, with the exception that some form of Latin has survived, in literature at least, to the present day, whereas the Semitic archetype, only a spoken language, has entirely passed away, though its general character may be inferred from whatever points are found common to its surviving daughters.

Accepting Arabia—Najd or al-Yaman—as the homeland and distributing centre of the Semitic peoples does not preclude the possibility of their having once before, at a very early date, constituted with another member of the white race, the Hamites, one community somewhere in eastern Africa; it was from this community that those who were later termed Semites crossed over into the Arabian peninsula, possibly at Bāb al-Mandab.[1] This would make Africa the probable Semito-Hamitic home and Arabia the cradle of the Semitic people and the centre of their distribution. The Fertile Crescent was the scene of the Semitic civilization.

[1] Barton, p. 27

CHAPTER II

THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

The setting of the stage

ARABIA is the south-western peninsula of Asia, the largest peninsula on the map. Its area of 1,027,000 square miles holds an estimated population of only fourteen millions. Su'ūdī Arabia, with an area (exclusive of al-Rab' al-Khālī) of 597,000 square miles, claims some seven millions; al-Yaman five millions; al-Kuwayt, Qatar, the trucial shaykhdoms, 'Umān and Masqaṭ, Aden and the Aden protectorate the rest. Geologists tell us that the land once formed the natural continuation of the Sahara (now separated from it by the rift of the Nile valley and the great chasm of the Red Sea) and of the sandy belt which traverses Asia through central Persia and the Gobi Desert. In earlier times the Atlantic westerlies, which now water the highlands of Syria-Palestine, must have reached Arabia undrained, and during a part of the Ice Age these same desert lands must have been pre-eminently habitable grasslands. Since the ice sheet never extended south of the great mountains in Asia Minor, Arabia was never made uninhabitable by glaciation. Its deep, dry wadi beds still bear witness to the erosive powers of the rainwater that once flowed through them. The northern boundary is ill-defined, but may be considered an imaginary line drawn due east from the head of the Gulf of al-'Aqabah in the Red Sea to the Euphrates. Geologically, indeed, the whole Syro-Mesopotamian desert is a part of Arabia.

The peninsula slopes away from the west to the Persian Gulf and the Mesopotamian depression. Its backbone is a range of mountains running parallel to the western coast and rising to a height of over 9000 feet in Midian on the north and 14,000 in al-Yaman on the south.[1] Al-Sarāh in al-Hijāz reaches an elevation of 10,000 feet. From this backbone the eastern fall is gradual and long; the western, towards the Red Sea, is steep and short. The southern sides of the peninsula, where the sea has been

[1] The highest measured point: Carl Rathjens and Hermann v. Wissmann, *Südarabiens Reste*, vol III, *Landeskundliche Ergebnisse* (Hamburg, 1934), p 2

receding from the coast at a rate reckoned at seventy-two feet per year, are fringed by lowlands, the Tihāmahs. Najd, the north central plateau, has a mean elevation of 2500 feet. Its mountain range, Shammar, lifts one red granite peak, Aja', 5550 feet above the sea-level. Behind the coastal lowlands rise ranges of various heights on all three sides. In 'Umān, on the eastern coast, the summits of al-Jabal al-Akhḍar soar to a height of 9900 feet, forming one notable exception to the general eastward decline of the surface of the land.

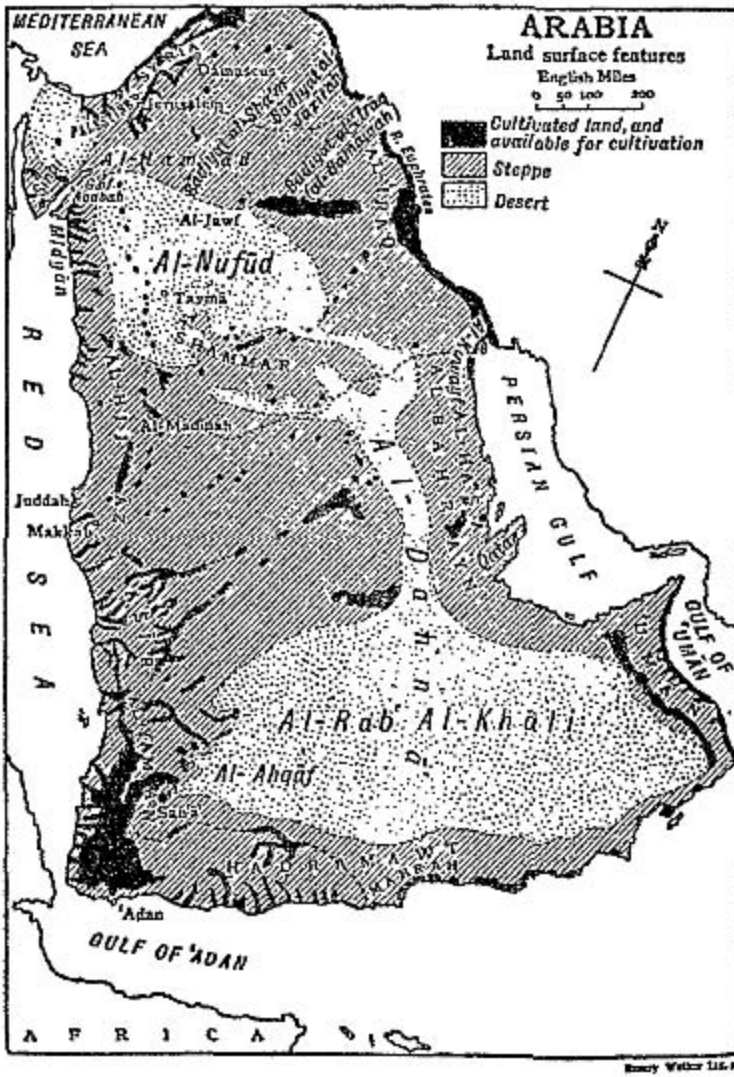
With the exception of the mountains and highlands just discussed the land consists mainly of desert and steppe. The steppes (sing. *dārah*) are circular plains between hills covered with sand and embosoming subterranean waters. The so-called Syrian desert, Bādiyat al-Sha'm, as well as the Mesopotamian desert, are mostly steppeland. The southern part of the Syrian desert is colloquially known as al-Ḥamād. The southern part of the Mesopotamian steppeland is often referred to as Bādiyat al-'Irāq or al-Samāwah.

Of the desert land three varieties may be distinguished:

1. The great Nufūd, a tract of white or reddish sand blown into high banks or dunes and covering a vast area in North Arabia. The classical term is *al-bādiyah*, sometimes *al-dahnā'*. Though dry except for an occasional oasis, al-Nufūd receives in some winters enough rain to cover it with a carpet of verdure and convert it into a paradise for the camels and sheep of the wandering Bedouin. Among the first of the dozen Europeans who have succeeded in traversing the Nufūd are the French Alsatian, Charles Huber (1878); the English diplomatist and poet, Wilfrid S. Blunt (1879); and the Strassburg orientalist, Julius Euting (1883).

2. Al-Dahnā' (the red land), a surface of red sand, extends from the great Nufūd in the north to al-Rab' al-Khāli in the south, describing a great arc to the south-east and stretching a distance of over six hundred miles. Its western part is sometimes distinguished as al-Aḥqāf (dune land). On older maps al-Dahnā' is usually indicated as al-Rab' al-Khāli (the vacant quarter). When al-Dahnā' receives seasonal rains, it abounds in pasturage attractive to the Bedouins and their cattle for several months a year, but in summer-time the region is void of the breath of life. Before Bertram Thomas[1] no European ever ventured to cross

[1] *Arabia Felix: Across the Empty Quarter of Arabia* (New York, 1932).


ARABIA
Land surface features
English Miles
0 50 100 200
Cultivated land, and available for cultivation
Steppe
Desert
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
SYRIA
Damascus
Jerusalem
PALESTINE
Al-Nafud
Al-Jawf
Tayma
Al-Madinah
Juddah
Makkah
RED SEA
Al-Dahna
Al-Rub' Al-Khali
Al-Ahqaf
Sabia
Adan
GULF OF 'ADAN
PERSIAN GULF
Qatar
GULF OF 'UMAN
AFRICA
R. Euphrates
R. Tigris
Wadi Hadhramaut
Rocky Walker Lith. Mfg.

al-Rab' al-Khāli, "no man's land" of Arabia. Arabian American Oil Company marked its 250,000 square miles on its maps. Thomas crossed it in fifty-eight days from the Arabian Sea to the Persian Gulf, encountered the phenomenon of singing sands and discovered a "lake of salt water", in reality an arm of the Persian Gulf in the south of Qaṭar. Until then our knowledge of the dreaded and mysterious waste of South Arabia was no more than that of the tenth-century geographers.

3. Al-Ḥarrah, a surface of corrugated and fissured lavas overlying sandstone. Volcanic tracts of this type abound in the western and central regions of the peninsula and extend north as far as eastern Ḥawrān. Yāqūt[1] lists no less than thirty such Ḥarrahs. The last volcanic eruption reported by an Arab historian took place in A.D. 1256.

Within this ring of desert and steppe lies an elevated core, Najd, the Wahhābiland. In Najd the limestone has long been generally exposed; here and there are occasional strips of sand. Mt. Shammar consists of granite and basalt rock.

Arabia is one of the driest and hottest of countries. Though sandwiched between seas on the east and west, those bodies of water are too narrow to break the climatic continuity of the Africo-Asian rainless continental masses. The ocean on the south, to be sure, does bring rains, but the simoom (*samūm*) which seasonally lashes the land leaves very little moisture for the interior. The bracing and delightful east wind (*al-ṣaba*) has always provided a favourite theme for Arabian poets.

In al-Ḥijāz, the birthplace of Islam, seasons of drought extending possibly over a period of three or more years are not unknown. Rainstorms of short duration and extraordinary violence may strike Makkah and al-Madīnah and occasionally threaten to overthrow the Ka'bah; al-Balādhuri[2] devotes a whole chapter to the floods (*suyūl*) of Makkah. Subsequent to these rains the hardy pastoral flora of the desert makes its appearance. In northern al-Ḥijāz the isolated oases, the largest covering an area of some ten square miles, are the only support of settled life. Five-sixths of the population of al-Ḥijāz is nomadic. Certain oases, such as Fadak (now al-Hā'it), which figured in early Islam, are

[1] *Mu'jam al Buldān*, ed F Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1866–73), index
[2] *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, ed de Goeje (Leyden, 1866), pp. 53-5; tr. Philip K Hitti, *The Origins of the Islamic State* (New York, 1916, reprint Beirūt, 1966), pp. 82-4.

today of no significance. Most of these fertile tracts were cultivated at the time of the Prophet by Jews. The mean annual temperature in the Ḥijāz lowland is nearer 90° than 80° F. Al-Madīnah, with a mean temperature of little over 70° F., is more healthful than its sister to the south, Makkah.

Only in al-Yaman and 'Asīr are there sufficient periodic rains to warrant a systematic cultivation of the soil. Perennial vegetation is here found in favoured valleys to a distance of about two hundred miles from the coast. Ṣan'ā', the modern capital of al-Yaman, is over 7000 feet above the sea and therefore one of the healthiest and most beautiful towns of the peninsula. Other fertile but not continuous tracts are found on the coast. The surface of Ḥaḍramawt is marked by deeply sunk valleys where water is abundant in the subsoil. 'Umān, the easternmost province, receives a fair supply of rain. Especially hot and humid are Juddah (Jedda), al-Ḥudaydah (Hodeida) and Masqaṭ (Muscat).

Arabia cannot boast a single river of significance which flows perennially and reaches the sea. None of its streams are navigable. In place of a system of rivers it has a network of wadis which carry away such floods as occur. These wadis serve another purpose: they determine the routes for the caravans and the pilgrimages. Since the rise of Islam the pilgrimages have formed the principal link between Arabia and the outer world. The chief land routes are from Mesopotamia, by way of Buraydah in Najd, following the Wādi al-Rummah, and from Syria, passing through Wādi al-Sirḥān and skirting the Red Sea coast. The intrapeninsular routes are either coastal, fringing nearly the whole peninsula, or transpeninsular, running from south-west to north-east through the central oases and avoiding the stretch between, namely, the Vacant Quarter.

The tenth-century geographer al-Iṣṭakhri[1] speaks of only one place in al-Ḥijāz, the mountain near al-Ṭā'if, where water freezes. Al-Hamdāni[2] refers to frozen water in Ṣan'ā'. To these places Glaser[3] adds Mt. Ḥaḍūr al-Shaykh, in al-Yaman, where snow falls almost every winter. Frost is more widespread.

Vegetation

The dryness of the atmosphere and the salinity of the soil

[1] *Masālik al-Mamālik*, ed. de Goeje (Leyden, 1870), p. 19, ll. 12-13.

[2] *Al-Iklīl*, Bk. VIII, ed. Nabih A. Faris (Princeton, 1940), p. 7; see also Nazih M. al-'Azm, *Rihlah fi Bilād al-'Arab al-Sa'idah* (Cairo, 1937?), pt. 1, p. 118.

[3] In A. Petermann, *Mitteilungen aus Justus Perthes geographischer Anstalt*, vol. 32 (Gotha, 1886), p. 43.

militate against the possibility of any luxuriant growth. Al-Ḥijāz is rich in dates. Wheat grows in al-Yaman and certain oases. Barley is cultivated for horses. Millet (*dhurah*) grows in certain regions, and rice in 'Umān and al-Ḥasa. On the highlands parallel to the southern coast, and particularly in Mahrah, the frankincense tree, which figured prominently in the early commercial life of South Arabia, still flourishes. A characteristic product of 'Asīr is gum-arabic. The coffee plant, for which al-Yaman is now famous, was introduced into South Arabia in the fourteenth century from Abyssinia. The earliest reference to this "wine of Islam" is in the writings of the sixteenth century.[1] The earliest known mention of coffee by a European writer was in 1585.

Of the trees of the desert several species of acacia, including *athl* (tamarisk) and *ghada*, which gives excellent charcoal, are found. Another species, *talh*, yields gum-arabic. The desert also produces *samḥ*, the grains of which give a flour used for porridge, and the eagerly sought truffle and senna (*al-sana*).

Among the domestic plants the grape-vine, introduced from Syria after the fourth Christian century, is well represented in al-Ṭā'if, and yields the alcoholic beverage styled *nabīdh al-zabīb*. The wine (*khamr*), however, sung by the Arabic poets, was the brand imported from Ḥawrān and the Lebanon. The olive tree, native in Syria, is unknown in al-Ḥijāz. Other products of the Arabian oases are pomegranates, apples, apricots, almonds, oranges, lemons, sugar-cane, water-melons and bananas. The Nabataeans and Jews were probably the ones responsible for the introduction of such fruit trees from the north.

The date palm

Among the Arabian flora the date-palm tree is queen. It bears the most common and esteemed fruit: the fruit (*tamr*) par excellence. Together with milk it provides the chief item on the menu of the Bedouin, and, except for camel flesh, is his only solid food[2]. Its fermented beverage is the much-sought *nabīdh*. Its crushed stones furnish the cakes which are the everyday meal of the camel. To possess "the two black ones" (*al-aswadān*), i.e. water and dates, is the dream of every Bedouin. The Prophet is reported to have enjoined, "Honour your aunt, the palm, which was made of the same clay as Adam".[3] Arab authors list

[1] See al-Jazīn in de Sacy, *Chrestomathie arabe*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1826), vol I, pp. 138 *seq*., II, pp 412 *seq*

[2] Consult Ibn Qutaybah, *'Uyūn al Akhbār* (Cairo, 1930), vol III, pp 209-13

[3] Al-Suyūṭi, *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍarah* (Cairo, 1321), vol II, p 255

a hundred varieties of dates in and around al-Madīnah.

Even this queen of Arabian trees must have been introduced from the north, from Mesopotamia, where the palm tree was the chief object which attracted early man thither. The Arabic vocabulary in Najd and al-Ḥijāz relating to agriculture, e.g. *ba'l* (watered by rain only),[1] *akkār* (ploughman), etc., indicates borrowing from the northern Semites, particularly the Aramaeans.

Fauna

The animal kingdom is represented by panthers (sing. *namir*), leopards (sing. *fahd*), hyenas, wolves, foxes and lizards (especially *al-ḍabb*). The lion, frequently cited by the ancient poets of the peninsula, is now extinct. Monkeys are found in al-Yaman. Among the birds of prey eagles (*'uqāb*), bustards (*ḥubāra*, houbara), falcons, hawks and owls may be counted. Crows are abundant. The most common birds are the hoopoe (*hudhud*), lark, nightingale, pigeon and a species of partridge celebrated in Arabic literature under the name *al-qaṭa*.[2]

Of domestic animals the principal ones are the camel, the ass, the ordinary watch-dog, the greyhound (*salūqī*), the cat, the sheep and the goat. The mule is said to have been introduced from Egypt after the Hijrah by Muḥammad.

The desert yields locusts, which the Bedouin relishes, especially when roasted with salt. Locust plagues are reputed to appear every seventh year. Of reptiles the Nufūd boasts, by all accounts, the horned viper. Lawrence[3] speaks with horror of his experience with the snakes in Wādī al-Sirḥān.

The Arabian horse

Renowned as it has become in Moslem literature, the horse was nevertheless a late importation into ancient Arabia. This animal, for which Najd is famous, was not known to the early Semites. Domesticated in early antiquity somewhere east of the Caspian Sea by nomadic Indo-European herdsmen, it was later imported on a large scale by the Kassites and Hittites and through them made its way, two millenniums before Christ, into Western Asia. From Syria it was introduced before the beginning of our era into Arabia, where it had the best opportunity to keep its blood pure and free from admixture. The Hyksos passed the horse on from Syria into Egypt and the Lydians from Asia Minor into Greece, where it was immortalized by Phidias on the

[1] See below, p. 97.
[2] See R. Meinertzhagen, *The Birds of Arabia* (Edinburgh, 1954).
[3] T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (New York, 1936), pp. 269-70.

Parthenon. In the Egyptian, Assyro-Babylonian and early Persian records the Arabian appears as a cameleer, not as a cavalier. The camel, rather than the horse, figured in the tributes exacted by the Assyrian conquerors from the "Urbi".[1] In Xerxes' army, intent upon the conquest of Greece, the Arabs rode camels.[2] Strabo,[3] presumably on the authority of his friend Aelius Gallus, the Roman general who invaded Arabia as late as 24 B.C., denies the existence of the horse in the peninsula.

Renowned for its physical beauty, endurance, intelligence and touching devotion to its master, the Arabian thoroughbred (*kuḥaylān*) is the exemplar from which all Western ideas about the good-breeding of horseflesh have been derived. In the eighth century the Arabs introduced it into Europe through Spain, where it left permanent traces in its Barbary and Andalusian descendants.[4] During the Crusades the English horse received fresh strains of blood through contact with the Arab.

In Arabia the horse is an animal of luxury whose feeding and care constitutes a problem to the man of the desert. Its possession is a presumption of wealth. Its chief value lies in providing the speed necessary for the success of a Bedouin raid (*ghazw*). It is also used for sports: in tournament (*jarīd*), coursing and hunting. In an Arab camp today in case of shortage of water the children might cry for a drink, but the master, unmoved, would pour the last drop into a pail to set before the horse.

The camel

If the horse is the most noble of the conquests of man, the camel is certainly from the nomad's point of view the most useful. Without it the desert could not be conceived of as a habitable place. The camel is the nomad's nourisher, his vehicle of transportation and his medium of exchange. The dowry of the bride, the price of blood, the profit of *maysir* (gambling), the wealth of a sheikh, are all computed in terms of camels. It is the Bedouin's constant companion, his *alter ego*, his foster parent. He drinks its milk instead of water (which he spares for the cattle); he feasts on its flesh; he covers himself with its skin; he makes his tent of its hair. Its dung he uses as fuel, and its urine as a hair tonic and medicine. To him the camel is more than "the ship of the desert"; it is the special gift of Allah (cf.

[1] Below, pp. 39, 41.
[2] Herodotus, *History*, Bk VII, ch. 86, § 8
[3] *Geography*, Bk. XVI, ch. 4, §§ 2 & 26.
[4] William R. Brown, *The Horse of the Desert* (New York, 1929), pp. 123 *seq.*

Koran 16 : 5-8). To quote a striking phrase of Sprenger,[1] the Bedouin is "the parasite of the camel". The Bedouins of our day take delight in referring to themselves as *ahl al-ba'īr*, the people of the camel. Musil[2] states that there is hardly a member of the Ruwalah tribe who has not on some occasion drunk water from a camel's paunch. In time of emergency either an old camel is killed or a stick is thrust down its throat to make it vomit water. If the camel has been watered within a day or two, the liquid is tolerably drinkable. The part which the camel has played in the economy of Arabian life is indicated by the fact that the Arabic language is said to include some one thousand names for the camel in its numerous breeds and stages of growth, a number rivalled only by the number of synonyms used for the sword. The Arabian camel can go for about twenty-five days in winter and about five days in summer without water. The camel was a factor in facilitating the early Moslem conquests by assuring its masters more mobility than, and consequent advantage over, the settled peoples. The Caliph 'Umar is quoted as having said: "The Arab prospers only where the camel prospers". The peninsula remains the chief camel-breeding centre in the world. The horses of Najd, the donkeys of al-Ḥasa and the dromedaries of 'Umān are world famous. In the past the pearl fisheries of 'Umān and the Persian Gulf region, the salt mines of certain areas and the camel industry were the main sources of income. But since the beginning of the exploitation of the oil-fields in 1933, the extensive activities connected with the oil industry have become by far the greatest source. The oil-fields of al-Ḥasa are classed among the richest in the world.

From north-western Arabia the camel, like the horse originally an American animal, was introduced into Palestine and Syria on the occasion of the invasion of the Midianites in the eleventh century B.C. (Judges 6 : 5, cf Gen. 24 : 64), the first record of the widespread use of this animal.[3] It was introduced into Egypt with the Assyrian conquest in the seventh century B.C., and into northern Africa with the Moslem invasion in the seventh century after Christ.

[1] In *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, xlv (1891), p. 361, l. 13.
[2] *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* (New York, 1928), p. 368. Cf. Bertram Thomas in *The Near East and India*, Nov. 1, 1928, p. 518.
[3] Cf. Carleton S. Coon, *Caravan: the Story of the Middle East* (New York, 1951), p. 61.

CHAPTER III

BEDOUIN LIFE

The nomad

ORRESPONDING to the twofold nature of the land, the inhabitants of Arabia fall into two main groups: nomadic Bedouins and settled folk. The line of demarcation between the wandering and the sedentary elements in the population is not always sharply drawn. There are stages of semi-nomadism and of quasi-urbanity. Certain townsfolk who were at one time Bedouin still betray their nomadic origin, while other Bedouins are townspeople in the making. The blood of the settled population is thus constantly refreshed by a nomadic strain.

The Bedouin is no gypsy roaming aimlessly for the sake of roaming. He represents the best adaptation of human life to desert conditions. Wherever verdant land is found, there he goes seeking pasture. Nomadism is as much a scientific mode of living in the Nufūd as industrialism is in Detroit or Manchester.

Action and reaction between the townsfolk and the desert folk are motivated by the urgent dictates of self-interest and self-preservation. The nomad insists on extracting from his more favourably situated neighbour such resources as he himself lacks, and that either by violence—raids—or by peaceful methods—exchange. He is land-pirate or broker, or both at once. The desert, where the Bedouin plays the part of the pirate, shares certain common characteristics with the sea.

The nomad, as a type, is today what he was yesterday and what he will be tomorrow. His culture pattern has always been the same. Variation, progress, evolution, are not among the laws he readily obeys. Immune to the invasion of exotic ideas and manners, he still lives, as his forbears did, in tents of goats' or camels' hair, "houses of hair", and grazes his sheep and goats in the same fashion and on the same pastures. Sheep- and camel-raising, and to a lesser degree horse-breeding, hunting and raiding, form his staple occupation and are to his mind the only occupations worthy of a man. Agriculture and all varieties of

trade and craft are beneath his dignity. If and when he frees himself from his environment he is no more a nomad. In the Fertile Crescent empires have come and gone, but in the barren wastes the Bedouin has remained for ever the same.[1]

Over all the living things of the desert the Bedouin, the camel and the palm are the triumvirate that rules supreme; and together with the sand they constitute the four great actors in the drama of its existence.

To its denizen the desert is more than a habitat: it is the custodian of his sacred tradition, the preserver of the purity of his speech and blood and his first and foremost line of defence against encroachment from the outside world. Its scarcity of water, scorching heat, trackless roads, lack of food-supply—all enemies in normal times—prove staunch allies in time of danger. Little wonder then that the Arabian has rarely bent his neck to a foreign yoke.

The continuity, monotony and aridity of his desert habitat are faithfully reflected in the Bedouin physical and mental make-up. Anatomically he is a bundle of nerves, bones and sinews. The leanness and barrenness of his land show themselves in his physique. His daily food is dates and a mixture of flour, or roasted corn, with water or milk. His raiment is as scanty as his nourishment: a long shirt (*thawb*) with a belt and a flowing upper garment (*'abā'*) which pictures have made familiar. The head is covered by a shawl (*kūfīyah*) held by a cord (*'iqāl*). Trousers are not worn and footwear is rare. Tenacity, endurance (*sabr*), seems to be his supreme virtue, enabling him to survive where almost everything else perishes. Passivity is the obverse of this same virtue. Passive endurance is to him preferable to any attempt to change the state in which he finds himself, no matter how hard his lot. Individualism, another characteristic trait, is so deeply ingrained that the Bedouin has never been able to raise himself to the dignity of a social being of the international type, much less to develop ideals of devotion to the common good beyond that which pertains to the tribe. Discipline, respect for order and authority, are no idols in desert life. "O Lord", prayed a Bedouin, "have mercy upon me and upon Muhammad, but upon no one else besides!"[2] Since the days of Ishmael the

[1] A central feature of ibn Su'ūd's economic and social reforms is the settlement of nomads on the soil.

[2] Abu-Dāwūd, *Sunan* (Cairo, 1280), vol. i, p. 89.

Arabian's hand has been against every man and every man's hand against him.

The *ghazw* (razzia), otherwise considered a form of brigandage, is raised by the economic and social conditions of desert life to the rank of a national institution. It lies at the base of the economic structure of Bedouin pastoral society. In desert land, where the fighting mood is a chronic mental condition, raiding is one of the few manly occupations. Christian tribes, too, such as the banu-Taghlib, practised it without any mental reservations. The poet al-Quṭāmi of the early Umayyad period has given expression to the guiding principle of such life in two verses: "Our business is to make raids on the enemy, on our neighbour and on our own brother, in case we find none to raid but a brother!" [1] In Su'ūdi Arabia raids are now illegal. Razzia

According to the rules of the game—and *ghazw* is a sort of national sport—no blood should be shed except in cases of extreme necessity. *Ghazw* does help to a certain extent to keep down the number of mouths to feed, though it does not actually increase the sum-total of available supplies. A weaker tribe or a sedentary settlement on the borderland may buy protection by paying the stronger tribe what is today called *khūwah*. These ideas of *ghazw* and its terminology were carried over by the Arabians into the Islamic conquests.

The principle of hospitality, however, mitigates in some measure the evils of *ghazw*. However dreadful as an enemy he may be, the Bedouin is also within his laws of friendship a loyal and generous friend. Pre-Islamic poets, the journalists of their day, never tired of singing the praises of *ḍiyāfah* (hospitality) which, with *ḥamāsah* (fortitude and enthusiasm) and *murū'ah* (manliness),[2] is considered one of the supreme virtues of the race. The keen competition for water and pasturage, on which the chief causes of conflict centre, splits the desert populace into warring tribes; but the common consciousness of helplessness in the face of a stubborn and malignant nature develops a feeling for the necessity of one sacred duty: that of hospitality. To refuse a guest such a courtesy in a land where no inns or hotels obtain, or to harm him after accepting him as a guest, is an

[1] Abu-Tammām, *Ash'ār al-Ḥamāsah*, ed. Freytag (Bonn, 1828), p. 171.
[2] Cf. Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, pt. 1 (Halle, 1889), p. 13.

offence not only against the established mores and honour but against God Himself, the real protector.

Religiousness

The rudiments of Semitic religion developed in the oases, rather than in the sandy land, and centred upon stones and springs, forerunners of the Black Stone and Zamzam in Islam and of Bethel in the Old Testament. In the case of the Bedouin, religion sits very lightly indeed on his heart. In the judgment of the Koran (9 : 98), "the desert Arabians are most confirmed in unbelief and hypocrisy". Up to our present day they never pay much more than lip homage to the prophet.[1]

The clan

The clan organization is the basis of Bedouin society. Every tent represents a family; an encampment of tents forms a *hayy*; members of one *hayy* constitute a clan (*qawm*). A number of kindred clans grouped together make a tribe (*qabīlah*). All members of the same clan consider each other as of one blood, submit to the authority of but one chief—the senior member of the clan—and use one battle-cry. "Banu" (children of) is the title with which they prefix their joint name. The feminine names of certain clans show traces of the earlier matriarchal system. Blood relationship, fictitious or real, furnishes the adhesive element in tribal organization. 266532

The tent and its humble household contents are individual property, but water, pasturage and cultivable land are the common property of the tribe.

If a member of a clan commits murder inside the clan, none will defend him. In case of escape he becomes an outlaw (*ṭarīd*). If the murder is outside the clan, a vendetta is established, and any fellow clan-member may have to pay for it with his own life.

Blood, according to the primitive law of the desert, calls for blood; no chastisement is recognized other than that of vengeance. The nearest of kin is supposed to assume primary responsibility. A blood feud may last forty years, as in the case of the Basūs War between the banu-Bakr and the banu-Taghlib. In all the *ayyām al-ʿArab*, those intertribal battles of pre-Islamic days, the chroniclers emphasize the blood feud motif, though underlying economic reasons must have motivated many of the events. Sometimes a bloodwite (*diyah*) is accepted.

No worse calamity could befall a Bedouin than to lose his

[1] Ameen Rihani, *Taʾrīkh Najd* (Beirūt 928), p. 233.

tribal affiliation. A tribeless man, in a land where stranger and enemy are synonymous, like a landless man in feudal England, is practically helpless. His status is that of an outlaw, one beyond the pale of protection and safety.

Though primarily a matter of birth, clan kinship may be individually acquired by sharing a member's food or sucking a few drops of his blood. Herodotus[1] speaks of this ancient rite of adoption. If a slave is freed he often finds it to his interest to keep some attachment with the family of his former master, thus becoming a client (*mawla*). A stranger may seek such a relationship and is styled a protégé (*dakhīl*). In like manner a whole weaker clan might desire the protection of, and ultimately become absorbed by, a stronger clan or tribe. The Ṭayyi', Ghaṭafān, Taghlib, etc., were confederations of North Arabian tribes which figured prominently in history and whose descendants still survive in Arabic-speaking lands.

An analogous custom in religion made it possible for a stranger to become attached to the service of a sanctuary[2] and thus become a client of the god. To the present day the pilgrims to Makkah are referred to as "the guests of Allah", and the students connected with the mosque of Makkah or any other great mosque are called "[His] neighbours" (sing. *mujāwir*).

'Aṣabīyah is the spirit of the clan. It implies boundless and unconditional loyalty to fellow clansmen and corresponds in general to patriotism of the passionate, chauvinistic type. "Be loyal to thy tribe," sang a bard, "its claim upon its members is strong enough to make a husband give up his wife."[3] This ineradicable particularism in the clan, which is the individualism of the member of the clan magnified, assumes that the clan or tribe, as the case may be, is a unit by itself, self-sufficient and absolute, and regards every other clan or tribe as its legitimate victim and object of plunder and murder. Islam made full use of the tribal system for its military purposes. It divided the army into units based on tribal lines, settled the colonists in the conquered lands in tribes and treated new converts from among the subjugated peoples as clients. The unsocial features of individualism and *'aṣabīyah* were never outgrown by the Arab character as it developed and unfolded itself after the rise of Islam, and were

'Aṣabīyah

[1] Bk. III, ch. 8.

[2] Cf. Ezekiel 44:7.

[3] Al-Mubarrad, *el-Kāmil*, ed. W. Wright (Leipzig, 1864), p. 229, l. 3

among the determining factors that led to the disintegration and ultimate downfall of the various Islamic states.

The sheikh.

The clan is represented by its titular head, the sheikh. Unlike his modern namesake of Hollywood fame, the sheikh (*shaykh*) is the senior member of the tribe whose leadership asserts itself in sober counsel, in generosity and in courage. Seniority in age and personal qualifications determine the choice. In judicial, military and other affairs of common concern the sheikh is not the absolute authority; he must consult with the tribal council composed of the heads of the component families. His tenure of office lasts during the good-will of his constituency.

The Arabian in general and the Bedouin in particular is a born democrat. He meets his sheikh on an equal footing. The society in which he lives levels everything down. The title *malik* (king) the Arabians never used except in referring to foreign rulers and the partially Romanized and Persianized dynasties of Ghassān and al-Ḥīrah. The kings of the banu-Kindah formed the only exception to this rule But the Arabian is also aristocratic as well as democratic. He looks upon himself as the embodiment of the consummate pattern of creation. To him the Arabian nation is the noblest of all nations (*afkhar al-umam*). The civilized man, from the Bedouin's exalted point of view, is less happy and far inferior In the purity of his blood, his eloquence and poetry, his sword and horse and above all in his noble ancestry (*nasab*), the Arabian takes infinite pride. He is excessively fond of prodigious genealogies and often traces his lineage back to Adam. No people, other than the Arabians, have ever raised genealogy to the dignity of a science.

The Bedouin woman, whether Islamic or pre-Islamic, enjoyed and still enjoys a measure of freedom denied to her sedentary sister. She lived in a polygamous family and under a baal system of marriage in which the man was the master, nevertheless she was at liberty to choose a husband and leave him if ill-treated.

Ability to assimilate other cultures when the opportunity presents itself is well marked among the children of the desert. Faculties which have remained dormant for ages seem to awake suddenly, under the proper stimuli, and develop into dynamic powers. In the Fertile Crescent lies the field of opportunity. A Hammurabi makes his appearance in Babylon, a Moses in

Sinai, a Zenobia in Palmyra, a Philip the Arab in Rome or a Hārūn-al-Rashīd in Baghdād. Monuments are built, like those of Petra, which still arouse the admiration of the world. The phenomenal and almost unparalleled efflorescence of early Islam was due in no small measure to the latent powers of the Bedouins, who, in the words of the Caliph 'Umar, "furnished Islam with its raw material".[1]

[1] Ibn-Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, ed. Eduard Sachau, vol. iii, pt. 1 (Leyden, 1904), p. 246, l. 3

CHAPTER IV

EARLY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

South Arabians

WE have thus far used the term Arabian for all the inhabitants of the peninsula without regard to geographical location. We must now differentiate between the South Arabians and the North Arabians, the latter including the Najdis of Central Arabia. The geographical division of the land by the trackless desert into northern and southern sections has its counterpart in the peoples who inhabit it.

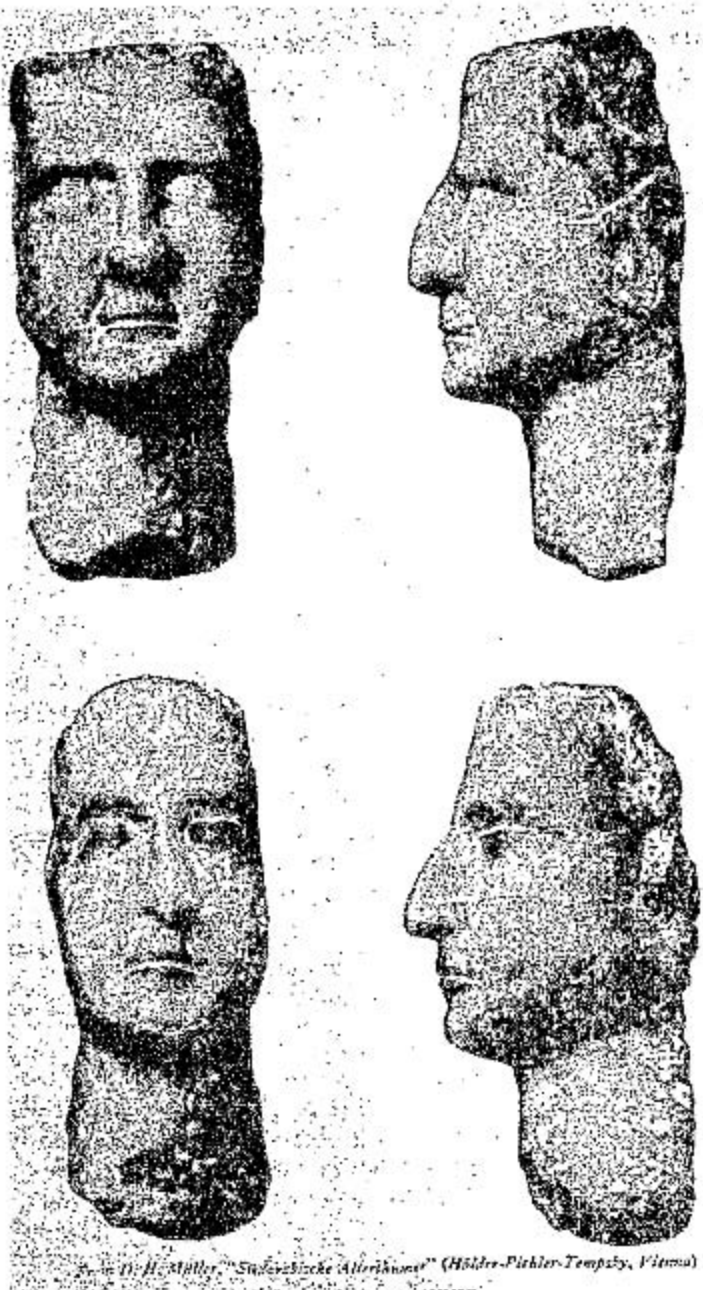
The North Arabians are mostly nomads living in "houses of hair" in al-Ḥijāz and Najd; the South Arabians are in the main sedentary, domiciled in al-Yaman, Ḥadramawt and along the neighbouring coast. The Northerners speak the language of the Koran, the Arabic par excellence; the Southerners used an ancient Semitic tongue of their own, Sabaean or Ḥimyarite, with which the Ethiopic of Africa is closely allied. Both are dolichocephalic (long-headed) members of the Mediterranean race. But the Southerners have a considerable coastal element that is brachycephalic (round-headed), with a broad jaw and aquiline nose, flat cheeks and abundant hair, characteristic of the Armenoid (Hittite, Hebrew) type. It is an intrusive element borne to South Arabia perhaps by sea from the north-east.[1] The South Arabians were the first to rise to prominence and develop a civilization of their own. The North Arabians did not step on to the stage of international affairs until the advent of Islam.

The memory and consciousness of this national distinction among the Arabians is reflected in their own traditional genealogies. They divide themselves first into two groups: extinct (*bā'idah*), including Thamūd, 'Ād—both of koranic fame—, Ṭasm and Jadīs, and surviving (*bāqiyah*). The Thamūd were an historical people mentioned in the cuneiform annals of Sargon II[2] and known to classical writers as "Tamudaei".[3] The 'Ādites

[1] Carleton S Coon, *The Races of Europe* (New York, 1939), pp 403-4, 408

[2] D. D. Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, vol II (Chicago, 1927), §§ 17, 118.

[3] Pliny, *Natural History*, Bk. VI, ch. 32.



D. H. Müller, "Südarabische Altertümer" (Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, Vienna)

SABAEAN TYPES

are supposed to have flourished in ancient Ḥaḍramawt. Next, the genealogists proceed to subdivide the surviving Arabians into two ethnic stocks: Arabian Arabs (*'āribah*) and Arabicized Arabs (*musta'ribah*). The 'Āribah, according to them, are Yamanites descended from Qaḥṭān (the Joktan of the Old Testament) and constitute the aboriginal stock; the Musta'ribah are the Ḥijāzis, Najdis, Nabataeans and Palmyrenes, all descended from 'Adnān—an offspring of Ishmael—and are "naturalized" in the land. In the traditional Qaḥṭān and 'Adnān is a reminiscence of the differentiation between South Arabians and North Arabians. The Madīnese who rushed to the support of the Prophet at the time of his Hijrah were of Yamanite origin, but his own family, the Quraysh, were Nizāri of the northern stock. The Ghassānids of eastern Syria and the Lakhmids of al-Ḥīrah in al-'Irāq were Southerners domiciled in the north.

This gulf between the two Arabian stocks was never bridged. The age-old division continued to be as prominent as ever, even after Islam had apparently unified the Arabian nation.

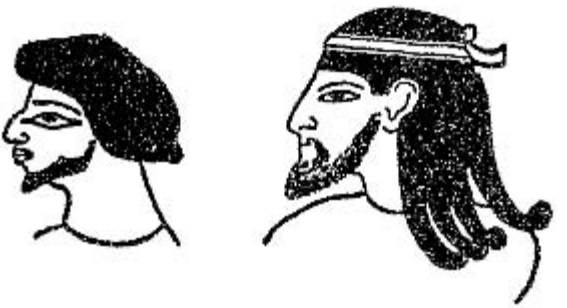
1 Relations with Egypt

Like a thick wedge the Arabian peninsula thrusts itself between the two earliest seats of culture: Egypt and Babylonia. The Panjāb in India may have been a third cultural focus, and the peninsula lies between it and the West. Although Arabia was not brought within the scope of the river-valley culture of either the land of the one river or the land of the twin rivers, yet it could not entirely have escaped their influence. Its culture, however, was at bottom indigenous. It belonged to the maritime type. Its south-eastern people were possibly the ones who acted as intermediaries between Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Panjāb —the three focal centres of earliest trade—and gave their name to the great intervening sea.

Africa touches Arabia in the north at the Sinaitic peninsula, over which a land route passes, comes close to it in the south at Bāb al-Mandab, only fifteen miles across, and is connected with mid-western Arabia by a third route which follows Wādi al-Ḥammāmāt, opposite the bend of the Nile near Thebes, and connects with the Red Sea at al-Quṣayr. This last route was the chief central connection. During the Twelfth Egyptian Dynasty (*ca.* 2000–1788 B.C.) a canal above Bilbays connected the Nile with the Red Sea. Restored by the Ptolemies, this canal, the

antecedent of the Suez Canal, was reopened by the caliphs and used until the discovery (1497) of the route to India round the Cape of Good Hope.

The Egyptian interest in Sinai arose because of its copper and turquoise mines located in Wādi Maghārah in the southern part of the peninsula near the modern town of al-Ṭūr. Even in pre-dynastic days the nomads of Sinai were exporting their valued products to Egypt. Pharaohs of the First Dynasty operated the mines of the peninsula, but the period of great exploitation started with Snefru (*ca.* 2720 B.C.) of the Third Dynasty. The Sinaitic copper



From G. Elliot Smith, "The Ancient Egyptians and the Origin of Civilization" (Harper & Bros.)

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN REPRESENTATIONS OF ARABIANS
(*Ca.* 2000 B.C. and 1500 B.C. respectively)

great road connecting Egypt with Syria-Palestine and thence reaching to the rest of the Fertile Crescent and Asia Minor—that first international highway used by man—sent a branch south-east to these copper and turquoise mines of Sinai. In a royal tomb of the First Dynasty at Abydos, Petrie found in 1900 on a piece of ivory a portrait of a typical Armenoid Semite labelled "Asiatic", with a long pointed beard and shaven upper lip, presumably a South Arabian. An earlier relief belonging to the same dynasty shows an emaciated Bedouin chief in a loin-cloth crouching in submission before his Egyptian captor, who is about to brain the Bedouin with his mace. These are the earliest representations of Arabians extant. The word for Bedouin (Eg. *'amu*, nomad, Asiatic) figures prominently in the early Egyptian annals and in some cases refers to nomads around Egypt and outside of Arabia proper.

Frankincense

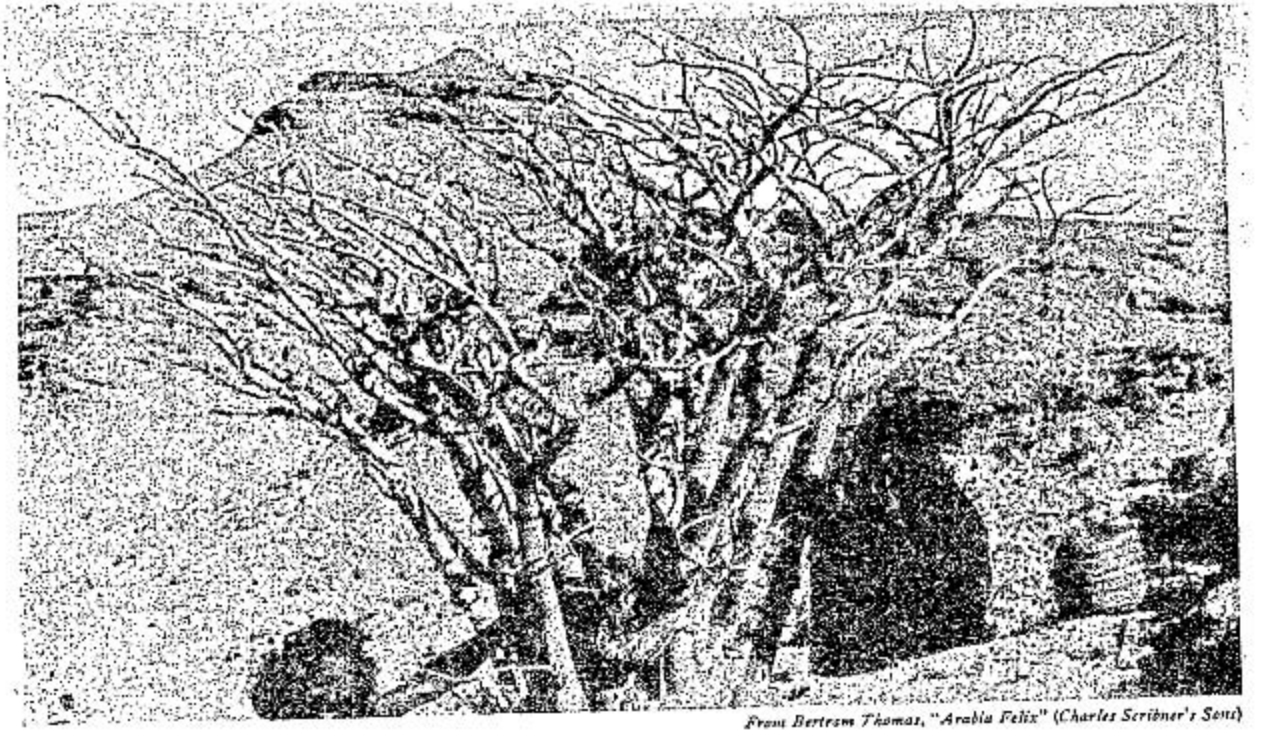
South Arabia was brought nearer to Egypt when the latter established commercial relationships with Punt and Nubia. Herodotus[1] speaks of Sesostris, probably Senusert I (1980–1935 B.C.) of Dynasty XII, as conquering the nations on the Arabian Gulf, presumably the African side of the Red Sea. The Eighteenth Dynasty maintained a fleet in the Red Sea, but as early as the Fifth Dynasty we find Sahure (2553–2541 B.C.) conducting the first maritime expedition by way of that sea to an incense-producing land, evidently Somaliland on the African shore.

From A. T. Olmstead's History of Palestine and Syria (Chas. Scribner's Sons)

SEMERKHET, THE SIXTH KING OF THE FIRST DYNASTY SMITING THE CHIEF OF THE NOMADS

The chief attraction for the Egyptians in South Arabia lay in the frankincense, which they prized highly for temple use and mummification and in which that part of Arabia was particularly rich. When Nubia was subjugated and Punt (modern Somaliland) brought within the commercial sphere of the Egyptian empire many expeditions were conducted to those places to procure "myrrh, fragrant gums, resin and aromatic woods". Such an expedition to Punt was undertaken by Hatshepsut (*ca.* 1500 B.C.), the first famous woman in history. The emissaries of her successor, Thutmose III, the Napoleon of ancient Egypt, brought (1479 B.C.) from the same land the usual cargo of "ivory, ebony, panther-skins and slaves". As these were also the products of al-Yaman in south-western Arabia it is not unlikely that the Egyptians used the term "Punt" for the land on both sides of Bāb al-Mandab. Gold may also have come from Arabia. The incense trade with South Arabia went through Wādī al-Hammāmāt, making that central route the most important link with South Arabia.

[1] Bk. II, ch. 102.



From Bertram Thomas, "Arabia Felix" (Charles Scribner's Sons)

A FRANKINCENSE TREE AND A MAHRI COLLECTOR

Ḥaḍramawt,[1] which in ancient times included the coastlands Mahrah and al-Shihr,[2] was the celebrated land of frankincense. Ẓafār, formerly a town and now a district on the coast, was its chief centre. The modern name is Dhufar and it is under the nominal rule of the sultan of 'Umān. This Ẓafār, the commercial centre of the frankincense country and situated as it is on the southern coast, should not be confused with the inland Zafār in al-Yaman, which was the Ḥimyarite capital.[3] The frankincense (*lubān*, whence "olibanum") tree still flourishes in Ḥaḍramawt and other parts of South Arabia. As of old, Zafār is still the chief centre of its trade.

The ancient Egyptians were not the only people who had a commercial interest in Arabia. Their foremost rivals for the trade in spices and minerals were the people of Babylonia.

2. Relations with the Sumerians and Babylonians

Eastern Arabia bordered on Mesopotamia. The early inhabitants of that region, the Sumerians and Akkadians, had already by the fourth millennium before our era become familiar with their neighbours of the Westland (Amurru) and were able to communicate with them both by land and water.

The source of supply of the Sumerian copper, the earliest metal discovered and used in industry, was probably in 'Umān.

On a diorite statue of Narām-Sin (*ca.* 2171 B.C.), a grandson and successor of Sargon (the first great name in Semitic history), we read that he conquered Magan and defeated its lord, Manium.[4] Gudea (*ca.* 2000 B.C.), the Sumerian patesi of Lagash, tells us of his expedition to procure stone and wood for his temple from Magan and Melukhkha. These two Sumerian place-names, Magan and Melukhkha, evidently were first applied to certain regions in east and central Arabia but were later, in the Assyrian period, shifted to more distant localities in the Sinaitic peninsula and eastern Africa. "Magan" is not etymologically identifiable with Arabic "Ma'ān," name of an oasis in northern al-Ḥijāz (now in Transjordan), possibly an ancient Minaean colony on the caravan route. In these cuneiform inscriptions we have the first recorded reference in history to a place in Arabia and to an Arabian people.

[1] Ḥaṣarmāweth of Gen. 10 : 26

[2] In its later and modern use the name al-Shiḥr has been applied to the whole frankincense coast, including Mahrah and Ẓafār.

[3] Cf Yāqūt, *Buldān*, vol. III, pp 576 7

[4] Cf F Thureau-Dangin, *Les inscriptions de Sumer et d'Akkad* (Paris, 1905), pp 238, 239.

The "Sealand" of the cuneiform inscriptions was, according to a recent theory, located in Arabia proper and included the western shore of the Persian Gulf as far as the isle of al-Baḥrayn (ancient Dilmun) and possibly al-Nufūd as far west as al-'Aqabah. Nabopolassar was king of the Sealand before he became king of Babylon.

3 Assyrian penetration

The first unmistakable reference to the Arabians as such occurs in an inscription of the Assyrian Shalmaneser III, who led an expedition against the Aramaean king of Damascus and his allies Ahab and Jundub, an Arabian sheikh. The encounter took place in 853 B.C. at Qarqar, north of Ḥamāh. These are the words of Shalmaneser:

> Karkar, his royal city, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. 1,200 chariots, 1,200 cavalry, 20,000 soldiers of Hadad-ezer, of Aram (? Damascus); . . . 1,000 camels of Gindibu', the Arabian.[1]

It seems very appropriate that the name of the first Arabian in recorded history should be associated with the camel.

Anxious to ensure the safety of the trade highways passing through the far-flung Assyrian empire and converging on the Mediterranean, Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.), founder of the second Assyrian empire, conducted a series of campaigns against Syria and its environs. In the third year of his reign he exacted tribute from Zabibi, the queen of "Aribi" land. In the ninth year he conquered another queen of Aribi, Samsi (Shams or Shamsīyah) by name. His annals record that in 728 B.C. the Mas'ai tribe, the city of Temai (Taymā') and the Sab'ai (Sabaeans) sent him tribute of gold, camels and spices. These tribes evidently lived in the Sinai peninsula and the desert to the north-east.[2] Thus was Tiglath-Pileser III the first to fasten the yoke on Arabian necks

Sargon II (722–705 B.C.), the conqueror of Carchemish and Samaria, reports that in the seventh year of his reign he subjugated among others the tribes of Tamud (Thamūd of the Koran) and Ibādid, "who inhabit the desert, who know neither high nor low official", struck them down and deported the remnant to Samaria.[3] At the same time he received from Samsi,

[1] Luckenbill, vol. i, § 611.
[2] Ditlef Nielsen, *Handbuch der altarabischen Altertumskunde*, vol. i, *Die altarabische Kultur* (Copenhagen, 1927), p. 65.
[3] Luckenbill, vol. ii, § 17.

queen of Arabia, It'amara (Yatha'-amar), the Sabaean chief, and from other kings of Egypt and the desert "gold, products of the mountain, precious stones, ivory, seed of the maple (?), all kinds of herbs, horses, and camels, as their tribute".[1] This It'amara of Saba' was evidently one of the Yatha'-amars who bear the royal title *mukarrib* in the South Arabic inscriptions. Likewise his successor Kariba-il of Saba', from whom Sennacherib claims to have received tribute, must have been the south-western Arabian identified with Kariba-il of the inscriptions.[2] If so, the "tribute" claimed by the Assyrians could not have been but freewill presents offered by these South Arabian rulers to the Assyrian kings as equals and probably as allies in the common struggle against the wild nomads of North Arabia.

About 688 B.C. Sennacherib reduced "Adumu, the fortress of Arabia" and carried away to Nineveh the local gods and the queen herself, who was also the priestess. Adumu is the oasis in North Arabia that figured later in the Islamic conquests under the name Dūmat al-Jandal. The queen, Telkhunu (Te'elkhunu) by name, had allied herself with the rebellious Babylonians against the Assyrian suzerainty, and was assisted by Ḥazāel, the chief of the Qedar (Assyrian Kidri) tribe, whose headquarters were in Palmyrena.

Esarhaddon about 676 suppressed a rebellion headed by Uaite', the son and successor of Ḥazāel, who, "to save his life, forsook his camp, and, fleeing alone, escaped to distant (parts)".[3] Evidently the Bedouins proved a thorn in the side of the Assyrian empire and were incited to revolt by both Egypt and Babylonia. On his famous march (670) to the conquest of Egypt, the terrible Assyrian was so unnerved by his fearful privations in the North Arabian desert that he saw "two-headed serpents" and other frightful reptiles that "flapped their wings".[4] Isaiah (30 : 6), in his "burden" of the beasts of the south, mentions "the viper and fiery flying serpent". Herodotus[5] assures us that "vipers are found in all parts of the world; but the winged serpents are nowhere seen except in Arabia, where they are all congregated together".

In his ninth campaign, directed against the Arabian tribes,

[1] Luckenbill, vol. ii, § 18.
[2] Luckenbill, vol. ii, § 946.
[3] Nielsen, *Handbuch*, vol. i, pp. 75 *seq.*
[4] Cf. *ibid.* vol. ii, § 558.
[5] Bk. III, ch. 109.

Ashurbanipal (668–626 B.C.) captured Uaite' and his armies after a severe struggle.

Many references are made in the Assyrian annals to Arabian chiefs "kissing the feet" of the kings of Nineveh and offering them among other presents gold, precious stones, eyebrow dyes (kohl, antimony), frankincense, camels and donkeys. In fact we read of no less than nine different campaigns undertaken by Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal to chastise the unconquerable Bedouins who were for ever harassing the Assyrian provinces in Syria, interfering with the caravan routes and receiving aid and comfort from Egypt and Babylonia, both hostile to Assyria. The "Urbi" mentioned in these campaigns must have been mainly Bedouins, and their land, "Aribi", must have been the Syro-Mesopotamian desert, the Sinaitic peninsula and North Arabia. In Sinai the Midianites of the Old Testament and not the Nabataeans were those brought under Assyrian control. The Sabaeans proper in south-western Arabia were never subjugated by Nineveh. The Assyrians, though rightly called the Romans of the ancient world, could not have brought under even nominal rule more than the oases and a few tribes in North Arabia.

4. Neo-Babylonian and Persian relations: Taymā'

Among the settlements of the north at this period Taymā' (Têmâ and Te-ma-a of the Assyro-Babylonian records) won special distinction as the provincial residence of Nabonidus (556–539 B.C.), the last king of the Chaldaeans. The Chaldaeans had fallen heir to the Assyrian empire, which included, since the days of Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.), Syria and a portion of North Arabia. In the third year of his reign Nabonidus, in the words of a cuneiform inscription, "slew the prince of Têmâ" and established himself in that oasis.[1]

The most significant reference in cuneiform literature to this Arabian oasis occurs in a chronicle relating to the fall of Babylon (539 B.C.) into the hands of the Persians. The chronicle states that Nabonidus was in "âl Têmâ" in the seventh, ninth, tenth and eleventh years of his reign, while his son (i.e. Belshazzar) and the soldiers were in Babylonia.

In 525 Cambyses, the son and successor of the founder of the Persian empire, passed through northern Arabia and made an alliance with its people while on his way to the conquest of

[1] R. P. Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar* (New Haven, 1929), pp. 106-7.

Egypt. Speaking of Darius, Herodotus[1] remarks: "The Arabians were never reduced to the subjection of Persia".

The Taymā' stone, bought by Huber (1883) and now deposited in the Louvre, bears one of the most valuable Semitic inscriptions ever found. Its date goes back to the fifth century B.C. Written in Aramaic, it records how a new deity, Ṣalm of Hajam, was introduced into Taymā' by a certain priest who further provided an endowment for the new temple and established a hereditary priesthood.[2] The new deity is represented in the Assyrian fashion and below him stands his priest who erected the stela.

5. Contacts with the Hebrews

The Jews were geographically next-door neighbours of the Arabians and racially their nearest of kin. Echoes of the desert origin of the Hebrews abound in the Old Testament.[3] Hebrew and Arabic, as we have learned before, are cognate Semitic tongues. Some of the Hebrew Old Testament names are Arabic, e.g. those of almost all of Esau's sons (Gen. 36: 10-14; 1 Ch. 1 : 35-7). A South Arabian would have but little difficulty in understanding the first verse of Hebrew Genesis.[4] The rudiments of the Hebrew religion, modern research shows, point to a beginning in the desert.

On their way to Palestine from Egypt about 1225 B.C. the Hebrew (Rachel) tribes sojourned about forty years in Sinai and the Nufūd. In Midian, the southern part of Sinai and the land east of it, the divine covenant was made. Moses married an Arabian woman, the daughter of a Midianite priest,[5] a worshipper of Jehovah who instructed Moses in the new cult. Yahu (Yahweh, Jehovah) was apparently a Midianite or North Arabian tribal deity. He was a desert god, simple and austere. His abode was a tent and his ritual was by no means elaborate. His worship consisted in desert feasts and sacrifices and burnt offerings from among the herds.[6] The Hebrews entered Palestine as nomads; the heritage of their tribal life from desert ancestors continued to be well marked long after they had settled among, and become civilized by, the native Canaanites.

The Hebrew kingdom in its heyday included the Sinaitic

[1] Bk. III, ch. 88.

[2] G. A. Cooke, *A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford, 1903), pp. 195-6.

[3] Hos 9 : 10, Jer. 2 : 2; Deut. 32: 10, etc.

[4] B. Moritz in *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, n. ser., vol. iii (1926), pp 81 *seq.*; D. S. Margoliouth, *The Relations between Arabs and Israelites* (London, 1924), pp. 8, 15. Consult James A. Montgomery, *Arabia and the Bible* (Philadelphia, 1934), pp 149 *seq.*

[5] Ex. 3 : 1, 18 : 10-12.

[6] Ex. 3 : 18, 5 : 1; Num. 10 : 35-6.

peninsula. Solomon had his fleet in the Gulf of al-'Aqabah. Ophir, whence the navy of Hiram and Solomon brought gold, algum and precious stones (1 K. 9 : 27-8, 10 : 11; 2 Ch. 9 : 10), was probably Ẓafār in 'Umān. By the time of Job (22 : 24) Ophir had become a synonym for a gold-producing land. Over a century after Solomon, Jehoshaphat (873–849 B.C.) still held sway over Elath (Ezion-geber, modern al-'Aqabah) and the trade routes leading thither and received tribute from the Arabians who "brought him flocks" (2 Ch. 17 : 11). In reporting his third campaign, directed (701) against Syria-Palestine, Sennacherib proclaims: "As for Hezekiah, the terrifying splendor of my majesty overcame him and the Urbi (Arabs) and his mercenary (?) troops which he had brought in to strengthen Jerusalem, his royal city, deserted him".[1] Hezekiah (1 Ch. 4 : 41), and before him Uzziah (2 Ch. 26 : 7), fought against the Minaeans in and around the oasis of Ma'īn (modern Ma'ān). Uzziah (792–740 B.C.) restored Elath to Judah and rebuilt the town (2 K. 14 : 22). The Chronicler (2 Ch. 21 : 16, 17) reports a South Arabian raid against Judah which resulted in the loss of King Jehoram's (848–844 B.C.) sons, wives and treasures, although it is difficult to see how distant Sabaeans, "the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians", could have carried out such a raid. By the time of Nehemiah,[2] in the middle of the fifth century B.C., the Jews were beginning to look upon their south-eastern neighbours as enemies.

Biblical association Old Testament references

Etymologically 'Arab is a Semitic word meaning "desert" or the inhabitant thereof with no reference to nationality. In this sense Hebrew 'Ereb is used in Is. 21 : 13, 13 : 20 and Jer. 3 : 2. In the Koran *a'rāb* is used for Bedouins. Second Mac. 12 : 10 makes Arabs and nomads synonymous. The first certain instance of the biblical use of the word as a proper name occurs in Jer. 25 : 24: "kings of Arabia". Jeremiah's prophetic career fell between 626 and 586 B.C. The "kings" referred to were in all probability sheikhs of northern Arabia and the Syrian Desert. By the third century B.C. the term was beginning to be used for any inhabitant of the peninsula, for 2 Ch. 21 : 16 makes mention of "the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians", leaving no doubt that the people whom the writer had in mind were the Arabians of the south-west, i.e. Sabaeans. Of the four best-

[1] Luckenbill, vol. ii, § 240. [2] Neh. 2 : 19, 4 : 7.

known kingdoms of ancient Arabia, viz. Saba', Ma'īn, Ḥaḍramawt and Qatabān, the first three—and these were the important ones—are mentioned in the Old Testament. In the commercial chapter of Ezekiel († after 572 B.C.) Arabia is coupled with Kedar, and the articles of merchandise listed are exactly what we would expect in the way of products from Arabia. From verse 21 in this chapter (27), we learn that the Arabians of the sixth century B.C. were engaged, as they are still engaged today, in breeding cattle which they sold to the neighbouring settlers. From Jer. 3 : 2 it is also evident that they were then notorious for highway robbery. Jer. 25 : 23 (American Revised) indicates that they had their heads shaved except for a tuft at the top, a practice similar to that of the Bedouins today.

Dedan (Ar. Daydān), referred to and mentioned repeatedly in the Old Testament (Is. 21 : 13; Jer. 25 : 23; Ezek. 25 : 13), is modern al-'Ulā, an oasis in northern al-Ḥijāz. For some time it was the headquarters of the Sabaeans in the northern part of the peninsula. At the height of their commercial power the Sabaeans evidently exercised control over the transport routes leading through al-Hijāz northward to the Mediterranean ports and had colonies planted along these routes.

The Kedar (Heb. Qēdār) mentioned by Ezekiel,[1] the "Kidri" of the Assyrian annals[2] and the "Cedrei"[3] of classical literature, held sway over North Arabia. Palmyrena with the region southeast of Damascus was their habitat.

The Shunammite damsel whose beauty is immortalized in the Song ascribed to Solomon (6 : 13, 1 : 5; cf. 1 K. 1 : 3) was probably an Arabian of the Kedar tribe. If historical, the Queen of Sheba (Arabic Bilqīs), who brought to the wise king of Israel gifts of unique value characteristic of South Arabia (1 K. 10 : 10; 2 Ch. 9 : 9), must have had her headquarters neither in al-Yaman nor in Ethiopia, but in one of those Sabaean posts or garrisons in the north on the caravan route. Not until two centuries after the age of Solomon (*ca.* 1000 B.C.) do the Yamanite kings begin to figure in inscriptions.

In Job 6 : 19 the Sheba (Ar. Saba') are associated with Tema (Taymā'). Job, the author of the finest piece of poetry that the ancient Semitic world produced, was an Arab, not a Jew, as the

[1] See also Is. 21 : 16; Gen. 25 : 13 [2] Luckenbill, vol. ii, §§ 820, 869.
[3] Pliny, Bk. V, ch. 12.

form of his name (*Iyyōb*, Ar. *Ayyūb*) and the scene of his book, North Arabia, indicate.[1] The appendix to the Book of Proverbs contains the wise sayings [2] of Agur son of Jakeh (Prov. 30 : 1) and of Lemuel (Prov. 31 : 1), the two kings of Massa, a tribe of Ishmael (Gen. 25 : 14). The names of these two persons occur in some form in certain Minaean and other ancient South Arabic inscriptions. In Baruch 3 : 23 there is a reference to "the Agarenes [sons of Agar = Hagar, i.e. Ishmaelites or North Arabians] that seek wisdom upon earth".

"Qedem" and "Bene Qedem" of the Old Testament, rendered in the English versions (Gen. 29 : 1; Num. 23 : 7; Is. 11 : 14; Jud. 6 : 33; Ezek. 25 : 4; Job 1 : 3) "east", "children of the east", "people of the east", etc., correspond to Arabic *sharq* and *sharqīyūn* (east and easterners). In particular, the terms mean the land and the Bedouins east of Palestine; in general, Arabia and the Arabians. "Saracen" comes from this same Arabic stem and is one of a half-dozen words of Arabic origin which occur in Old English, this word being used as early as the ninth century. It had had a history of its own before the rise of Islam and can be applied to others besides Arabians and Arabs.[3] Job, whose book is considered a masterpiece of wisdom as well as poetry, was a chief of the Bene Qedem (Job 1 : 3). In wisdom Solomon alone excelled this tribe (1 K. 4 : 30). The "wise men from the east" (Matt. 2 : 1), therefore, who followed the star to Jerusalem were possibly Bedouins from the North Arabian desert rather than Magi from Persia.

In the post-exilic literature the word Arab usually signifies Nabataean (2 Mac. 5 : 8; 1 Mac. 5 : 39). First Maccabees 9 : 35 mentions the Nabataeans as such. At the time of Paul the Nabataean kingdom extended as far north as Damascus. The Arabia to which Paul retired (Gal. 1 : 17) was undoubtedly some desert tract in the Nabataean district. The Arabians in Acts 2 : 11 were also in all probability Nabataeans.

[1] Certain technicalities of biblical Hebrew poetry, including parallelism, as illustrated in Job resemble Arabic poetical technique; in both cases the verse is a couplet consisting of two parts which complement each other either appositionally or antithetically. In the Middle Ages Hebrew grammar was modelled after Arabic grammar.

[2] Cf. with those of Luqmān, Koran 31 : 11.

[3] In this book, therefore, such terms as "history of the Saracens", "Saracenic art", "Saracenic architecture", etc., have been avoided. An attempt has been made to use "Arabian" for an inhabitant of the peninsula and "Arab" for any Arabic-speaking person, particularly if a Moslem. To Muslems "Muhammadan" is objectionable.

6. In classical literature

Arabia and the Arabians were familiar to the Greeks and Romans. The country lay across their path to India and China and produced commodities highly prized in the markets of the west. Its inhabitants were the middlemen of the southern seas, as their kinsmen, the Phoenicians, had been earlier of the Mediterranean.

The classical writers divided the land into Arabia Felix, Arabia Petraea and Arabia Deserta, corresponding to the tripartite political division of the land in the first Christian century, the first being independent, the second subject to Rome and the third nominally controlled in part by Parthia. Arabia Deserta included the Syro-Mesopotamian desert (the Bādiyah). Arabia Petraea (the rocky) centred on Sinai and the Nabataean kingdom, having Petra for its capital. Arabia Felix comprised the rest of the Arabian peninsula, the interior of which was then but little known. Its restriction to the Yaman, the region best known to Europe, was a medieval error. The name itself, meaning "happy", may have been an attempt to translate Ar. *yaman* (to the right hand), confused with *yumn*, happiness. The district was called Yaman because it lay to the right side, i.e. south of al-Ḥijāz, in opposition to al-Sha'm, i.e. Syria, which lay to the left or north.[1] Marcian (*ca.* A.D. 400) of Heraclea[2] uses the term "Saraceni". Before Marcian, Ptolemy,[3] who flourished in the first half of the second century of our era, refers to the Saracens. Ammianus Marcellinus,[4] a native of Antioch who wrote in the latter half of the fourth Christian century, identifies the Saracens with the Scenite Arabs.

The first mention of the Arabians in Greek literature was made by Aeschylus[5] (525–456 B.C.), the reference being to a distinguished Arabian officer in the army of Xerxes. Herodotus[6] (*ca.* 484–425 B.C.) follows with a reference to the Arabians in Xerxes' army, who were evidently from eastern Egypt.

[1] The "Sabaei" (Sabaeans), "Minaei" (Minaeans), "Homeritae" (Ḥimyarites), "Scenitae" (tent-dwellers = Bedouins), "Nabataei" (Nabataeans), "Catabanei" (Qatabānites), "Chatramotitae" (people of Ḥadramawt), "Omanitae" ('Umānites), "Sachalitae" (inhabitants of the Sāḥil, i.e. the coast-line, in this case the southern coast line, medieval al-Shiḥr)—all these figure in Greek and Roman geographies and histories.

[2] *Periplus of the Outer Sea*, tr. Wilfred H. Schoff (Philadelphia, 1927), § 17a.

[3] *Geographia*, ed. Carolus F. A. Nobbe, vol. II (Leipzig, 1887), Bk. V, ch. 17, § 3.

[4] *Rerum gestarum*, Bk. XXII, ch. 15, § 2, Bk. XXIII, ch. 6, § 13.

[5] *Persians*, l. 320.

[6] Bk. VII, § 69

To the classical authors from the Greek Eratosthenes († *ca.* 196 B.C.)—the source of Strabo—to the Roman Pliny († A.D. 79) Arabia is a land of fabulous wealth and luxury; it is the country of frankincense and other spices; its people love and enjoy liberty. Indeed, what particularly struck Western writers was the characteristic last mentioned. The independent character of

From Heinrich Kiepert, "Atlas antiquus"

ARABIA OF THE CLASSICAL AUTHORS

the Arabian people has formed a theme of praise and admiration for European authors from the remotest times to the days of Gibbon.[1]

That the Arabians themselves were conscious of those superior advantages which their natural environment afforded may be inferred from the debate with the Persian Chosroes in the presence of the Byzantine, Indian and Chinese deputies, in the

[1] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury (London, 1898), vol. v, p. 319.

course of which the Arab delegation brought out as eloquently and forcefully as possible the points in which their nation excelled.[1] Diodorus Siculus[2] (fl. 2nd half of 1st cent. B.C.) affirms that the Arabians "highly prize and value their liberty". In his *Geography*,[3] Strabo († A.D. 24), on the authority of an earlier Greek, states that the Arabians were the only people who did not send their ambassadors to Alexander, who had planned "to make Arabia the seat of empire".[4]

Roman expedition

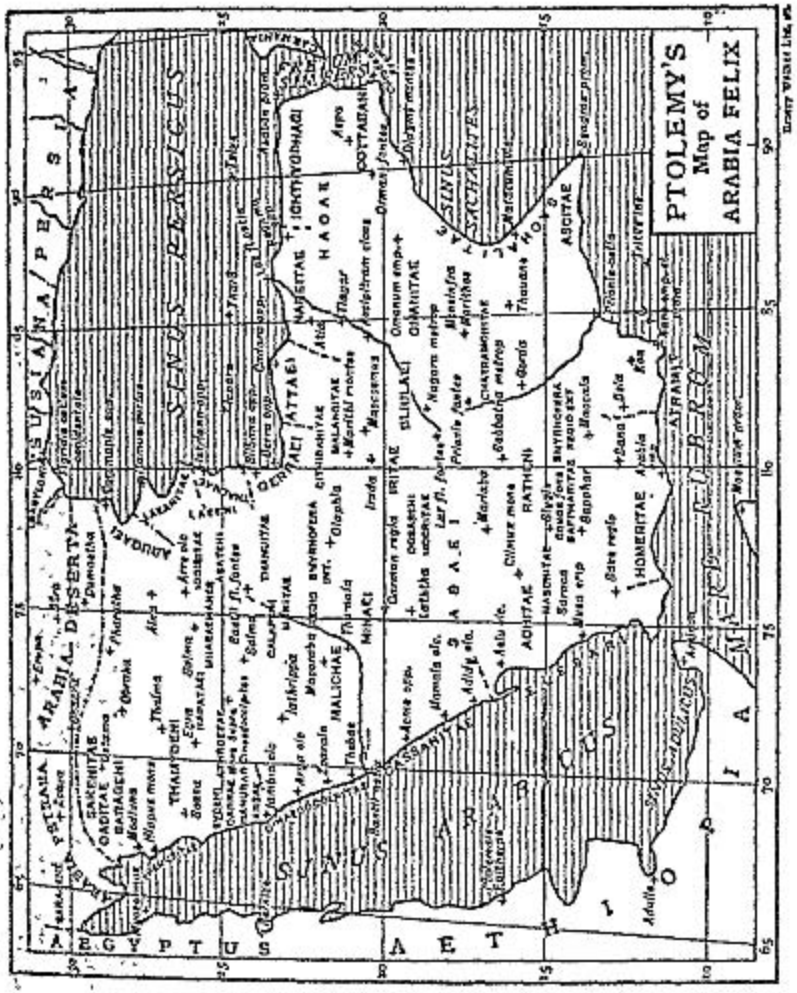
Masters of the world, as they were, the Romans failed to fasten the yoke upon Arabian necks. Their famous expedition of 10,000 men conducted from Egypt under the leadership of its prefect Aelius Gallus in 24 B.C., during the reign of Augustus Cæsar, and supported by their Nabataean allies, proved a signal failure. Its object was admittedly to capture those transport routes monopolized by the South Arabians and tap the resources of al-Yaman for the benefit of Rome. After months of southward penetration the decimated army turned back to "Negrana" (Najrān), which it had captured previously, made the coast of the Red Sea and ferried across to the Egyptian shore. The return trip took sixty days. The farthest point in Arabia reached was "Mariaba", which was probably not Ma'rib the Sabaean metropolis but Mariama to the south-east. The celebrated Greek geographer Strabo, historian of the expedition and himself the personal friend of Gallus, blames the many misfortunes on the perfidy of its guide, "Syllaeus the minister of the Nabataeans".[5] Thus ended ignominiously the first, and indeed the last, military campaign of major importance that any European power ever ventured to conduct in inland Arabia.

The aromatic land

To Herodotus[6] "the whole of Arabia exhales a most delicious fragrance", it being "the only country which produces frankincense, myrrh, cassia, cinnamon and ladanum.... The trees which bear the frankincense are guarded by winged serpents, small in size and of varied colours, whereof vast numbers hang about every tree."[7] But the geographer Strabo is slightly more judicious than the over-credulous "father of history". To him also South Arabia is "the aromatic country",[8] but its "snakes, a

[1] Ibn-'Abd-Rabbihi, *al-'Iqd al-Farīd* (Cairo, 1302), vol. i, p. 125.
[2] *Bibliotheca historica*, Bk. II, ch. 1, § 5
[3] Bk XVI, ch. 1, § 11.
[4] Bk XVI, ch 4, § 27.
[5] Bk. XVI, ch 4, § 23.
[6] Bk. III, ch. 113.
[7] Bk. III, ch. 107.
[8] Bk XVI, ch. 4, § 25.

span in length, spring up as high as a man's waist".[1] Diodorus Siculus[2] reiterates the same view of Arabia as a spice-producing



land the very soil of which is redolent. Pliny, who in his *Natural History* (Bk. VI) summarizes the Roman knowledge of the Eastern countries as of A.D. 70, also emphasizes this characteristic

[1] Bk. XVI, ch. 4, § 19.

[2] Bk. II, ch. 49, §§ 2-3.

of the land[1] and adds, in another connection, that the Sabaei are "the best known of all the tribes of Arabia on account of their frankincense".[2] Clearly Ḥaḍramawt was in those days the frankincense land par excellence. The Greeks and Romans evidently presumed that all the commodities in which the Arabians dealt were native products of their own land, so jealously did the merchants guard the secrets of their other sources in Abyssinia and India and so strict was the monopoly.

Those same classical writers were greatly impressed by the wealth of the South Arabians. Strabo[3] mentions cities "adorned with beautiful temples and palaces". Pliny,[4] using Aelius Gallus for authority, concurs.

Gold

While frankincense and spices were the products for which the land was most famous, almost equally prized were the mineral deposits, particularly gold, found along the western coast of the peninsula from Midian to al-Yaman and to some extent in the central portion of the land. Diodorus[5] asserts that Arabia possessed mines of gold so pure that no smelting was necessary. Al-Maqdisī[6] and al-Hamdānī[7] (tenth century) devote a paragraph each to the minerals of Arabia, emphasizing particularly its gold.

Other treasured scraps of information are embedded in the Greek and Latin records. Strabo[8] tells us that in South Arabia polyandry of the type in which a number of brothers married the same wife prevailed, that people lived incestuously and that the law of primogeniture, by which the eldest became the chief, was observed. He further states that the greater part of their wine was made of dates and that instead of olive oil sesame oil was used.[9]

In his geography, written between A.D. 150 and 160, Ptolemy, whose projection of the known world was to determine the geographical ideas of both Europeans and Asians for many centuries to come, gives us the result of an attempt to put into scientific form the records and personal impressions of merchants and travellers of his time. His map of Arabia is the first sketch based on such information.

[1] Bk. XII, ch. 30. [2] Bk. VI, ch. 32. [3] Bk. XVI, ch. 4, § 3.
[4] Bk VI, ch 32. [5] Bk. II, ch. 50, § 1.
[6] *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm*, ed. de Goeje (Leyden, 1877), pp. 101-2.
[7] *Ṣifat Jazīrat al-'Arab*, ed. D. H Müller (Leyden, 1884), pp 153-4.
[8] Bk XVI, ch. 4, § 25. [9] *Ibid.* § 26, Pliny, Bk. VI, ch. 32

CHAPTER V

THE SABAEAN AND OTHER STATES OF SOUTH ARABIA

THE Sabaeans were the first Arabians to step within the threshold of civilization. They figure in the late cuneiform inscriptions. The oldest reference to them in Greek literature is in Theophrastus († 288 B.C.), *Historia plantarum*.[1] The south-western corner of the peninsula was the early home of the Sabaeans. The South Arabians as merchants

The fertility of that felicitous rain-favoured land, its proximity to the sea and its strategic location on the India route were all determining factors in its development. Here were produced spices, myrrh and other *aromata* for seasoning foods or burning in the ceremonial of the court and the ritual of the church; foremost among these was incense, that most valuable commodity of ancient trade. Thither did rare and highly prized products, such as pearls from the Persian Gulf, condiments, fabrics and swords from India, silk from China, slaves, monkeys, ivory, gold and ostrich feathers from Ethiopia, find their way in transit to Western marts. The author of *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*[2] has left us (A.D. 50–60) a bird's-eye view of the market of "Muza", present-day Mukha (Mocha):

> The merchandise imported there consists of purple cloths, both fine and coarse; clothing in the Arabian style, with sleeves; plain, ordinary, embroidered, or interwoven with gold; saffron, sweet rush, muslins, cloaks, blankets (not many), some plain and others made in the local fashion; sashes of different colors, fragrant ointments in moderate quantity, wine and wheat, not much.

The Sabaeans were the Phoenicians of the southern sea. They knew its routes, reefs and harbours, mastered its treacherous monsoons and thus monopolized its trade during the last millennium and a quarter before our era. The circumnavigation of Arabia, stated as a theoretical possibility by Alexander's admiral, Nearchus, was in their case an actuality. To the Greco-Roman

[1] Bk. IX, ch. 4, § 2.

[2] Tr. W. H. Schoff (New York, 1912), § 24.

pilots the frankincense country was "mountainous and forbidding".[1] "Navigation", according to the *Periplus*,[2] "is dangerous along this whole coast of Arabia, which is without harbors, with bad anchorages, foul, inaccessible because of breakers and rocks, and terrible in every way."

Through the Red Sea the main maritime route led from Bāb al-Mandab to Wādi al-Ḥammāmāt on the coast of Middle Egypt. The inherent difficulty of navigating this sea, especially in its northern parts, caused the Sabaeans to develop land routes between al-Yaman and Syria along the western coast of the peninsula, leading through Makkah and Petra and forking at the northern end to Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia. The Syrian branch strikes the Mediterranean outlet at Ghazzah (Gaza). From Ḥaḍramawt, particularly rich in frankincense, a caravan road led to Ma'rib, the Sabaean capital, where it joined the main commercial artery. Along this south-to-north route a number of Sabaean colonies were planted. From these may have come the Sabaeans who figured in the Assyrian and Hebrew records. An historical snapshot has been preserved for us in Gen. 37 : 25 of a "caravan of Ishmaelites" coming down "from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh".

South Arabic inscriptions

The conquests which the South Arabians achieved were in commerce and trade. The kingdoms they built were not military states. The outline of their history can be delineated from such references as those cited above in the ancient Semitic and Greco-Roman writings, from the semi-legendary traditions preserved in early Moslem literature—particularly the works of Wahb ibn-Munabbih († in Ṣan'ā', *ca.* A.D. 728), al-Hamdāni[3] († A.D. 945) and al-Ḥimyari († A.D. 1177)—but above all from the local sources made accessible mainly through the discoveries of Halévy and Glaser. All this native South Arabian literature, however, is epigraphic—on metal and stone. Whatever perishable material was used for recording business transactions, historical narratives, or strictly literary productions has entirely disappeared. The earliest inscriptions found are mostly boustro-

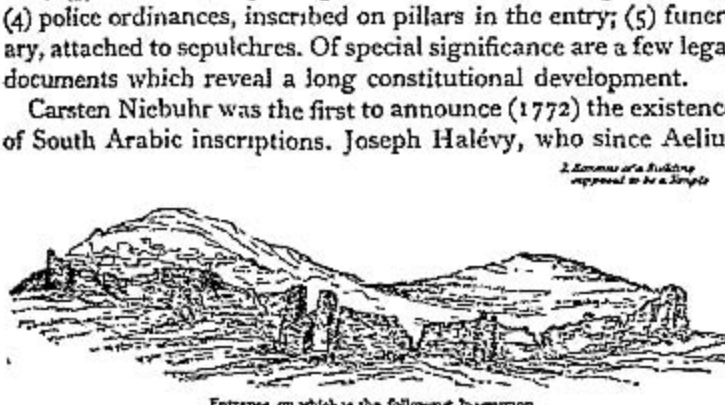
[1] *Erythraean Sea*, § 29.

[2] *Ibid.* § 20; D. H. Muller, *Die Burgen und Schlösser Südarabiens nach dem Iklil des Hamdâni*, 2 pts. (Vienna, 1879–81).

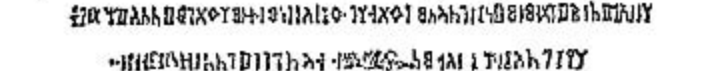
[3] Bk. VIII, ed. Nabih A. Faris (Princeton, 1940); *The Antiquities of South Arabia* (Princeton, 1938); Bk. X, ed. Muḥibb-al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (Cairo, 1368).

phedon, dating from the eighth or ninth century B.C. The inscriptions may be classified as follows: (1) votive, engraved on tablets of bronze placed in the temples and dedicated to Almaqah (Ilmuqah), 'Athtar and Shams; (2) architectural, occurring on the walls of the temples and other public edifices to commemorate the name of the builder of or the contributor to the construction; (3) historical, reporting a battle or announcing a victory; (4) police ordinances, inscribed on pillars in the entry; (5) funerary, attached to sepulchres. Of special significance are a few legal documents which reveal a long constitutional development.

Carsten Niebuhr was the first to announce (1772) the existence of South Arabic inscriptions. Joseph Halévy, who since Aelius



Entrance on which is the following Inscription



From "Journal of the Royal Geographical Society" (1837)

THE RUINS OF NAQAB AL-HAJAR AND TWO LINES OF INSCRIPTION WHICH FURNISHED EUROPE WITH ITS FIRST SIGHT OF SOUTH ARABIC INSCRIPTION

Gallus (24 B.C.) was the first European to visit Najrān in al-Yaman (1869–70), brought back copies of 685 inscriptions from thirty-seven different localities. Between 1882 and 1894 Eduard Glaser undertook four scientific expeditions to al-Yaman which yielded some 2000 inscriptions, of which some are still unpublished. In all we possess today about 4000 such inscriptions, extending in date as far back as the seventh century B.C. Th. S. Arnaud, who discovered the ruins of Ma'rib, copied in 1843 at the risk of his life about sixty inscriptions. James R. Wellsted, an English naval officer, published in 1837 a part of the inscription of Naqab al-Hajar and this furnished Europe with its second sight of South Arabian writing. The decipherment was accomplished by Emil Rödiger of Halle (1837) and by Gesenius (1841).

As revealed by these inscriptions, the South Arabic or Minaco-Sabaean language (also called Ḥimyarite) has twenty-nine letters in its alphabet. The characters represent in all probability an early forking from the Sinaitic, which constitutes the connecting link between the Phoenician alphabet and its Egyptian ancestor. These symmetrical rectilinear letters (*al-musnad*) point to a long development.[1] Its alphabet, like other Semitic forms, consists of consonants only. In noun formation, verb conjugation, personal pronouns and vocabulary, South Arabic has certain affinities with Akkadian (Assyro-Babylonian) and Ethiopic (Abyssinian). But it has the broken plural which characterizes North Arabic and Ethiopic. Akkadian, South Arabic and Ethiopic represent in certain respects the older form of Semitic speech. With the decay of the Yamanite culture South Arabic practically disappeared and North Arabic was substituted. The literary fairs of the north, such as the Sūq 'Ukāẓ, the annual heathen pilgrimage to the Ka'bah and the commercial relations with Makkah hastened the process of substitution.

1. The Sabaean kingdom

The first major kingdoms discernible through the mists of South Arabian antiquity were the Sabaean and the Minaean, which during a considerable part of their history were contemporaries. Both kingdoms began as theocracies and ended as secular kinships.

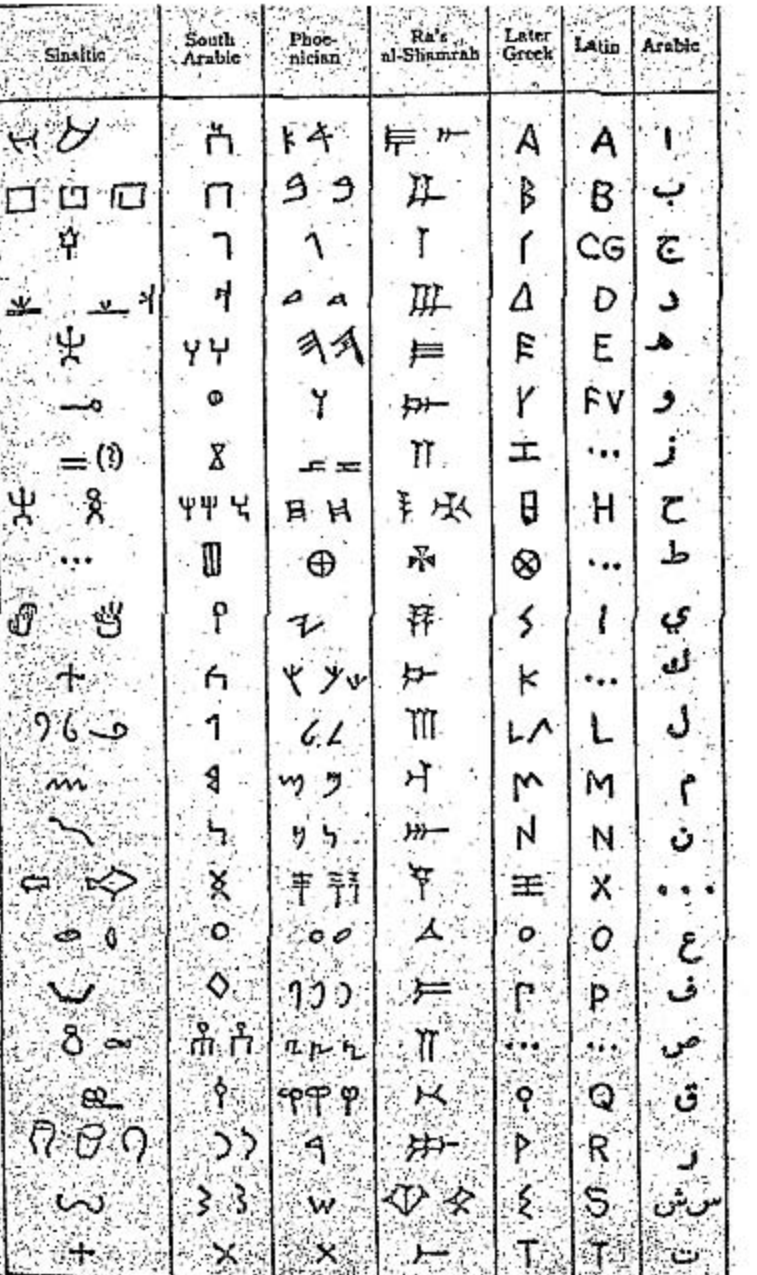
The Sabaeans were the most distinguished branch of the entire South Arabian family. Saba', biblical Sheba, their original homeland, lay south of Najrān in the Yaman district. The Sabaean period, according to the school of Arabists who hold for the low (or short) chronology extended from about 750 B.C. to 115 B.C. with a change in the royal title at about 610 B.C.; the Minaean from about 700 B.C., to the third pre-Christian century.[2] Mukarrib[3] was the title of the priest-king who stood at the head of the state. Two early Sabaean mukarribs, Yatha'-amar and Kariba-il, are cited in the royal Assyrian annals of Sargon II and Sennacherib[4] and must have reigned in the late eighth and

[1] For specimens see *Corpus inscriptionum Semiticarum*, pars iv (Paris, 1889 ff.).

[2] Cf. Nielsen, *Handbuch*, vol. i, pp. 64 *seq*; F. V. Winnett in *Bulletin, American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 73 (1939), pp. 3-9; G. Ryckmans in *Bulletin, School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. xiv (1952), pp. 1 *seq.*; Jacques Ryckmans, *L'Institution monarchique en Arabie méridionale avant l'Islam* (Louvain, 1951), pp. 257 *seq.*

[3] MKRB, vocalization uncertain.

[4] See above, pp. 37-8.



Constructed with the aid of G. Vision Dunand

A TABLE OF ALPHABETS, INCLUDING RA'S AL-SHAMRAH CUNEIFORM

early seventh century. In their heyday the kings of Saba' extended their hegemony over all South Arabia reducing their neighbour, the Minaean kingdom, to a state of vassalage. Sirwāḥ, a day's journey west of Ma'rib, was the capital of Saba'. Its principal building was the temple of Almaqah, the moon-god.[1] Its principal ruins, now called al-Kharibah, house a village of a hundred persons. An inscription records that its surrounding wall was built by Yada'-il, an early mukarrib. Another inscription records the victorious campaigns of Kariba-il Watar (*ca.* 450 B.C.), who first assumed the title "MLK [king of] Saba".

Ma'rib dam

In the second period of the Sabaean kingdom (*ca.* 610–115 B.C.) the ruler appears shorn of his priestly character. Ma'rib, some sixty miles east of Ṣan'ā', then became the capital. This city lay 3900 feet above the sea. It has been visited by only a few Europeans, first among whom were Arnaud, Halévy and Glaser. It was the meeting-place of the trade routes connecting the frankincense lands with the Mediterranean ports, particularly Ghazzah. Al-Hamdāni in his *Iklīl*[2] refers to three citadels in Ma'rib, but the construction for which the city was particularly famous was the great dam, Sadd Ma'rib.[3] This remarkable engineering feat, together with the other public works of the Sabaeans, reveal to us a peace-loving society highly advanced not only in commerce but in technical accomplishment as well. The older portions of the dam were constructed in the mid-seventh pre-Christian century. The inscriptions make Sumhu'alay Yanuf and his son Yatha'-amar Bayyin the main builders and cite restorations in the time of Sharaḥbi-Il Ya'fur (A.D. 449–450) and Abraha the Abyssinian (A.D. 543). But al-Hamdāni, and after him al-Mas'ūdi,[4] al-Isfahāni[5] and Yāqūt,[6] regard Luqmān ibn-'Ād, a mythical personage, as the builder.

2. The Minaean kingdom

The Minaean kingdom flourished in the Jawf of al-Yaman and in its heyday included most of South Arabia. The original Arabic form Ma'ān (biblical Mā'ōn, Me'ūn, Me'īn as a place

[1] Ahmed Bakhry, *An Archaeological Journey to Yemen*, vol 1 (Cairo, 1952), pp 29-56, Wendell Phillips, *Qataban and Sheba* (New York 1955); Richard L. Bowen and Frank P Albright *Archaeological Discoveries in South Arabia* (Baltimore 1958)

[2] Faris, p 45 For description of ruins see al-Azm, pt. 2, pp 50 *seq* *Murūj al-Dhahab*, ed. and tr de Meynard and de Courteille vol iii (Paris, 1864), p. 366

[3] *Ta'rikh Sinī Mulūk al-Arḍ w-al-Anbiyā'*, ed Gottwaldt (Leipzig, 1844), p 126

[4] *Buldān*, vol. iv, p 383

name) was later vocalized Ma'īn, meaning spring-water. The name survives in present-day Ma'ān (south-east of Petra), an important colony on the northern trade route. Minaean inscriptions near al-'Ula[1] and Tabūk attest the existence of several colonies in this region serving as warehouses and relay posts. The Minaean capital Qarnāw, visited by Halévy in 1870, is modern Ma'īn (in southern al-Jawf, north-east of Ṣan'ā'). The religious metropolis, Yathīl, also in southern al-Jawf, is present-day Barāqish, north-west of Ma'rib. The Minaeans spoke the same language as the later Sabaeans, with only dialectal differences. The so-called Minaean inscriptions include the Qatabānian royal inscriptions and few Ḥaḍramawt texts. Carvings in the temple ruins of al-Ḥazm, provincial capital of al-Jawf, represent suspended vessels, probably wine offerings, gazelles and other sacrificial animals, snakes which were divine symbols, dancing girls who were temple servants, and ostriches evidently kept in sacred parks.

3. an H m

Other than the Minaean and Sabaean kingdoms two other important states arose in this area Qatabān and Ḥaḍramawt. The land of Qatabān lay east of the site of 'Adan, that of Ḥaḍramawt about where it is today. The Qatabān monarchy,[2] whose capital was Tamna' (now Kuḥlān), lasted from about 400–50 B.C.; that of Ḥaḍramawt, whose capital was Shabwah (classical Sabota), lasted from the mid-fifth century before Christ to the end of the first Christian century. At times these kingdoms were under Sabaean and Minaean hegemony. Arab historians knew nothing about all these peoples whose inscriptions extend from North Arabia to Ethiopia, who organized the spice trade and undertook amazing public works.

4. H ka

From 115 B.C. onwards the entire area falls under new masters who stemmed from the southwestern highlands, the tribe of Ḥimyar. Thence the civilization is referred to as Ḥimyarite, though the royal title remains "king of Saba' and dhu-Raydān". Raydān later became known as Qatabān. This marks the beginning of the first Ḥimyarite kingdom, which lasted till about A.D. 300. The word "Homeritae" occurs first in *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (about A.D. 60) and then in Pliny. The

[1] Lihyānite capital *ca* 500–300 B.C. See above p 42

[2] Cf. Phillips, p 247. For a list of kings see Müller, *Die Burgen*, pt. 2, pp 60-67; G. Ryckmans, *Les noms propres sud sémitiques*, vol i (Louvain, 1934), pp 36 *seq*; H. St. J. B Philby, *The Background of Islam* (Alexandria, 1947), pp. 143-4.

Ḥimyarites were close kinsmen of the Sabaeans and, as the youngest branch of the stock, became the inheritors of the Minaeo-Sabaean culture and trade. Their language was practically the same as that of the Sabaeans and Minaeans before them. Pliny's references to agriculture are confirmed by the wells, dams and cisterns repeatedly mentioned in the inscriptions. The collection of frankincense, considered a religious act, was still the source of greatest income.

Ẓafār (classical Sapphar and Saphar, Sephar of Gen. 10 : 30), the inland town, about one hundred miles north-east of Mukha on the road to Ṣan'ā', was the capital of the Ḥimyarite dynasty. It displaced Ma'rib of the Sabaeans and Qarnāw of the Minaeans.

British Museum

HIMYARITE SILVER COIN

Obv. male head with monogram; rev. male head with inscription reading KRB'L WTR (Karība-il Watar)
Ca. A.D. 50

Its ruins can still be seen on the summit of a circular hill near the modern town of Yarim. At the time of the composition of *The Periplus* its king was Kariba-il Watar (Charibael of *The Periplus*).

It was during this Ḥimyarite period that the ill-fated Roman column under Aelius Gallus penetrated as far as Mariama. The "Ilasarus" of Strabo, who was the ruler at that time, is Ili-shariḥa Yaḥḍub of the inscriptions.

The Semitic origin of the Abyssinians

Another notable occurrence in the early part of this period was the establishment of Arabian colonists from al-Yaman and Ḥaḍramawt in the "land of Cush", where they laid the basis of the Abyssinian kingdom and civilization and ultimately developed a culture which the native negroes could probably never have achieved. The displacement of South Arabian tribes about the middle of the fifth century of our era (connected by popular tradition with the breaking of the great dam of Ma'rib), which

carried some to Syria and al-'Irāq, may have resulted in augmenting the earlier South Arabian settlements in Abyssinia. Along the whole coast of East Africa there was an infusion of Arabian blood of far earlier origin than the Moslem invasion. The beginnings of the kingdom of Aksūm (Axum), the original nucleus of later Abyssinia, belong to the first century after Christ.

The castle of Ghumdān

To another Ili-shariḥa (Līsharḥ ibn-Yahṣub of Yāqūt[1]), of the first century after Christ, is ascribed the most celebrated castle of "the land of castles", as al-Yaman has been called, Ghumdān in Ṣan'ā'. As a measure of protection against Bedouin raids the urban Ḥimyarites found it necessary to erect well-fortified palaces. Al-Hamdāni, and following him Yāqūt, have left us detailed descriptions of Ghumdān, though by their time it was but a gigantic ruin. The citadel, according to these geographers, had twenty stories, each ten cubits high—the first skyscraper in recorded history. It was built of granite, porphyry and marble. The king had his court installed in the uppermost story, the roof of which was covered with one slab of stone so transparent that one could look through it skyward and distinguish between a crow and a kite. The four facades were constructed of stones of various colours. At each corner-stone stood a brazen lion which roared whenever the wind blew. In a poem al-Hamdāni refers to the clouds as the turban of Ghumdān and marble as its belt. The structure survived until the rise of Islam and was apparently destroyed in the course of the struggle which established Moslem supremacy in al-Yaman.

The king of this first Ḥimyarite period appears as a feudal lord, residing in a castle, owning land and issuing coins of gold, silver and copper, with his image on one side and an owl (the Athenian emblem) or a bull's head on the other. Certain older coins bear the head of Athena and show South Arabian dependence on Athenian models as early as the fourth century before our era. Besides coins, bronze figures of Hellenistic and Sāsānid workmanship are occasionally unearthed in al-Yaman. Native art shows no high antiquity. Semitic genius nowhere expressed itself through such a channel.

The social organization of the Sabaeo-Ḥimyarite community as revealed by the inscriptions represents a curious blend of the

[1] *Buldān*, vol. iii, p. 811, l. 8.

old tribal system, caste stratification and feudal aristocracy and monarchy, presenting phenomena many of which may be duplicated elsewhere but which in their aggregate seem unique.

The Romans displace the Arabians in maritime trade

In the course of this first Ḥimyarite period the zenith of the South Arabian power was passed. So long as the Yamanites monopolized the maritime trade of the Red Sea they prospered; but now the control was slipping out of their hands. *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (A.D. 50–60), the first record of organized trading with the East in vessels built and commanded by subjects of a Western power, marks the turning-point of the tide of commerce. The great overland route through the Fertile Crescent and connecting Europe with India, which was a source

British Museum

ḤIMYARITE SILVER COIN

Obv. head of Athena, on her cheek Sabaean letter *nūn*, rev owl, with olive spray and crescent. Coin belongs to 3rd or 2nd cent B.C., imitation of the old Attic type of 4th cent. B.C.

of endless friction between the Parthian and Roman empires, had been threatened before this time by Alexander; but the southern maritime route to India remained in the hands of Arabians until almost the first century after Christ. Their task consisted in collecting the products of their own land together with those of East Africa and India and carrying them by camel northward from Ma'rib through Makkah to Syria and Egypt, thus avoiding the hazards of the Red Sea. If, however, transportation by sea seemed preferable the route ran either all the way up the Red Sea to the canal connecting with one of the eastern arms of the Nile or else through the southern part of the Red Sea to Wādi al-Ḥammāmāt and then across the Egyptian desert to Thebes or down the Nile to Memphis The land route through al-Ḥijāz was dotted with Ḥimyarite stations.[1] Strabo[2] writes that the caravan journey from "Minaea to Aelana" (al-'Aqabah) takes

[1] See Koran 34 .17-18.

[2] Bk XVI. ch. 4 § 4.

seventy days. As the people of the West developed more and more the taste for Oriental cloths, perfumes and spices, the South Arabians raised the price of their own products, especially frankincense and myrrh, and increased the tolls on the foreign goods which passed through their hands. In the meantime they more jealously guarded their control over the routes. Hence their proverbial wealth. Petra and then Palmyra became partners in this commercial system, links in the chain, and consequently shared in the ensuing prosperity. But now the whole situation was beginning to change.

When Egypt under the Ptolemies became once more a world power the first attempt was made to contest the supremacy of the sea with the South Arabians. Ptolemy II (285–246 B.C.) reopened the Nile–Red Sea canal originally dug by Sesostris some seventeen centuries previously. The consequent entry of the Ptolemaic merchant marine into the waters separating Egypt from Arabia proved the beginning of the end for the Himyarite commercial activity. Rome, which captured Egypt from the Ptolemies about the middle of the first century B.C., followed the Ptolemies in the policy of maritime competition against the Arabians and in the desire to free Egypt from commercial dependence upon al-Yaman. In the days of Pliny Roman citizens were already complaining of the high prices exacted by the South Arabian traders for commodities for which Rome had to pay in cash because she had so little to offer by way of goods they desired.[1] The Abyssinians, evidently not content with the share of spoils allotted them by their neighbours to the east, were now courting Roman alliance.

In the early Roman period a Greek or Roman, perhaps in the Abyssinian maritime service, was initiated into the mysteries of the sea routes with their hazards and periodic changes of monsoons, and triumphantly returned to Alexandria with a cargo of the greatly desired and highly priced articles, including cinnamon and pepper produced in India, commodities which the Westerners had believed to be of Arabian origin. This Hippalus, the Columbus of early Roman trade, was followed by others who thus contributed to the final break-up of the Arabian monopoly. But full advantage of the memorable discovery of the periodicity of the monsoons and the direct sea route to India was not taken

[1] Pliny Bk. XII ch. 41

till sometime later. The entry of the Roman shipping into the Indian Ocean sounded the knell of South Arabian prosperity.[1] Economic decline brought in its wake, as it always does, political ruin. One by one Petra, Palmyra and north-western Mesopotamia fell under the paws of the Roman wolf.

5. The second Himyarite kingdom

About A.D. 300 the monarchical title in South Arabia becomes "king of Saba', dhu-Raydān, Ḥaḍramawt and Yamanāt". This means that by this time Ḥaḍramawt had lost its independence. To this title a further addition was soon made: "and of their Arabians in the mountains and in the Tihāmah". Yamanāt (Yamānah) might have then embraced the entire southern coastlands; Tihāmah was the Red Sea coast west of Ṣan'ā'.

After an invasion from Abyssinia resulting in a short Abyssinian rule (*ca.* 340–78) the native Ḥimyarite kings resumed their long title and held their position till about A.D. 525. In the Aksūmite inscriptions of the middle of the fourth century the Abyssinian monarch claims to be "king of Aksūm, Ḥimyar, Raydān, Ḥabashah,[2] Salḥ and Tihāmah". This was not the first or only time the Abyssinians invaded Arabia. Once before, in the second and third centuries after Christ, they must have succeeded in establishing temporary authority over parts of South Arabia.

Nine of the Ḥimyarite kings of this period are known to us from inscriptions. Tubba' is the royal title that has survived in Islamic literature. Among the Ḥimyarite kings best known to later Arabic legends was one Shammar Yar'ash, who is represented as having conquered as far as Samarqand, which, according to these legends, takes its name from him. Another was abu-Karib As'ad Kāmil, the Abi-kariba As'ad (*ca.* A.D. 385–420) who is reported to have conquered Persia and who later embraced the Jewish faith. The memory of the latter is still kept alive in the Arabic ballads of adventure. This later Ḥimyarite period was signalized by the introduction of Christianity and Judaism into al-Yaman.

Christianity and Judaism in al-Yaman

The religion of South Arabia was in its essence a planetary astral system in which the cult of the moon-god prevailed. The moon, known in Ḥadramawt as Sīn, to the Minaeans as Wadd (love or lover, father), to the Sabaeans as Almaqah (the health-giving god?) and to the Qatabānians as 'Amm (paternal uncle),

[1] Cf George F. Hourani in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. xi (1952), pp. 291–5.

[2] I.e Ḥadramawt. See Nielsen, *Handbuch*, vol. i, p. 104.

stood at the head of the pantheon. He was conceived of as a masculine deity and took precedence over the sun, Shams, who was his consort. 'Athtar (Venus, corresponding to the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, Phoenician 'Ashtart), their son, was the third member of the triad. From this celestial pair sprang the many other heavenly bodies considered divine. The North Arabian al-Lāt, who figured in the Koran, may have been another name for the sun-goddess.

Christianity of the Monophysite type began to trickle in from the north, particularly Syria, at an early date. Syrian missionaries fleeing persecution may have entered al-Yaman at times unknown to us, but the first Christian embassy to South Arabia that we read of was that sent by the Emperor Constantius in 356 under the leadership of Theophilus Indus, an Arian. The real motive behind the mission lay in the international politics of the day and the rivalry between the Roman and Persian empires for spheres of influence in South Arabia. Theophilus succeeded in building one church at 'Adan (Aden) and two others in the country of the Ḥimyarites. Najrān, into which Christianity of the Monophysite communion is said to have been introduced by a holy man from Syria named Faymiyūn (Phemion), embraced the new faith about A.D. 500. Ibn-Hishām[1] and al-Ṭabari[2] give us the legend of this ascetic, who was captured by an Arab caravan and brought to Najrān. Ya'qūb of Sarūj (†521) addressed a comforting letter in Syriac to the Christians of Najrān. The second caliph, 'Umar, deported (A.D. 635–6) to al-'Irāq those of them who had failed to embrace Islam.[3] As late as A.D. 840 we hear of a Mār Petrus, bishop of San'ā' and al-Yaman.

Judaism also became widely spread in al-Yaman under the second Ḥimyarite kingdom. It must have found its way early into North Arabia, perhaps consequent to the conquest of Palestine and the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in A.D. 70. Judging by the names preserved most of the Jews in Arabia must have been Judaized Aramaeans and Arabians rather than descendants of Abraham. In the early part of the sixth century the Hebrew religion had such a hold upon al-Yaman that the last Ḥimyarite king, dhu-Nuwās (a descendant of the Tubba' As'ad Kāmil),

[1] *Sīrah*, ed. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen, 1858), pp. 20-22.
[2] *Ta'rīkh al-Rusul*, ed. de Goeje, vol. 1 (Leyden, 1881–2), pp. 919-25.
[3] Balādhuri, *Futūḥ*, p. 66 = Hitti, *Origins*, pp. 101-2. See below, p. 169.

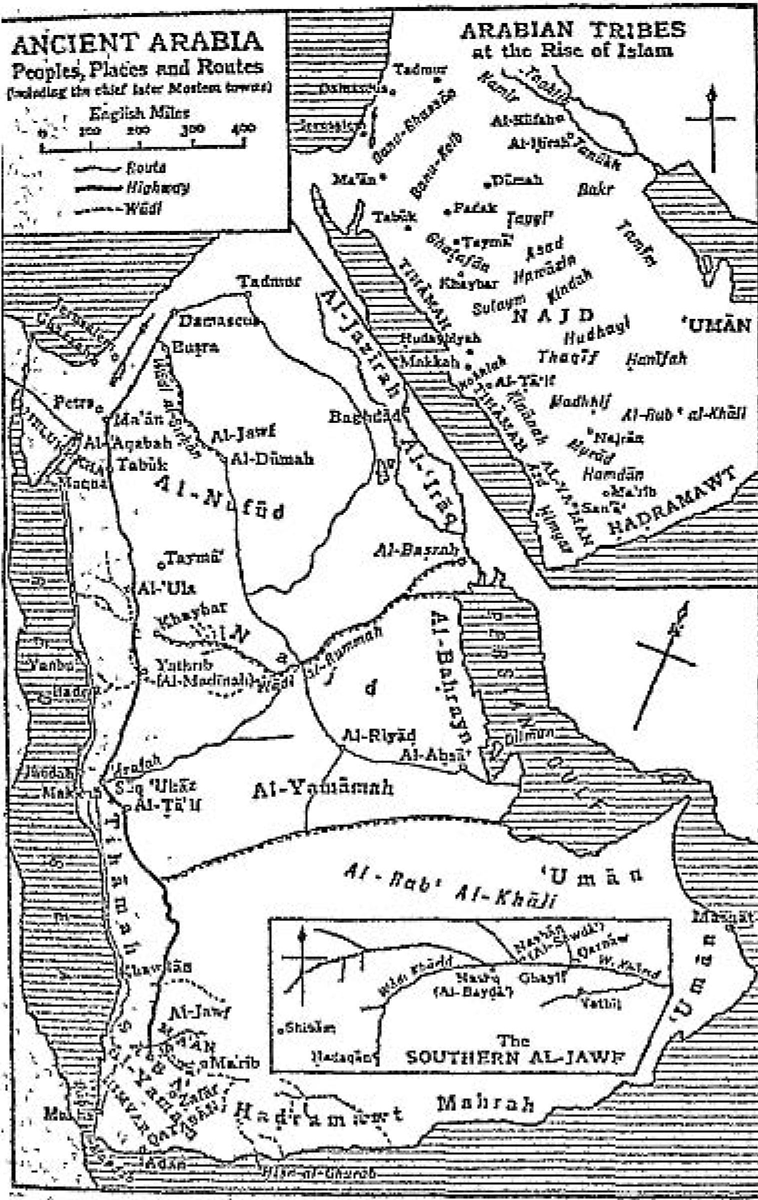
was a Jew. Virtually all the hundred thousand Jews in al-Yaman have been, after 1948, transferred to Israel.

Rivalry between the South Arabian converts of the two newly introduced monotheistic religions led to active hostility. Evidently dhu-Nuwās, representing the nationalistic spirit, associated the native Christians with the hated rule of the Christian Abyssinians. To this Jewish monarch is ascribed the famous massacre of the Christians of Najrān in October 523 (sūr. 85 : 4).[1] Daws dhu-Tha'labān (or Thu'lubān) survived, according to Arabic tradition, and implored the Emperor Justin I for aid, the Byzantine emperor at that time being regarded as the protector of Christians everywhere. The emperor wrote to the Negus (Najāshi) of Abyssinia (Kaleb Ela Aṣbeḥa in the inscriptions), for he represented the Christian power nearest the scene of trouble. The Negus is said to have sent 70,000 men across the Red Sea to Arabia under a certain Aryāṭ. This campaign therefore falls within the network of the international politics of that age: Byzantium was seeking through Abyssinia to bring the Arabian tribes under her influence and use them against Persia.[2] The Abyssinians were victorious in 523 and again in 525. The leader on the latter occasion was Abrahah (variant of Abraham), originally an officer under Aryāṭ, but who by this time had fallen out with his commander and taken over the supreme command. According to al-Ṭabari,[3] dhu-Nuwās, setting spurs to his steed, "plunged it into the waves of the sea and was never seen again". Thus came to his end the last Ḥimyarite monarch, and with him the period of the independence of al-Yaman was terminated. All that remains of the glorious memory of the ancient Ḥimyarite dynasty is today perpetuated in the name of an obscure tribe, Ḥimyar, east of 'Adan.

The period of Abyssinian rule

The Abyssinians came as helpers, but as often happens remained as conquerors. They turned colonists[4] and remained from 525 to 575 in control of the land whence their ancestors had long before emigrated to the African shore. Abrahah, the acknowledged Aksūmite viceroy, built in Ṣan'ā', now the capital, one of the most magnificent cathedrals of the age, called by the Arabian writers al-Qalīs (al-Qulays, al-Qullays, from Gr.

[1] See Axel Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites* (Lund, 1924).
[2] Procopius, *History of the Wars*, ed and tr. H. B Dewing (London, 1904), Bk. I, ch 20, §§ 9-12.
[3] Vol. i, pp 927-8.
[4] Procopius, Bk. I, ch. 20, §§ 2, 6.


ANCIENT ARABIA
Peoples, Places and Routes
English Miles
0 100 200 300 400
Route
Highway
Wādī
ARABIAN TRIBES
at the Rise of Islam
Tadmur
Damascus
Ma'ān
Banu-Kalb
Al-Kūfah
Al-Ḥīrah
Bakr
Dūmah
Tabūk
Fadak
Taymā'
Khaybar
Asad
Tamīm
Kindah
Sulaym
NAJD
'UMĀN
Hudhayl
Makkah
Thaqīf
Ḥanīfah
Al-Ṭā'if
Madhḥij
Al-Rub' al-Khālī
Najrān
Hamdān
Ma'rib
Ṣan'ā'
HADRAMAWT
Petra
Buṣra
Baghdād
Al-'Aqabah
Al-Jawf
Al-Dūmah
Tabūk
Al-Nufūd
Al-'Irāq
Al-Baṣrah
Taymā'
Al-'Ula
Khaybar
Yanbu'
Yathrib
(Al-Madīnah)
Al-Bahrayn
Al-Riyāḍ
Al-Aḥsā'
Dilmun
Jiddah
Sūq 'Ukāẓ
Al-Ṭā'if
Al-Yamāmah
Al-Rub' Al-Khālī
'Umān
Khawlān
Al-Jawf
Ma'rib
Mahrah
Ḥaḍramawt
'Adan
Ḥiṣn al-Ghurāb
The
SOUTHERN AL-JAWF
Shibām
Ghayl
Yathil

ekklēsia, church). The cathedral, of which little is left today but the site, was built from the ruins of ancient Ma'rib.

The Christian Abyssinians were evidently intent upon converting the land and creating a rival to pagan Makkah, the centre of pilgrimage in the north, for pilgrimage was a source of great income to those who dwelt in the city to which the pilgrims travelled or beside the roads leading thither. In the establishment of a southern religious shrine that would draw large crowds, to the detriment of the Ḥijāz sanctuary, the Abyssinian overlords were evidently successful. Indeed the memory of this economic-religious rivalry has been perpetuated in the local tradition in which two Arabian pagans of the Fuqaym tribe, attached to the cult of the Ka'bah, polluted the Ṣan'ā' cathedral on the eve of a festival, causing Abrahah to undertake a disciplinary expedition against Makkah. The incident is said to have taken place in the year of the birth of the Prophet (570 or 571), which year has been dubbed *'ām al-fīl*, the year of the elephant, after the elephant which accompanied Abrahah on his northward march and which greatly impressed the Arabians of al-Ḥijāz, where elephants had never been seen. The Abyssinian army was destroyed by smallpox, "the small pebbles" (*sijjīl*) of the Koran.[1]

The breaking of Ma'rib dam

To this period should also be assigned the memorable event immortalized in Islamic literature as "the bursting of the great dam" of Ma'rib occasioned by the great flood.[2] Al-Iṣfahāni,[3] who devotes the eighth book of his annals (finished A.D. 961) to Ḥimyarite kings, puts the tragic event four hundred years before Islam, but Yāqūt[4] comes nearer to the truth when he assigns it to the reign of the Abyssinians. The ruins of this dam are visible to the present day. A dated South Arabic inscription (date corresponding to A.D. 542–3) by Abrahah dealing with one of the breaks has been discovered and published by Glaser.[5]

This breach in the time of Abrahah was preceded by one in A.D. 450 when the water broke the dam. But the works were then restored. The final catastrophe alluded to in the Koran (34 : 15) must have taken place after 542 and before 570. Connected with one of the early breaches in the dyke was the

[1] 105 : 1-3. See al-Ṭabari, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Būlāq, 1329), vol. xxx, p. 193; ibn-Hishām, *Sīrah*, p. 36.

[2] Koran 34 : 15. [3] *Op. cit.* p. 126. [4] *Buldān*, vol. iv, p. 383.

[5] In *Mitteilungen der vorderasiatischen Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1897), pp. 360-388.

migration of the banu-Ghassān to the Ḥawrān region in Syria, where they became the bulwark of Roman rule, and of the banu-Lakhm to the Ḥīrah region, where a number of South Arabic inscriptions have recently been unearthed. The banu-Ghassān chose the year of the breaking of the dam as the starting-point for an era of their own.[1] Besides the Ghassān and Tanūkh of Syria and al-'Irāq, the banu-Ṭayyi', Kindah and other large and powerful tribes of North and Central Arabia claim South Arabian origin. There are today families in Syria which trace their entry into the country back to this same event.

Later Arab imagination seized upon this spectacular episode of the great flood and bursting of the dam to explain the whole age-long process of decline and decay in South Arabian trade, agriculture,[2] prosperity and national life; a decline due, as we have already learned, to the entry of Roman shipping into the Red Sea, the introduction of the divisive influence of new religions and the subsequent submission to foreign rule. The legend of "the bursting of the dam"—for so it became in later annals—is perhaps to be analysed as a concentrated and dramatic re-telling of a long history of economic and sociological causes that led to the disintegration and final downfall of South Arabian society and as the crystallization of the results of a long period of decay into one single event. And, with what appears to be a subtle appreciation of the intangible quality of the true causes leading up to this tragedy, the chroniclers[3] report that a rat turned over a stone which fifty men could not have budged, and thus brought about the collapse of the entire dam. Muzayqiyā' ('Amr ibn-'Āmir Mā'-al-Samā') was according to tradition the ruler during whose reign this rat did its momentous and epoch-making work.

The national movement to free al-Yaman from Abyssinian rule found its hero, so the tradition goes, in a scion of the old Ḥimyar royal line, Sayf ibn-dhi-Yazan. The successful struggle (*sīrah*) of Sayf in his romance found a place in the Arabic saga and, revised and embellished in Egypt in the course of the fourteenth century, is still recited by Arab story-tellers in the cafés of

Then Persia period

[1] Al-Mas'ūdi, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh*, ed de Goeje (Leyden, 1893), p 202.

[2] For the theory of climatic desiccation there is no sufficient evidence in historic times; Alois Musil, *Northern Ḥiǧāz* (New York, 1928), pp 304-19

[3] Mas'ūdi, *Murūj*, vol. iii, p. 383, Yāqūt, *Buldān*, vol. iv, p. 384, cf. Mas'ūdi, pp 370-71.

Cairo, Beirūt and Baghdād. Sayf, according to tradition, sought, but naturally failed to receive, Constantinople's aid against Abyssinia, for the latter power was Christian and therefore friendly to Byzantium. He was then presented by the Arab king of al-Ḥīrah to the Persian sovereign, Kisra Anūsharwān, at the Sāsānid court in al-Madā'in (Seleucia-Ctesiphon). The destinies of the world were then chiefly in the hands of the Christian Byzantines and Mazdean Persians, Aksūm acting as the unofficial agent of Byzantium. The Christian Arabians were pro-Byzantine and looked to Constantinople for protection and countenance; the Jewish and pagan Arabians were pro-Persian and expected aid from Ctesiphon. In response to Sayf's prayers the Persian emperor in 575 sent eight hundred men under Wahraz (or Wahriz), who routed the Abyssinian garrison in al-Yaman and freed the country from the hated African rule. At first a system of joint administration was instituted with Sayf as titular head. Sayf took up his residence in the ancient castle of Ghumdān, which was evidently in ruins during the Abyssinian rule. But soon al-Yaman was converted into a Persian satrapy and the South Arabians found they had only changed one master for another.

In this tradition we have preserved for us a clear recollection of the rivalry between the two powers on either side of Arabia —Zoroastrian Persia and Christian Abyssinia (backed by Byzantium)—to inherit their neighbour, the defunct South Arabian kingdom. The native Christian Arabian sympathy with Byzantium served as a wedge for Abyssinian intervention, while Jewish and pagan leanings toward Persia gave the latter its opportunity. With the Syro-Arabian desert in the north barring the penetration of world powers South Arabia thus acted as the gateway through which these powers found their way into the peninsula.

In 628, the sixth year after the Hijrah, Bādhān, the fifth Persian satrap of al-Yaman, embraced Islam. With the birth of this new religion the centre of interest in the peninsula shifted to the north. Henceforth the stream of Arabian history flowed in northern channels, with al-Ḥijāz replacing al-Yaman in public consideration.

CHAPTER VI

THE NABATAEAN AND OTHER PETTY KINGDOMS OF NORTH AND CENTRAL ARABIA

1. The Nabataeans

ASIDE from the South Arabian kingdoms a few petty states evolved during the pre-Islamic period in the northern and central parts of the peninsula. These North Arabian states, like those of the south, drew their strength mainly from commerce and were in no sense militaristic either in their inception or in their development. The earliest among them was the Nabataean kingdom.

We read of no Assyrian campaign directed against the Nabataeans, because they were not then on the main route to the west. In the early part of the sixth century B.C. the Nabataeans (al-Anbāṭ, classical Nabataei)[1] came as nomadic tribes from what is today called Transjordan and occupied the land of the Edomites (Idumaeans, the descendants of Esau), from whom they later wrested Petra. The predecessors of the Edomites in this "land of Seir" were the Horites (Hurris).[2] The Nabataeans, from their metropolis Petra, came into possession of the neighbouring territory. Petra, a Greek word meaning rock, is a translation of the Hebrew Sela' mentioned in Isaiah 16 : 1, 42 : 11 and 2 Kings 14 : 7.[3] Al-Raqīm[4] is the Arabic correspondent and the modern name is Wādi Mūsa (the valley of Moses). The ancient city, located on an arid plateau three thousand feet high, presents today the spectacle of a vast glowing necropolis hewn in a rock (Umm al-Biyārah) whose sandstone strata exhibit almost all the colours of the rainbow.

For upwards of four hundred years, beginning toward the end of the fourth century B.C., Petra was a key city on the caravan route between Saba' and the Mediterranean.

Our first detailed account of the early history of the Naba-

[1] Heb Nĕbāyŏth, Assyr Nabaitu, Nabaiu, are apparently not the Nabataeans.
[2] Gen. 14 : 6, 36 : 20
[3] Cf 2 Ch 25 12, Jer. 49 . 16, Ob 3 4.
[4] See Josephus, *Antiquities*, Bk. IV, ch 4, § 7, ch. 7, § 1.

taeans comes from Diodorus Siculus († after 57 B.C.). About 312 B.C. they were strong enough to resist two expeditions sent against them by Antigonus, Alexander's successor as king of Syria, and return victoriously to "the rock".[1] They were then within the Ptolemaic sphere of influence. Later they became the allies of Rome and nominally co-operated in the famous invasion of Arabia in 24 B.C. by Gallus. In the reign of Ḥārithath (al-Ḥārith, Aretas III, *ca.* 87–62 B.C.) the Nabataeans first came into close contact with the Romans. It was then that the royal coins were first struck. Julius Cæsar in 47 B.C. called on Māliku (Mālik, Malchus I) to provide him with cavalry for the Alexandrian war. His successor, 'Obīdath ('Ubaydah, Obodas III, *ca.* 28–9 B.C.), was the ruler under whom the Roman expedition to Arabia took place. Arabia Petraea, whose capital was Petra, reached its height under Ḥārithath IV (9 B.C. to A.D. 40). At the time of Christ the Nabataean kingdom extended north as far as Damascus, which together with Coele-Syria was wrested from Seleucid hands by Ḥārithath III (*ca.* 87 B.C.). It was an ethnarch of Ḥārithath IV who endeavoured to arrest Paul in Damascus.[2] Al-Ḥijr (Madā'in Ṣāliḥ) in northern al-Ḥijāz must have also in the first century of our era been included in the Nabataean kingdom, as the inscriptions there attest. The names of all the Nabataean monarchs from Ḥārithath I (169 B.C.) to the last independent ruler, Rabbīl II (A.D. 70–106), are known to us.[3] In A.D. 105 the Emperor Trajan put an end to the Nabataean autonomy and in the following year their territory became a regular Roman province.

After Diodorus, Josephus († *ca.* A.D. 95) is our chief source of information about the Nabataeans, but Josephus was interested in them only as they crossed wires with the Hebrews. To him Arabia meant the Nabataean state reaching eastward as far as the Euphrates. Malchus or Malichus (Ar. Mālik), mentioned by Josephus[4] as the "king of Arabia" whom Herod and his father had befriended, and the Malchus[5] (Malchus II, A.D. 40–70) who about A.D. 67 sent 1000 horse and 5000 foot to the assistance of Titus in his attack on Jerusalem, were both Nabataeans. In 1 Mac. 5 : 25 and 2 Mac. 5 : 8 the Nabataeans are identified

[1] Diodorus, Bk. XIX, §§ 94-7.
[2] 2 Cor. 11 : 32.
[3] See the list in Cooke, *North-Semitic Inscriptions*, p 216
[4] *Antiquities*, Bk. XIV, ch. 14, § 1; *The Jewish War*, Bk. I, ch. 14, § 1.
[5] *Jewish War*, Bk. III, ch. 4, § 2.

The NORTH ARABIAN KINGDOMS Before Islam
(including the chief later Moslem towns)
English Miles
0
100
200
300
400
AL-'IRĀQ
Tadmur (Palmyra)
Dura-Europos
Damascus
Al-Jābiyah
Boṣra
PALESTINE
GHASSĀNLAND
Mu'tah
Petra
KALB
Al-Nufūd
Dūmat al-Jandal
Al-Madā'in (Ctesiphon)
Kūfah
Al-Ḥīrah
LAKHM
TANŪKH
Baṣrah
Al-Ubullah
BAKR
AL-BAḤRAYN
Jebel Mūsa
Tabūk
Fadak
Taymā'
TAYYI'
GHAṬAFĀN
Khaybar
NAJD
Yathrib (Al-Madīnah)
HAWĀZIN
KINDAH
AL-YAMĀMAH
'UMĀN
AL-ḤIJĀZ
SULAYM
HUDHAYL
Makkah
AL-YAMAN
AL-RAB' AL-KHĀLI
AFRICA
Nile R.
ḤAḌRAMAWT
Ma'rib
San'ā'
Shabwah
ḤIMYAR
Ẓafār
'Adan
Gulf of Aden

with the Arabians. The modern Ḥuwayṭāt Bedouins are regarded as the descendants of the Nabataeans.

Though they spoke Arabic as an everyday language the Nabataeans, in default of an Arabic script at that early date, used the Aramaic characters of their northern neighbours. Diodorus[1] refers to a letter of theirs written to Antigonus "in Syriac characters". Aramaic was used by them as the language of learning and trade, but the mistakes made in the Aramaic inscriptions which have survived, the Arabic proper names and the use of such Arabic expressions as *ghayr* (other than) betray the Arabic vernacular of their authors.

This Nabataean cursive script, taken from the Aramaic, developed in the third century of our era into the script of the North Arabic tongue, the Arabic of the Koran and of the present day. More particularly it was transformed into the round *naskhi* script in distinction to the angular *Kūfi* (Kufic), which owes its name to al-Kūfah—though employed before it was founded—and was used almost exclusively for the Koran and early official documents, monuments and coins. One of the oldest Arabic inscriptions is that of al-Namārah in eastern Ḥawrān, which goes back to A.D. 328 and was set up as an epitaph on the tomb of Imru'-al-Qays, a Lakhmid king of al-Ḥirah. No Nabataean literature has come down to us other than epigraphic.

The Sinaitic origin of the alphabet

The Sinaitic peninsula, close to the Nabataean homeland and the scene of the promulgation of the Ten Commandments, has within the last years yielded probably the oldest alphabetic inscriptions ever found. These inscriptions were discovered at Sarābīt al-Khādim and removed to the Cairo Museum. Many attempts have been made at their decipherment. The writing was done presumably by Sinaitic workers in the turquoise mines and dates from about 1850 B.C.—some eight centuries before the Aḥīrām inscription of Jubayl (ancient Gebal, Gr. Byblos) found by Montet and considered one of the earliest Phoenician inscriptions.

After the development of the Sinaitic alphabet its characters were carried into northern Syria, and there turned into actual cuneiform, as the Ra's al-Shamrah tablets of the late fifteenth century indicate.[2] This newly discovered script is clearly alpha-

[1] Bk. XIX, ch 96.

[2] F.-A Schaeffer in *Syria*, vol. x (1929), pp. 285 97, Charles Virolleaud, *ibid.* pp. 304-10.

betic and Semitic, and although written with a stylus on clay tablets its letters were not borrowed from the earlier Sumero-Akkadian characters. In it the Sinaitic alphabet was conventionalized into wedge-shaped signs.

For a long time it has been recognized by modern scholars that the Phoenicians, who were the first to use an exclusively alphabetic system of writing, must have originally received the basis for their system from Egyptian hieroglyphic sources, but the gap always seemed wide between the two systems. The Sinaitic writing now comes in to bridge that gap. The Sinaitic Semite took, for instance, from the hieroglyphics the sign for ox-head (not caring what "ox-head" was in the Egyptian language) and called this sign by the name of the ox-head in his own language, *aleph*. Then according to the principle of acrophony he used this sign for the sound *a*. The same treatment he accorded to the sign for "house", calling it *beth* and using it for the sound *b* and so on.

This Sinaitic origin of the alphabet explains how it could have been transmitted on the one hand to South Arabia, where it underwent an independent development and was employed by the Minaeans perhaps as early as 1200 B.C., and how on the other hand it was carried northward to the Phoenician coast. With the trade in turquoise, which the Arabs sold to the Phoenicians, went the alphabet, just as it later went with the trade from the Phoenicians to the Greeks to become the mother of all European alphabets.

The inscriptions, discovered in the volcanic Ṣafa region of Ḥawrān, which date from about A.D. 100 or later,[1] as well as the Dedanite and Liḥyānite inscriptions of al-'Ulā in northern al-Ḥijāz (the so-called proto-Arabic) of the seventh to the third century B.C., and the Thamūdic writings of the same region, particularly of al-Ḥijr and Taymā' (of the fifth century B.C. to the fourth Christian century), represent in their epigraphy by-forms of the South Arabic alphabet;[2] but the language of all these inscriptions is North Arabic differing but little from the well-known classical Arabic. The Thamūdic graffiti are a development of the Liḥyānite script, another development of which is seen in the Ṣafa graffiti. The Ṣafa inscriptions are the northernmost South

[1] Cf. F. V. Winnett, *A Study of the Lihyanite and Thamudic Inscriptions* (Toronto, 1937), p. 53.

[2] René Dussaud, *Les Arabes en Syrie avant l'Islam* (Paris, 1907), pp. 57-73; Dussaud and F. Macler, *Voyage archéologique au Ṣafa et dans le Djebel ed-Drûz* (Paris, 1901), pp. 3-14.

Arabian writings found. The South Arabic script has also survived in Ethiopic.

The historical relations of the three northern peoples who used these similar scripts, Ṣafaitic, Liḥyānite and Thamūdic, have not been completely determined. The Liḥyānites, whom Pliny[1] mentions under the name Lechieni, were an ancient people, probably a section of the Thamūd, and their capital Daydān was once a Minaean colony on the great trade route which carried the merchandise of al-Yaman and India to the Mediterranean ports. After the fall of Petra (A.D. 105) the Liḥyānites seem also to have held the important Nabataean centre al-Ḥijr (modern Madā'in Ṣāliḥ), once a Thamūdic town. The Minaean as well as the Nabataean civilization greatly influenced the later Liḥyānite culture. The ruins of al-'Ula, which include tombs decorated with sculptures in high relief, indicate an advanced pre-Islamic civilization of which very little is known.[2]

Petra

Petra reached its greatest wealth and prosperity in the first century of our era under the patronage of the Romans, who treated it as a buffer state against Parthia. On three sides, east, west and south, the city was impregnable. Carved out of the solid rock, it was surrounded on all sides by precipitous and almost impassable cliffs and was entered through a narrow winding defile. The city provided the only spot between the Jordan and Central Arabia where water was not only abundant but invitingly pure. Here the South Arabians obtained on their northward caravan march fresh relays of camels and drivers. Thus the Nabataeans formed an important link in the commercial chain by which South Arabia flourished. The spectacular ruins of Petra still attract many tourists and constitute an important source of income to the modern state of Transjordan.

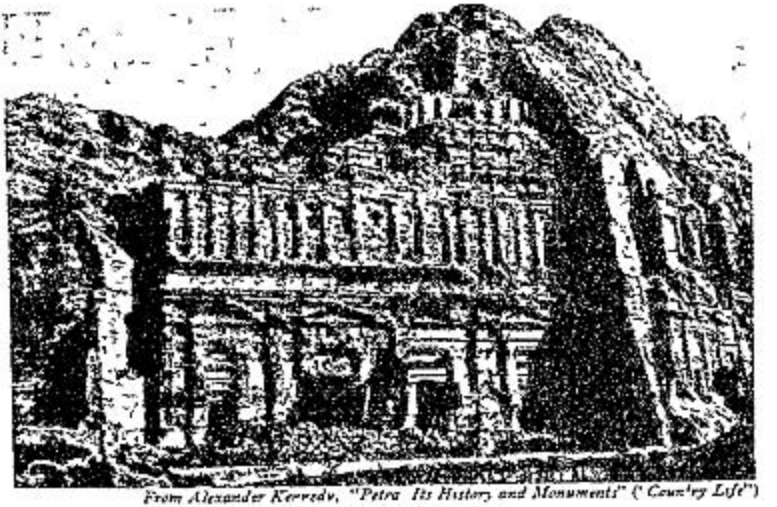
Petra had a kind of Ka'bah with Dūshara (Dusares), worshipped under the form of a black rectangular stone, at the head of the pantheon; Allāt, identified by Herodotus[3] with Aphrodite Urania, was the chief female deity. Dūshara (dhu-Shara, i.e. the lord of Shara) was later associated with the vine, introduced to the land of Nabataeans in the Hellenistic period, and

[1] Bk. VI, ch. 32.

[2] Consult Eduard Glaser, *Skizze der Geschichte und Geographie Arabiens* (Berlin, 1890), vol. ii, pp. 98-127; Jaussen and Savignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie* (Paris, 1909), pp. 250-91.

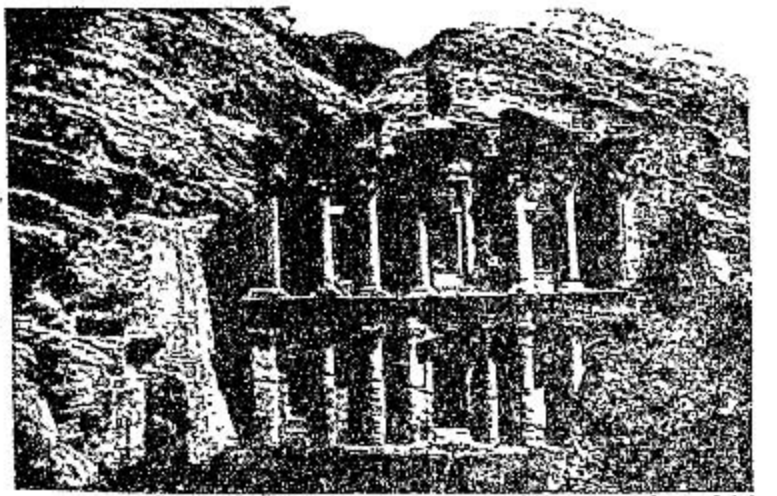
[3] Bk. III, ch. 8.

as the god of wine borrowed some of the traits of Dionysus-Bacchus.



From Alexander Kennedy, "Petra: Its History and Monuments" ("Country Life")

PETRA: THE PALACE



From Alexander Kennedy, "Petra: Its History and Monuments" ("Country Life")

PETRA: THE DAYR

In the first two centuries after Christ, as the sea route to India became more and more familiar to the Roman sailors, as the

caravan route from east to west was gradually diverted to a more northerly region centring at Palmyra, and as the north-to-south trade took a course farther east corresponding to the later pilgrimage route and the present Ḥijāz Railway, Petra lost its advantageous position and the Nabataean state began to decline. After the reduction of the city in A.D. 105 through the cupidity and short-sightedness of Trajan, Arabia Petraea was incorporated (106) into the Roman empire under the name Provincia Arabia, and henceforth the history of Petra remained almost a blank for many centuries.[1]

2 Palmyrena

The new conditions created in Western Asia by the Parthian conquest of Mesopotamia and the new routes which began to be used on a large scale after the first century of our era gave prominence to a city situated in an oasis in the middle of the Syrian desert and whose fame has since become world wide. This is the city of Palmyra (Ar. Tadmur), whose present ruins are among the most magnificent and least-studied remains of antiquity. Located between the two rival empires of Parthia and Rome, Palmyra depended for its security upon the maintenance of a balance between the two and in profiting by its neutrality.[2] Its geographic position, with its plentiful supply of fresh and mineral waters, afforded a rendezvous not only for the eastern and western trade but for the south-to-north commerce starting in South Arabia. The "chief of the caravan" and the "chief of the market" figure in inscriptions as leading citizens.[3] In the course of the second and third centuries of our era this desert metropolis became one of the richest cities of the Near East.

Tadmor (the early Semitic name of Palmyra) must have been a very ancient settlement, for it was cited under the name Tadmar of Amurru[4] in an inscription of Tiglath-Pileser I (*ca.* 1100 B.C.). So impressed by its ruins were the Arab story-tellers that they ascribed its origin to the jinn who, they believed, had built it for King Solomon.

Exactly when the Arabs came into possession of Palmyra local tradition does not seem to remember. The first authentic mention of the town is when Mark Antony in 42–41 B.C. made a vain

[1] A recently identified Nabataean site, 'RM, twenty-five miles east of al-'Aqabah, is koranic Iram (sūr. 89 : 6).

[2] Pliny, Bk. V, ch. 21. [3] Cooke, pp. 274, 279.

[4] Luckenbill, vol. i, §§ 287, 308. The Hebrew chronicler (2 Ch. 8 : 4) and the Greek translator of 1 K. 9 : 18 confused it with Tamar in Idumaea built by Solomon. Cf. Ezek. 47 : 19, 48 : 28.

attempt to possess himself of its riches. Its earliest native inscription goes back to 9 B.C., at which time Palmyra was already an important trade centre between the Roman and Parthian states.

The city must have come within the Roman political orbit early in the imperial period, for we find decrees relative to its customs duties issued in A.D. 17. In the time of Hadrian (A.D. 117–38) Palmyra and its dependent cities became vassals of Rome. As a consequence of Hadrian's visit in 130, the city received the name Hadriana Palmyra. Septimius Severus (A.D. 193–211) transformed Palmyra and its towns into provincial cities of the empire. At the beginning of the third century Palmyra assumed the status of a colony, but even then it must have enjoyed administrative independence with only a nominal recognition of Roman suzerainty. Palmyrenes then began to add to their names Roman ones. The Romans recognized the city's military importance, for their road from Damascus to the Euphrates passed through it.

Palmyra reached its period of splendour between A.D. 130 and 270. To this period most of its inscribed monuments belong. Its international trade extended as far east as China, and as a city created by the caravan trade it became the true heir of Petra.

Odaynath and Zenobia

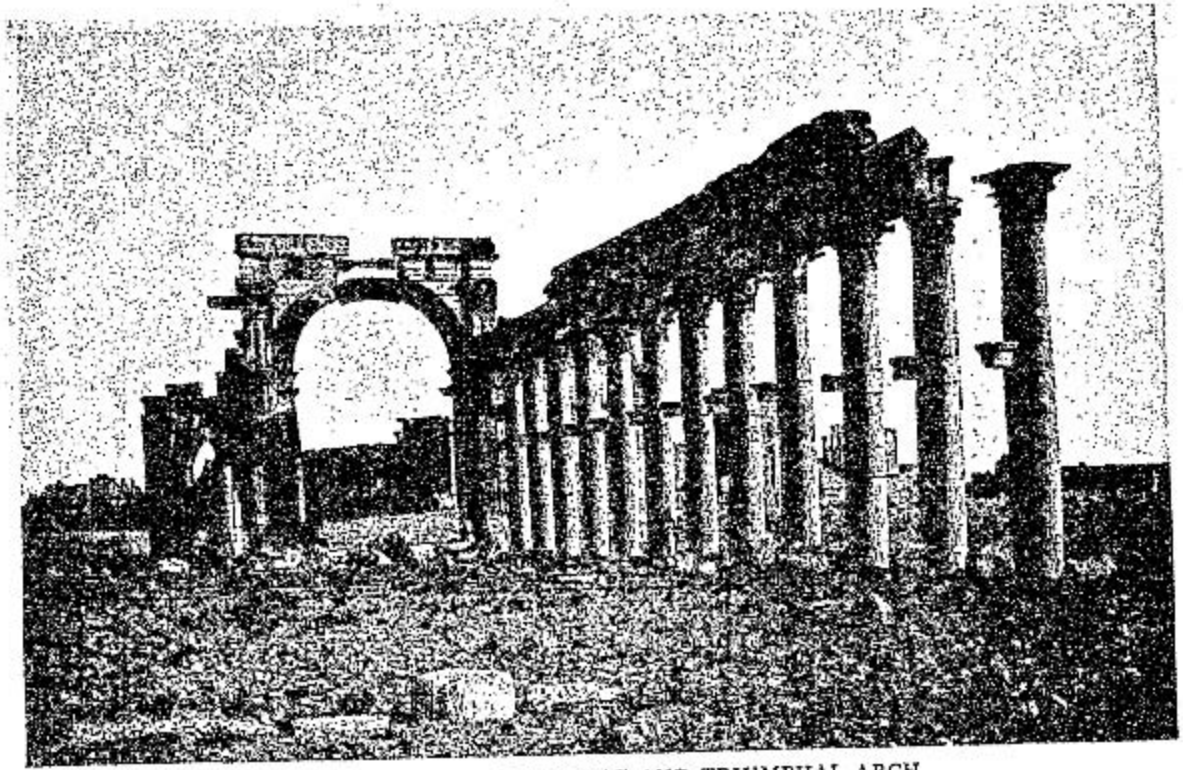
The Palmyrenes did not distinguish themselves as warriors until their chieftain Odaynath (Odenathus, Ar. Udhaynah) drove out of Syria Shāpūr I, who in A.D. 260 had captured the Emperor Valerian and conquered a large portion of Syria. Odaynath pursued Shāpūr to the very walls of his capital, Ctesiphon (al-Madā'in). In the protracted struggle between the Romans and the Sāsānids, who succeeded (226) the Parthians, the Palmyrene chief sided with the former and was appointed in 262 *dux Orientis*, vice-emperor over the Orient. The Emperor Gallienus bestowed on him the honorific title of Imperator and acknowledged him master of the Roman legions in the East. This meant that over Asia Minor and Egypt the supreme authority was nominally in his hand; over Syria, North Arabia and possibly Armenia it was virtually so. Thus did Palmyra become mistress of Western Asia. Four years later (266–7) Odaynath and his eldest son were treacherously assassinated at Ḥimṣ (Emesa), possibly at the instigation of Rome, which had suspected him of disloyalty.

Odaynath's beautiful and ambitious wife Zenobia (Aramaic

Bath-Zabbay, Ar. al-Zabbā', also Zaynab) proved a worthy successor. Ruling on behalf of her young son Wahb-Allāth (the gift of al-Lāt, Greek Athenodorus) she arrogated to herself the title of Queen of the East and for a time defied the Roman empire. With masculine energy she pushed forward the frontiers of her kingdom so as to include Egypt and a large part of Asia Minor, where the Roman garrisons in 270 were thrust back as far as Ankara (Ancyra). Even in Chalcedon opposite Byzantium a military attempt was made to establish her rule. Her victorious troops in the same year occupied Alexandria, the second city of the empire, and her minor son, who was then proclaimed King of Egypt, issued coins from which the head of Aurelian was omitted. Her success on the battlefield was due in the main to her two Palmyrene generals, Zabbay and Zabda.

Aurelian at last bestirred himself. In a battle at Antioch followed by another near Ḥims he defeated Zabda, and in the spring of 272 he entered Palmyra. The proud Arab queen fled in despair on a swift dromedary into the desert, but was finally taken captive and led in golden chains before the chariot of the victor to grace his triumphal entry into Rome. En route to his capital Aurelian was informed of an uprising in Palmyra and thereupon speedily returned to the city, completely destroyed its walls and dissolved its commonwealth. The ornaments of the glorious Temple of the Sun (Bel) he transferred to the new temple he erected in Rome to the sun-god of the East in memory of his notable victory. The city was left in ruins, in practically the same state as at present. Thus did the brilliant and meteoric glory of Palmyra come to an end.

The Palmyrene civilization was an interesting blend of Greek, Syrian and Parthian (Iranian) elements. It is significant not only in itself but, as in the case of the Nabataean civilization which we have already studied, as an illustration of the cultural heights which the Arabians of the desert are capable of attaining when the proper opportunities present themselves. That the Palmyrenes were of Arabian stock is evidenced from the proper names and the frequent occurrence of Arabic words in their Aramaic inscriptions. The language they spoke was a dialect of Western Aramaic not unlike the Nabataean and Egyptian Aramaic. Their religion had the prominent solar features that characterized the religion of North Arabians. Bel, of Babylonian



PALMYRA: THE COLONNADE AND TRIUMPHAL ARCH

origin, stood at the head of the pantheon; Baal Shamin (the lord of the heavens) figured in votive inscriptions and no less than twenty other names of deities occur in Palmyrene.

With the fall of the ephemeral kingdom of Palmyrena land traffic sought and found other paths. Buṣra (Bostra) in Ḥawrān and other Ghassānid towns became beneficiaries of the desert city as that city had itself once been the beneficiary of Petra.

3 The Ghassānids

The Ghassānids claim descent from an ancient South Arabian tribe, headed formerly by 'Amr Muzayqiyā' ibn-'Āmir Mā'-al-Samā', which is supposed to have fled to Ḥawrān[1] and al-Balqā' from al-Yaman towards the end of the third Christian century at the destruction of the Ma'rib dam. Jafnah, a son of 'Amr, is regarded as the founder of the dynasty, for which abu-al-Fidā'[2] claims thirty-one sovereigns, Ḥamzah al-Iṣfahāni[3] thirty-two, and al-Mas'ūdi[4] and ibn-Qutaybah[5] only eleven. These figures show how obscure Jafnid history has remained to Arab chroniclers.

This Yamani tribe displaced the Salīḥ, the first Arabians to found a kingdom in Syria, and established itself in the region south-east of Damascus at the northern end of the great transport route that bound Ma'rib with Damascus. In course of time the banu-Ghassān were Christianized and Syrianized, adopting the Aramaic language of Syria without, however, abandoning their native Arabic tongue. Like other Arabian tribes in the Fertile Crescent they thus became bilingual. About the end of the fifth century they were brought within the sphere of Byzantine political influence and used as a buffer state to stay the overflow of Bedouin hordes, serving a purpose not unlike that of Transjordan under the British today. Facing the Byzantine empire as they did, the Ghassānids adopted a form of Christianity which, though of the local Monophysite variety, still coincided with their political interests. Their capital was at first a movable camp; later it may have become fixed at al-Jābiyah in the Jawlān (Gaulanitis) and for some time was located at Jilliq.[6]

The Syro-Arab kingdom at its height

The Ghassānid kingdom, like its rival and relative at al-

[1] Assyrian Ḫaurānu (cf. Luckenbill, vol. i, §§ 672, 821), biblical Bashan, classical Auranitis.
[2] *Ta'rīkh* (Constantinople, 1286), vol. i, pp. 76-7.
[3] *Op. cit.* pp 115-22.
[4] *Murūj*, vol iii, pp. 217-21.
[5] *Al-Ma'ārif*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Gottingen, 1850), pp 314-16.
[6] Consult Leone Caetani, *Annali dell'Islām* (Milan, 1910), vol. iii, p. 928.

Ḥīrah, the kingdom of the Lakhmids, attained its greatest importance during the sixth century after Christ. In this century al-Ḥārith II ibn-Jabalah of Ghassān (*ca.* 529–69) and al-Mundhir III ibn-Mā'-al-Samā' of al-Ḥīrah (Alamundarus of Byzantine histories, † 554) dominate Arab history. This al-Ḥārith (nicknamed al-A'raj, the lame, by Arab chroniclers) is the first authentic name and by far the greatest in Jafnid annals. His history can be checked with the Greek sources.[1] As a reward for defeating his formidable Lakhmid rival, al-Mundhir III, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian appointed him (529) lord over all the Arab tribes of Syria and created him patricius and phylarch —the highest rank next to that of the emperor himself. In Arabic the title was rendered simply *malik*, king.

The greater part of al-Ḥārith's long reign was occupied with wars in the service of the Byzantine interests. About 544, in a battle with al-Mundhir III, the latter captured a son of al-Ḥārith and offered him as a sacrifice to al-'Uzza, the counterpart of the Greek Aphrodite.[2] But ten years later al-Ḥārith took his revenge and slew his Lakhmid enemy in a battle in the district of Qinnasrīn. This battle is perhaps the "Day of Ḥalīmah" of Arabic tradition, Ḥalīmah being the daughter of al-Ḥārith who, before the battle, perfumed with her own hands the hundred Ghassānid champions ready for death and clad them in shrouds of white linen in addition to coats of mail.[3]

In 563 al-Ḥārith paid a visit to the court of Justinian I at Constantinople.[4] The appearance of this Bedouin phylarch left a deep impression on the emperor's entourage. During al-Ḥārith's stay in Constantinople he secured the appointment of the Monophysite bishop Jacob Baradaeus (Ya'qūb al-Barda'i) of Edessa as prelate of the Syrian Arabs. So zealous was this Jacob in the propagation of the faith that the Syrian Monophysite church became known after him as Jacobite.

Al-Ḥārith's successor was his son al-Mundhir, also Alamundarus in Byzantine chronicles. Like his father, al-Mundhir proved an ardent protector of Monophysitism,[5] and this temporarily

Al-Mundhir, son of al-Ḥārith

[1] Procopius, Bk. I, ch. 17, §§ 47-8, Joannes Malalas, *Chronographia*, ed. L. Dindorf (Bonn, 1831), pp. 435, 461 *seq.*

[2] Procopius, Bk. II, ch. 28, § 13.

[3] Ibn-Qutaybah, pp. 314-15; cf. abu-al-Fidā', vol. i, p. 84.

[4] Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883), p. 240.

[5] John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. William Cureton (Oxford, 1853), pp. 251-2; tr. R. Payne Smith (Oxford, 1860), pp. 284-5.

alienated the sympathy of Byzantium and resulted in an open rebellion on the part of the Ghassānids. In 580 he visited Constantinople with his two sons and was received with great honour by Tiberius II, who replaced the precious diadem on his head with a still more precious crown. In the same year he successfully raided and burned al-Ḥīrah,[1] the capital of his Lakhmid foes. But this was not enough to remove the suspicion of treachery to the imperial cause with which his father before him had been charged. At the dedication of a church in Hūwārīn, between Damascus and Palmyra, he was apprehended and taken prisoner to Constantinople, later to be incarcerated in Sicily. Likewise his son and successor, al-Nu'mān, who ventured to raid and devastate Byzantine territory, was carried away to Constantinople.

Fall of the banu-Ghassān

After al-Mundhir and al-Nu'mān anarchy seems to have prevailed in Ghassānland. The various tribes in the Syrian desert chose their own chieftains. The capture of Jerusalem and Damascus (613-14) by the Sāsānid Khusraw Parwīz dealt the last blow to the Jafnid dynasty. Whether Heraclius on his reconquest of Syria in 629 restored the Syro-Arab phylarchate is uncertain. Arab chroniclers make Jabalah ibn-al-Ayham the last king of the house of Ghassān. On the memorable battlefield of Yarmūk (636) this monarch fought on the Byzantine side against the Arabians, but later adopted Islam. As he was circumambulating the Ka'bah in the course of his first pilgrimage, so the story goes, a Bedouin stepped on his cloak and the ex-king slapped him on the face. The Caliph 'Umar decreed that Jabalah should either submit to a similar blow from the hand of the Bedouin or pay a fine, upon which Jabalah renounced Islam and retired to Constantinople.[2]

The degree of culture attained by the Ghassānids, neighbours of the Byzantines, was undoubtedly higher than that to which their rivals on the Persian borderland, the Lakhmids, ever attained. Under their régime and during the earlier Roman period a peculiar civilization seems to have developed along the entire eastern fringe of Syria from a mixture of Arabic, Syrian and Greek elements. Houses of basalt, palaces, triumphal arches, public baths, aqueducts, theatres and churches stood where today there is nothing but utter desolation. The eastern and southern

[1] John of Ephesus, p. 415 (text), = p. 385 (tr.).
[2] Ibn-'Abd-Rabbihi, *'Iqd*, vol. i, pp 140-41.

slopes of Ḥawrān have preserved the ruins of almost three hundred towns and villages where only a few exist at the present day.

A number of the pre-Islamic poets of Arabia found in the Ghassānid phylarchs munificent patrons. Labīd, the youngest of the seven poets who composed the famous "Mu'allaqāt", fought on the Ghassānid side in the battle of Ḥalīmah. When al-Nābighah al-Dhubyāni fell out with the Lakhmid king he found in the court of the sons of al-Hārith a haven of refuge. The Madīnese poet Ḥassān ibn-Thābit (b. *ca.* 563), who claimed kinship with the banu-Ghassān, visited their court in his youth before he became the poet laureate of Muḥammad and made a number of references to it in his *dīwān* (anthology). In an apocryphal passage ascribed to him[1] we have a glowing account of the luxury and magnificence of Jabalah's court with its Makkan and Babylonian and Greek singers and musicians of both sexes and its free use of wine.[2]

4. The Lakhmi

From time immemorial streams of Arabian wanderers have *been wont to trickle along the eastern coast of their peninsula* to the Tigro-Euphrates valley and settle therein. About the beginning of the third century of our era a number of such tribes, calling themselves Tanūkh and said to have been of Yamanite origin, found an abode in the fertile region west of the Euphrates. Their advent may have coincided with the disturbances consequent to the fall of the Arsacid Parthian and the establishment of the Sāsānid dynasty (A.D. 226).

The Tanūkh lived first in tents. Their temporary camp developed in course of time into permanent al-Ḥīrah (from Syriac *ḥerta*, camp), which lay about three miles south of al-Kūfah, not far from ancient Babylon. This al-Ḥīrah became the capital of Persian Arabia.

The native population was Christian belonging to the East Syrian (later Nestorian) Church and was referred to by Arab authors as *'ibād*, i.e. worshippers (of Christ).[3] Some of the Tanūkh were subsequently Christianized and domiciled in northern Syria. The Tanūkhs who later came to southern Lebanon and professed the secret Druze religion trace their origin to the Lakhmid kings of al-Ḥīrah.[4]

[1] Abu-al-Faraj al-Iṣbahāni, *al-Aghāni* (Būlāq, 1284-5), vol. xvi, p. 15.

[2] Among the Christian families living today in southern Lebanon are some which trace their descent to Ghassānid origin.

[3] Cf. Tabari, vol. i, p 770.

[4] Cf. Hitti, *The Origins of the Druze People and Religion* (New York, 1928, reprint, 1966), p 21

Tradition names Mālik ibn-Fahm al-Azdī[1] as the first chieftain of this Arab settlement in al-'Irāq and makes his son Jadhīmah al-Abrash a vassal of Ardashīr. But the real founder of the Lakhmid kingdom was 'Amr ibn-'Adī ibn-Nasr ibn-Rabī'ah ibn-Lakhm, a son of Jadhīmah's sister, who had married a servant of Jadhīmah. 'Amr established himself in al-Ḥīrah, which he made his capital.

With the establishment of the Naṣrid or Lakhmid dynasty in the latter part of the third century of our era we begin to tread on firm historical ground. The names of some twenty Lakhmid kings have been handed down to us, but the first clearly delineated personage is Imru'-al-Qays I († A.D. 328), whose epitaph is the oldest proto-Arabic inscription yet discovered. The script is a variation of the Nabataean character and shows many signs of transition towards the later North Arabic script, particularly in the matter of joining the letters.[2]

A descendant of Imru'-al-Qays was al-Nu'mān I al-A'war (the one-eyed, *ca.* 400–418), celebrated in poetry and legend. He is credited with having built al-Khawarnaq, a famous castle near al-Ḥīrah, as a residence for Bahrām Gōr, the son of Yazdagird I (399–420), who was anxious to have his son brought up in the salubrious air of the desert. Al-Khawarnaq was declared a miracle of art and was ascribed by later historians to a Byzantine architect who suffered the fate common to many legendary architects in being put to death on the completion of his work —a favourite motif in such stories—so that the construction might never be duplicated. Al-Nu'mān remained a pagan throughout his life and at one time persecuted his own Christian subjects and prevented the Arabs from visiting St. Simeon Stylites, though in the latter part of his life he felt more kindly disposed towards Christianity. Simeon was himself an Arab and the crowds of the desert flocked to see the wonderful sight of this ascetic living on a pillar-top. The erection of al-Sadīr, a castle associated in poetry with al-Khawarnaq and lying "in the midst of the desert between al-Ḥīrah and Syria",[3] is also attributed to al-Nu'mān. Al-Sadīr and other Lakhmid *ḥīrahs* are today but names. None are identified except al-Khawarnaq.

Al-Ḥīrah at the height of its power

Under al-Nu'mān's son and successor, al-Mundhir I (*ca.*

[1] The Azd and the Tanūkh were confederated into one tribe in al-'Irāq.

[2] Dussaud, *Les Arabes en Syrie*, pp. 34-5.

[3] Yāqūt, vol. ii, p. 375.

A.D. 418–62), al-Ḥīrah began to play its important rôle in the events of the day. So great was al-Mundhir's influence that he could force the Persian priests to crown Bahrām, once the protégé of his father, over the claims of a powerful pretender to the throne. In 421 he fought beside his Sāsānid suzerain against the Byzantines.

In the first half of the sixth century al-Ḥīrah was ruled by another Mundhir, al-Mundhir III (*ca.* 505–54), whom the Arabs call ibn-Mā'-al-Samā', Mā'-al-Samā' (the water of heaven) being a sobriquet of his mother Māriyah or Māwīyah. His was the most illustrious rule in Lakhmid annals. He proved a thorn in the side of Roman Syria. His raids devastated the land as far as Antioch until he found more than a match in the Ghassānid al-Ḥārith.[1] About this al-Mundhir, *al-Aghānī*[2] relates the curious story of the two boon-companions whom he is said to have buried alive in the course of a carousal.

His son and successor, 'Amr, surnamed ibn-Hind (A.D. 554–69), though tyrannical was a munificent patron of poets. The greatest bards of Arabia then living, such as Ṭarafah ibn-al-'Abd, al-Ḥārith ibn-Ḥillizah and 'Amr ibn-Kulthūm (three of the seven reputed authors of "Golden Odes", *Mu'allaqāt*), flocked to his court. 'Amr, like other Lakhmid and Jafnid monarchs, recognized in the contemporary poets leaders of public opinion and potential publicity agents. Hence the lavish bounties which he and other patrons, with the hope of seeing their influence extended among the Bedouins, bestowed on the poets who frequented their courts. 'Amr met his death at the hand of his protégé ibn-Kulthūm, who thus avenged an insult to his mother by the king.

The royal family Christianized

Hind, the mother of 'Amr, was a Christian princess of Ghassān; others say of Kindah. She founded in the capital a convent which survived into the second century of Islam;[3] Yāqūt[4] has preserved for us its dedicatory inscription. In this inscription Hind calls herself "the maid of Christ and the mother of His slave ['Amr] and the daughter of His slaves". That there were Christians among the populace professing the East Syrian creed is indicated by the many references to the bishops of al-Ḥīrah, one of whom lived as early as A.D. 410.

[1] Procopius, Bk. I, ch. 17, §§ 45-8; Malalas, pp. 434-5, 445, 460 *seq.*
[2] Vol. xix, pp. 86-8. Cf. ibn-Qutaybah, p. 319; Iṣfahānī, *Ta'rīkh*, p. 111.
[3] Ṭabarī, vol. ii, pp. 1882, 1903.
[4] Vol. ii. p. 709.

The Lakhmid dynasty came to an end with al-Nu'mān III abu-Qābūs (*ca.* 580–602), son of al-Mundhir IV. He was a patron of the famous poet al-Nābighah al-Dhubyāni before the latter was driven from al-Ḥīrah as a result of a false accusation. Having been brought up in a Christian home, al-Nu'mān was converted to Christianity and became the first and only Christian Lakhmid king. That no member of the Lakhmid house saw fit before this time to adopt Christianity, the faith of the Byzantines, may be explained on the ground that the Ḥīrah kings found it to their political interest to remain friendly with Persia. Al-Nu'mān was baptized into the East Syrian (Nestorian) communion, the one least objectionable to Persia.

The Arab civilization of al-Ḥīrah, which faced Persia, did not attain the high degree reached by the Arab civilizations of Petra, Palmyra and Ghassānland under Syro-Byzantine influence. The Arabs of al-Ḥīrah spoke Arabic as a daily language but used Syriac in writing, just as the Nabataeans and Palmyrenes spoke Arabic and wrote in Aramaic. The Christians in the lower valley of the Euphrates acted as the teachers of the heathen Arabs in reading, writing and religion. From al-Ḥīrah the beneficent influences spread into Arabia proper. There are those who hold that it was the Syrian church of al-Ḥīrah which was responsible for the introduction of Christianity into Najrān. According to traditions preserved in ibn-Rustah[1] it was from al-Ḥīrah that the Quraysh acquired the art of writing and the system of false belief.[2] From this it is clear that Persian cultural influences likewise found their way into the peninsula through the Lakhmid kingdom.

After al-Nu'mān Iyās ibn-Qabīsah of the Ṭayyi' ruled (602–11), but beside him stood a Persian resident in control of the government. The Persian kings thus incautiously abolished the system of Arab vassalage and appointed Persian governors to whom the Arab chieftains were subordinate. Such was still the arrangement in 633 when Khālid ibn-al-Walīd at the head of the Moslem army received the submission of al-Ḥīrah.[3]

5 Kindah

As the Ghassānids stood in relation to the Byzantines and the Lakhmids to the Persians so did the Kindite kings of Central

[1] *Al-A'lāq al-Nafīsah*, ed. de Goeje (Leyden, 1892), p. 192, ll. 2-3, and p. 217, ll. 9-10. Cf. ibn-Qutaybah, pp. 273-4.

[2] Ar. *zandaqah*, from Pers. *zandīk* = Magian, fire-worshipper; Manichaean, heretic.

[3] Today where al-Ḥīrah once stood lie a few low mounds.

Arabia stand in relation to the last Tubba's of al-Yaman. Within the peninsula they were the only rulers to receive the title of *malik* (king), usually reserved by the Arabians for foreign potentates.

Though of South Arabian origin and, at the time preceding the rise of Islam, settled in the region to the west of Ḥadramawt, the powerful Kindah tribe is not mentioned in early South Arabian inscriptions; the first mention in history is in the fourth century of the Christian era. The reputed founder of the dynasty, Ḥujr, surnamed Ākil al-Murār, was according to tradition a stepbrother of the Ḥimyarite Ḥassān ibn-Tubba' and was appointed by the latter about A.D. 480 ruler of certain tribes whom the Tubba' had conquered in Central Arabia.[1] In this position Ḥujr was succeeded by his son 'Amr. 'Amr's son al-Ḥārith, the most valiant king of Kindah, was the one who for a short time after the death of the Persian Emperor Qubādh, rendered himself master of al-Ḥīrah, only to lose it (about 529) to the Lakhmid al-Mundhir III. Al-Mundhir put al-Ḥārith to death in 529 together with about fifty other members of the royal family, a fatal blow to the power of Kindah. Al-Ḥārith may have resided at al-Anbār, a city on the Euphrates about forty miles north-west of Baghdād.

The discord among the sons of al-Ḥārith, each heading a tribe, led to the dissolution of the confederacy and the final downfall of the ephemeral kingdom. The remnant of Kindah were forced back to their settlements in Ḥadramawt. This brought to an end one of the two rivals of al-Ḥīrah in the three-cornered fight for supremacy among the North Arabians, the other rival being the Ghassānids. The celebrated poet Imru'-al-Qays, composer of one of the greatest of the Golden Odes,[2] was a descendant of the royal Kindah line and made many vain attempts to regain a part of his heritage. His poems are bitter with rancour against the Lakhmids. In quest of aid he went as far as Constantinople, hoping to win the sympathy of Justinian, the enemy of al-Ḥīrah. On his way back, so the tradition goes, he was poisoned (about 540) at Ankara by an emissary of the emperor.[3]

[1] Iṣfahānī, *Ta'rīkh*, p. 140; ibn-Qutaybah, p. 308; Gunnar Olinder, *The Kings of Kinda* (Lund, 1927), pp. 38-9.

[2] See below, p. 94.

[3] Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma (Leyden, 1883), vol. i, p. 251; Olinder, pp. 117-18.

In early Islam a number of Kindites came into prominence. Chief among these was al-Ash'ath ibn-Qays, the Ḥaḍramawt chieftain who distinguished himself in the conquest of Syria and al-'Irāq and was rewarded by the governship of a Persian province. The descendants of al-Ash'ath held important posts under the Umayyad caliphs in Syria. Al-Muqanna',[1] the veiled prophet of Khurāsān who posed as an incarnation of the deity and for years defied the forces of the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Mahdi, was probably a Persian, not a Kindite. The earliest philosopher of Arabian blood was Ya'qūb ibn-Isḥāq al-Kindi,[2] whose millennium Baghdād celebrated in 1962

Kindah's rise is interesting not only in itself but as the first attempt in inner Arabia to unite a number of tribes around the central authority of one common chief As such the experiment established a precedent for al-Ḥijāz and Muhammad

[1] A hero of Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* See below, p 370

British Museum

NABATAEAN BRONZE COIN

Obv. Trajan's head; rev. city goddess of Petra, to be identified with Allāt-Manāṭu

CHAPTER VII

AL-ḤIJĀZ ON THE EVE OF THE RISE OF ISLAM

IN its broad outline Arabian history comprises three main eras:

1. The Sabaeo-Himyarite period, ending at the beginning of the sixth century after Christ;
2. The Jāhilīyah period, which in a sense extends from "the creation of Adam" down to the mission of Muḥammad, but more particularly, as used here, covers the century immediately preceding the rise of Islam;
3. The Islamic period, extending to the present day.

The term *jāhilīyah*, usually rendered "time of ignorance" or "barbarism", in reality means the period in which Arabia had no dispensation, no inspired prophet, no revealed book; for ignorance and barbarism can hardly be applied to such a cultured and lettered society as that developed by the South Arabians. The word occurs several times in the Koran (3 : 148, 5 : 55, 33 : 33, 48 : 26). In his anxiety to wean his people from pre-Islamic religious ideas, particularly from idolatry, the intensely monotheistic Muḥammad declared that the new religion was to obliterate all that had gone before it. This was later interpreted as constituting a ban on all pre-Islamic ideas and ideals. But ideas are hard to kill, and no one person's veto is strong enough to cancel the past. The Jāhilīyah days

Unlike the South Arabians the vast majority of the population of North Arabia, including al-Ḥijāz and Najd, is nomadic. The history of the Bedouins is in the main a record of guerilla wars called *ayyām al-ʿArab* (the days of the Arabians), in which there was a great deal of raiding and plundering but little bloodshed. The sedentary population of al-Ḥijāz and Najd developed no ancient culture of its own. In this they were unlike their neighbours and kindred, the Nabataeans, Palmyrenes, Ghassānids and Lakhmids. The Nabataeans, and to a larger extent the

Palmyrenes, were partially Aramaicized; the Ghassānids and Lakhmids were South Arabian colonists amidst Syro-Byzantine and Syro-Persian cultures. Our study of the Jāhilīyah period therefore limits itself to a survey of the battles between the northern Bedouin tribes in the century preceding the Hijrah and to an account of the outside cultural influences operating among the settled inhabitants of al-Ḥijāz preparatory to the rise of Islam.

The light of authentic record illumines but faintly the Jāhilīyah age. Our sources for this period, in which the North Arabians had no system of writing, are limited to traditions, legends, proverbs, and above all to poems, none of which, however, were committed to writing before the second and third centuries after the Hijrah, two to four hundred years after the events which they were supposed to commemorate. Though traditional and legendary this data is none the less valuable; for what a people believe, even if untrue, has the same influence over their lives as if it were true. The North Arabians developed no system of writing until almost the time of Muhammad. The only three pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions thus far found (besides the proto-Arabic inscription of Imru'-al-Qays in al-Namārah, 328) are those of Zabad south-east of Aleppo (512), of Ḥarrān in al-Laja (568) and umm-al-Jimāl (same century).

The term Arabians, as already explained, includes in its broad sense all the inhabitants of the peninsula. In its narrow sense it implies the North Arabians, who did not figure in international affairs until the unfolding of the Islamic power. Likewise the term Arabic signifies the Ḥimyarite-Sabaean as well as the northern dialect of al-Ḥijāz, but since the latter became the sacred language of Islam and utterly superseded the southern dialects of al-Yaman it became the Arabic par excellence. Therefore, when we speak after this of the Arabians and of Arabic we have particularly in mind the North Arabian people and the language of the Koran.

The "days of the Arabians"

The Ayyām al-'Arab were intertribal hostilities generally arising from disputes over cattle, pasture-lands or springs. They afforded ample opportunity for plundering and raiding, for the manifestation of single-handed deeds of heroism by the champions of the contending tribes and for the exchange of vitriolic satires on the part of the poets, the spokesmen of the warring parties. Though always ready for a fight the Bedouin was not

necessarily eager to be killed. His encounters, therefore, were not as sanguinary as their accounts would lead one to believe. Nevertheless these Ayyām provided a safety valve for a possible overpopulation in Bedouin land, whose inhabitants were normally in a condition of semi-starvation and to whom the fighting mood was a chronic state of mind. Through them vendetta became one of the strongest religio-social institutions in Bedouin life.

The course of events on each of these "days", as reported to us, follows somewhat the same pattern. At first only a few men come to blows with one another in consequence of some border dispute or personal insult. The quarrel of the few then becomes the business of the whole. Peace is finally restored by the intervention of some neutral party. The tribe with the fewer casualties pays its adversary blood money for the surplus of dead. Popular memory keeps the recollection of the heroes alive for centuries to come.

Such was the case of the Day of Bu'āth,[1] fought between the two related tribes of al-Madīnah, the Aws and the Khazraj, some years before the migration of the Prophet and his followers to that town. The Days of al-Fijār (transgression), so called because they fell in the holy months during which fighting was prohibited, were fought between the Prophet's family, the Quraysh, and their allies the Kinānah on one side, and the Hawāzin on the other. Muḥammad as a young man is said to have participated in one of the four combats.[2]

One of the earliest and most famous of these Bedouin wars was the Ḥarb al-Basūs, fought toward the end of the fifth century of our era between the banu-Bakr[3] and their kinsmen the banu-Taghlib in north-eastern Arabia. Both tribes were Christianized and considered themselves descendants of Wā'il. The conflict arose over nothing more than a she-camel, the property of an old woman of Bakr named Basūs, which had been wounded by a Taghlib chief.[4] According to the legendary history of the Ayyām this war was carried on for forty years with reciprocal raiding and plundering, while its flames were fanned by poetical

The Basūs War

[1] *Aghāni*, vol. ii, p. 162.
[2] Ibn-Hishām, pp. 117-19; quoted by Yāqūt, vol. iii, p. 579.
[3] The city of Diyār-Bakr (Diarbekr) still bears the name of this tribe.
[4] *Aghāni*, vol. iv, pp. 140-52; abu-Tammām, *Ḥamāsah*, pp. 420-23; *'Iqd*, vol. iii, p. 95.

exhortations. The fratricidal struggle was brought to an end about 525 through the intercession of al-Mundhir III of al-Ḥīrah, but only after the exhaustion of both sides. The names of the leaders on the Taghlib side, Kulayb ibn-Rabī'ah and his brother, the hero-poet Muhalhil († *ca.* A.D. 531), as well as the name of Jassās ibn-Murrah on the Bakr side, are still household words in all Arabic-speaking lands. This Muhalhil became the Zīr of the still popular romance *Qiṣṣat al-Zīr*.

The Day of Dāḥis

Hardly less famous is the Day of Dāhis and al-Ghabrā', the best known event of the pagan period. This war was fought between the 'Abs and its sister tribe Dhubyān in Central Arabia. Ghaṭafān was the traditional ancestor of both. The occasion was the unfair conduct of the Dhubyānites in a race between a horse called Dāhis belonging to the chieftain of 'Abs and a mare named al-Ghabrā' owned by the sheikh of Dhubyān. The struggle broke out in the second half of the sixth century, not long after the conclusion of the Basūs peace, and persisted at intervals for several decades into Islamic times.[1] It was in this war that 'Antarah (or 'Antar) ibn-Shaddād al-'Absi (*ca.* A.D. 525–615), the Achilles of the Arabian heroic age, distinguished himself as a poet and warrior.

North Arabic in its influence as a language

No people in the world, perhaps, manifest such enthusiastic admiration for literary expression and are so moved by the word, spoken or written, as the Arabs. Hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of its users such irresistible influence as Arabic. Modern audiences in Baghdād, Damascus and Cairo can be stirred to the highest degree by the recital of poems, only vaguely comprehended, and by the delivery of orations in the classical tongue, though it be only partially understood. The rhythm, the rhyme, the music, produce on them the effect of what they call "lawful magic" (*siḥr ḥalāl*).

Typical Semites, the Arabians created or developed no great art of their own. Their artistic nature found expression through one medium: speech. If the Greek gloried primarily in his statues and architecture, the Arabian found in his ode (*qaṣīdah*) and the Hebrew in his psalm, a finer mode of self-expression. "The beauty of man", declares an Arabic adage, "lies in the eloquence of his tongue." "Wisdom", in a late saying, "has alighted on three things: the brain of the Franks, the hands of the Chinese and the

[1] *Aghānī*, vol. ix, p. 150, vol. vii, p 150.

tongue of the Arabs."[1] Eloquence, i.e. ability to express one's self forcefully and elegantly in both prose and poetry, together with archery and horsemanship were considered in the Jāhilīyah period the three basic attributes of "the perfect man" (*al-kāmil*). By virtue of its peculiar structure Arabic lent itself admirably to a terse, trenchant, epigrammatic manner of speech. Islam made full use of this feature of the language and of this psychological peculiarity of its people. Hence the "miraculous character" (*i'jāz*) of the style and composition of the Koran, adduced by Moslems as the strongest argument in favour of the genuineness of their faith. The triumph of Islam was to a certain extent the triumph of a language, more particularly of a book.

The heroic age

From the heroic age of Arabic literature, covering the Jāhilīyah period and extending from about A.D. 525 to 622, we have preserved for us a few proverbs, certain legends and in particular a fairly abundant amount of poetry—all compiled and edited in later Islamic days. No scientific literature existed beyond a few magical, meteorological and medicinal formulas. Proverbs constitute a fair index of folk mentality and experience. Luqmān the Sage (*al-ḥakīm*), in whose mouth many of the ancient words of wisdom were put, was either an Abyssinian or a Hebrew. Tradition has handed down the names of a number of wise men and women of the Jāhilīyah, e.g. Aktham ibn-Ṣayfi, Ḥājib ibn-Zurārah and Hind the daughter of al-Khuṣṣ. In the *Majma' al-Amthāl* by al-Maydāni[2] († 1124) and in the *Amthāl al-'Arab* of al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbi[3] († 786) we have many specimens of this pre-Islamic wisdom literature.

Prose could not have been well represented in the Jāhilīyah literature since no system of writing had then been fully developed. Yet we have a few pieces, mainly legends and traditions, composed in Islamic days, which purport to have come from earlier times. These stories deal mostly with genealogies (*ansāb*) and the intertribal combats, the above-discussed Days of the Arabians. The Arabian genealogist, like his brother the Arabian historian, had a *horror vacui* and his fancy had no difficulty in bridging gaps and filling vacancies; in this way he has succeeded in giving us in most instances a continuous record

[1] Cf. al-Jāḥiẓ, *Majmū'at Rasā'il* (Cairo, 1324), pp. 41-3; *'Iqd*, vol. i, p. 125.
[2] 2 vols. (Cairo, 1310); G. Freytag, *Arabum proverbia* (Bonn, 1838-43).
[3] 2 vols. (Constantinople, 1300); al-Mufaḍḍal ibn-Salamah († *ca.* 920), *al-Fākhir*, ed. C. A. Storey (Leyden, 1915).

from Adam or, in more modest compass, from Ishmael and Abraham. Ibn-Durayd's *Kitāb al-Ishtiqāq* [1] and the encyclopædic work of abu-al-Faraj al-Iṣbahāni (or Iṣfahāni, † A.D. 967) entitled *Kitāb al-Aghāni* (the book of songs) comprise most valuable data on the subject of genealogies. Specimens of rhymed prose attributed to pre-Islamic oracles have likewise survived.

Poetry

It was only in the field of poetical expression that the pre-Islamic Arabian excelled. Herein his finest talents found a field. The Bedouin's love of poetry was his one cultural asset.

Arabic literature, like most literatures, sprang into existence with an outburst of poetry; but, unlike many others, its poetry seems to have issued forth full grown. The oldest pieces of poetry extant seem to have been composed some one hundred and thirty years before the Hijrah in connection with the War of al-Basūs, but these odes, with their rigid conventions, presuppose a long period of development in the cultivation of the art of expression and the innate capacities of the language. The poets of the middle part of the sixth century have never been surpassed. The early Moslem poets as well as the later and present-day versifiers regarded and still do regard the ancient productions as models of unapproachable excellence. These early poems were committed to memory, transmitted by oral tradition and finally recorded in writing during the second and third centuries of the Hijrah. Modern critical research makes it evident that numerous revisions, editions and modifications were made to bring them into accord with the spirit of Islam [2]

The rhymed prose used by the oracles and soothsayers (*kuhhān*) may be considered the first stage in the development of the poetical form. The Koran exhibits such a style. The song of the camel-driver (*ḥudā'*) may have been the second. Native Arabic tradition which tries to explain the origin of poetry in the attempt of the cameleer to sing in time with the rhythmic movements of the camel's pace may after all contain a germ of truth The word *ḥādi*, singer, is synonymous with *sā'iq*, camel-driver.

Rajaz, consisting of four or six feet to the line, evolved out of rhymed prose and constitutes the oldest and simplest metre. "It is the first-born child of poetry", so runs the Arabic definition, "with rhymed prose [*saj'*] for a father and song for a mother."

[1] Ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen, 1854).
[2] Cf. Ṭāha Ḥusayn, *al-Adab al-Jāhili* (Cairo, 1927).

In this heroic age of literature poetry was the only means of literary expression. The *qaṣīdah* (ode) represented the only, as well as a most finished, type of poetical composition. Muhalhil († *ca.* 531), the Taghlib hero of the Basūs War, is credited with being the first to compose these long poems. It is very likely that the ode developed in connection with the Days of the Arabians, particularly among the Taghlib or Kindah tribes. Imru'-al-Qays († *ca.* 540), originally a Qahtānī from South Arabia, belonged to Kindah. Though one of the most ancient of bards, he is generally esteemed the greatest, the *amīr* (prince) of poets. 'Amr ibn-Kulthūm († *ca.* 600), on the other hand, was a Taghlibite of the Rabī'ah from North Arabia. Though speaking different dialects these poets produced odes which exhibit the same literary form. The ode in the classical period

Appearing with Homeric suddenness the *qasīdah* surpasses even the Iliad and the Odyssey in metrical complexity and elaborateness. And when it makes its first appearance on the pages of history the *qasīdah* seems governed by a fixed set of conventions: stereotyped beginning, common epithets, stock figures of speech and same choice of themes—all of which point to a long period of development. Rich in animated passion, expressed in forceful and compact language, the ode is poor in original ideas, in thought-provoking imagery, and is consequently lacking in universal appeal. The poet and not the poetry is more often the thing to be admired. Translated into a foreign language it loses its value. The personal, subjective element prevails. The theme is realistic, the horizon limited, the point of view local. No national epic was ever developed by the Arabians and no dramatic work of first-class importance.

Among the ancient odes the so-called "Seven Mu'allaqāt" (suspended) hold first place. They are still honoured throughout the Arabic-speaking world as masterpieces of poetical composition. Legend has it that each of these odes was awarded the annual prize at the fair of 'Ukāz and was inscribed in golden letters and suspended on the walls of the Ka'bah.[1] Their genesis is explained in this way: at 'Ukāẓ, between Nakhlah and al-Ṭā'if in al-Ḥijāz, was held an annual fair, a sort of literary congress whither hero-poets resorted to celebrate their exploits and contend for the coveted first honour. A poet made a name The Mu'allaqāt

[1] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Muzhir* (Cairo, 1282), vol. ii, p. 240.

for himself here or nowhere. The Fair (*sūq*) of 'Ukāẓ stood in pre-Islamic days for a kind of *Académie française* of Arabia.

The annual fair, we are told, was held during the sacred months when fighting was taboo. The pagan Arabian calendar was like the later Moslem one, lunar, the first three months of its spring season, i.e. dhu-al-Qa'dah, dhu-al-Ḥijjah and Muharram, coincided with the period of peace. The fair provided ample opportunity for the exhibition of native wares, and for trade and exchange of commodities. We can easily visualize the sons of the desert flocking to these annual peaceful gatherings, lingering around the booths, sipping date wine and enjoying to the full the tunes of the singing girls.

Though the first ode said to have won the favour of the judges of 'Ukāẓ was that of Imru'-al-Qays († *ca.* 540), no collection of the Mu'allaqāt was attempted until the latter Umayyad period. Ḥammād al-Rāwiyah, the famous rhapsodist who flourished in the middle of the eighth century, chose the Seven Golden Odes, undoubtedly from among many others, and compiled them into a separate group. This collection has been translated into most European languages.[1]

The pre-Islamic poet

Aside from the famous Seven Odes we have from pre-Islamic poetry a collection named, after its compiler, al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbi († *ca.* 785), *al-Mufaḍḍalīyāt*,[2] containing one hundred and twenty odes composed by lesser lights, a number of *dīwāns* (anthologies) and a large number of fragments and excerpts in the *Dīwān al-Ḥamāsah*, edited by abu-Tammām († *ca.* 845) and in the *Kitāb al-Aghāni* of al-Isbahāni († 967).

The Arabian poet (*shā'ir*), as the name indicates, was originally one endowed with knowledge hidden from the common man, which knowledge he received from a demon, his special *shayṭān* (satan). As a poet he was in league with the unseen powers and could by his curses bring evil upon the enemy. Satire (*hijā'*) was therefore a very early form of Arabic poetry.[3]

As his office developed the poet acquired a variety of functions. In battle his tongue was as effective as his people's bravery. In peace he might prove a menace to public order by his fiery harangues. His poems might arouse a tribe to action in

[1] See William Jones, *Works* (London, 1799), vol iv, pp. 245-335, Anne and Wilfrid S. Blunt, *The Seven Golden Odes of Pagan Arabia* (London, 1903).

[2] Ed C. J. Lyall, 3 vols (Oxford & Leyden, 1921-4).

[3] Balaam was a type of primitive Arabian satirist (Num. 23 : 7).

the same manner as the tirade of a demagogue in a modern political campaign. As the press agent, the journalist, of his day his favour was sought by princely gifts, as the records of the courts of al-Ḥīrah and Ghassān show. His poems, committed to memory and transmitted from one tongue to another, offered an invaluable means of publicity. He was both moulder and agent of public opinion. *Qaṭʿ al-lisān* (cutting off the tongue) was the formula used for subsidizing him and avoiding his satires.

Besides being oracle, guide, orator and spokesman of his community the poet was its historian and scientist, in so far as it had a scientist. Bedouins measured intelligence by poetry. "Who dares dispute my tribe . . . its pre-eminence in horsemen, poets and numbers?" exclaims a bard in *al-Aghānī*.[1] In these three elements, military power, intelligence and numbers, lay the superiority of a tribe. As the historian and scientist of the tribe the poet was well versed in its genealogy and folklore, cognizant of the attainments and past achievements of its members, familiar with their rights, pasture-lands and border-lines. Furthermore, as a student of the psychological weaknesses and historical failures of the rival tribes it was his business to expose these shortcomings and hold them up to ridicule.

Aside from its poetic interest and the worth of its grace and elegance, the ancient poetry, therefore, has historical importance as source material for the study of the period in which it was composed. In fact it is our only quasi-contemporaneous data. It throws light on all phases of pre-Islamic life. Hence the adage, "Poetry is the public register [*dīwān*] of the Arabians".[2]

The ideal of Arab virtue as revealed by this ancient pagan poetry was expressed in the terms *murūʾah*, manliness (later *virtus*), and *ʿirḍ* (honour).[3] The component elements of *murūʾah* were courage, loyalty and generosity. Courage was measured by the number of raids (sing. *ghazw*) undertaken. Generosity manifested itself in his readiness to sacrifice his camel at the coming of a guest or on behalf of the poor and the helpless. Bedouin character as manifested in poetry

The name of Ḥātim al-Ṭāʾi († *ca.* A.D. 605) has been handed down to the present day as the personification of the Bedouin ideal of hospitality. As a lad in charge of his father's camels he

[1] Vol. viii, p. 77. [2] *Mushir*, vol. ii, p. 235.
[3] On *murūʾah* and *ʿirḍ*, see articles by Bishr Farès in *Encyclopædia of Islām, Supp.*

once slaughtered three of the animals to feed passing strangers and distributed the rest among them, which caused his father to expel him from home.[1]

The name of 'Antarah ibn-Shaddād al-'Absi (*ca.* 525–615), evidently a Christian, has lived through the ages as the paragon of Bedouin heroism and chivalry. Knight, poet, warrior and lover, 'Antarah exemplified in his life those traits greatly esteemed by the sons of the desert. His deeds of valour as well as his love episodes with his lady, 'Ablah, whose name he immortalized in his famous Mu'allaqah, have become a part of the literary heritage of the Arabic-speaking world. But 'Antarah was born a slave, the son of a black maid. He was, however, freed by his father on the occasion of an encounter with an enemy tribe in which the young man refused to take active part, saying, "A slave knows not how to fight; milking camels is his job". "Charge!" shouted his father, "thou art free."[2]

Bedouin heatheenism

Judged by his poetry the pagan Bedouin of the Jāhilīyah age had little if any religion. To spiritual impulses he was lukewarm, even indifferent. His conformity to religious practice followed tribal inertia and was dictated by his conservative respect for tradition. Nowhere do we find an illustration of genuine devotion to a heathen deity. A story told about Imru'-al-Qays illustrates this point. Having set out to avenge the murder of his father he stopped at the temple of dhu-al-Khalaṣah[3] to consult the oracle by means of drawing arrows.[4] Upon drawing "abandon" thrice he hurled the broken arrows at the idol exclaiming, "Accursed one! had it been thy father who was murdered thou wouldst not have forbidden my avenging him".[5]

Other than the poetical references, our chief sources of information about pre-Islamic heathenism are to be found in the remains of paganism in Islam, in the few anecdotes and traditions embedded in the late Islamic literature and in al-Kalbi's († 819–20) *al-Aṣnām* (the idols). The pagan Arabian developed no mythology, no involved theology and no cosmogony comparable to that of the Babylonians.

[1] Ibn-Qutaybah, *al-Shi'r w-al-Shu'arā'*, ed. de Goeje (Leyden, 1904), p. 124.
[2] *Aghāni*, vol. vii, pp. 149-50; ibn-Qutaybah, p. 130.
[3] The temple stood seven days' journey south of Makkah; its deity was a white stone; al-Kalbi, *al-Aṣnām*, ed. Aḥmad Zaki (Cairo, 1914), p. 34.
[4] See below, p. 100. Divining by arrows forbidden in Koran 5 : 4, 92.
[5] *Aghāni*, vol. viii, p. 70.

The Bedouin religion represents the earliest and most primitive form of Semitic belief. The South Arabian cults with their astral features, ornate temples, elaborate ritual and sacrifices represent a higher and later stage of development, a stage reached by sedentary society. The emphasis on sun-worship in the cultured communities of Petra and Palmyra implies an agricultural state where the association has already been made between the life-giving rays of the sun and the growth of vegetation.

The Bedouin's religion, like other forms of primitive belief, is basically animistic. The striking contrast between oasis and desert gave him perhaps his earliest definite conception of the specialized deity. The spirit of the arable land became the beneficent deity to be catered to; that of the arid land the maleficent, the demon, to be feared.[1]

Even after the conception of a deity was formed, natural objects such as trees, wells, caves, stones, remained sacred objects, since they formed the media through which the worshipper could come into direct contact with the deity. The well in the desert with its cleansing, healing, life-giving water very early became an object of worship. Zamzam's holiness, according to Arabian authors, was pre-Islamic and went back to the time when it supplied water to Hagar and Ishmael.[2] Yāqūt,[3] and after him al-Qazwīnī,[4] speak of travellers carrying away water from the Well of 'Urwah and offering it as a special present to their relatives and friends. Caves became holy through association with underground deities and forces. Such was originally Ghabghab in Nakhlah, where the Arabians sacrificed to al-'Uzza.[5] *Ba'l* represented the spirit of springs and underground water and must have been introduced into Arabia at the same time as the palm tree. The word left an interesting survival in the Moslem system of taxation, where a distinction is drawn between what *Ba'l* waters (i.e. land that needs no irrigation) and what the sky waters.

The Bedouin's astral beliefs centred upon the moon, in whose light he grazed his flocks. Moon-worship implies a pastoral society, whereas sun-worship represents a later agricultural stage. In our own day the Moslem Ruwalah Bedouins imagine

Solar aspects

[1] Ar. *taqwa*, piety, is from a stem meaning "to be on one's guard, to fear".
[2] Ibn-Hishām, *Sīrah*, p. 71.
[3] Vol. i, p. 434.
[4] *Āṯār al-Bilād wa-Akhbār al-'Ibād*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Göttingen, 1849), p. 200.
[5] Kalbi, pp. 18, 20; Yāqūt, vol. iii, pp. 772-3.

that their life is regulated by the moon, which condenses the water vapours, distils the beneficent dew on the pasture and makes possible the growth of plants. On the other hand the sun, as they believe, would like to destroy the Bedouins as well as all animal and plant life.

One characteristic feature of all elements of religious belief is their tendency to persist in some form when a higher stage of development has been attained. The survival represents a compromise between these two stages of religious development. Hence Wadd (Koran 71 : 22), the moon-god who stood at the head of the Minaean pantheon. Ibn-Hishām[1] and al-Ṭabari[2] speak of a sacred palm tree in Najrān. Gifts were offered to the tree in the form of weapons, garments and rags which were suspended from it. Dhāt-Anwāṭ[3] (that on which things are hung), to which the Makkans resorted annually, was perhaps identical with the tree of al-'Uzza at Nakhlah.[4] Al-Lāt in al-Ṭā'if was represented by a square stone,[5] and dhu-al-Shara in Petra by a quadrangular block of unhewn black stone four feet high and two feet wide. Most of these deities owned each a reserved grazing-land (*ḥima*).

Jinn

The Bedouin peopled the desert with living things of beastly nature called jinn or demons. These jinn differ from the gods not so much in their nature as in their relation to man. The gods are on the whole friendly; the jinn, hostile. The latter are, of course, personifications of the fantastic notions of the terrors of the desert and its wild animal life. To the gods belong the regions frequented by man; to the jinn belong the unknown and untrodden parts of the wilderness. A madman (*majnūn*) is but one possessed by the jinn. With Islam the number of jinn was increased, since the heathen deities were then degraded into such beings.[6]

The daughters of Allah

Among the urban population of al-Ḥijāz, and only about seventeen per cent. of the population was such, the astral stage of paganism was reached early. Al-'Uzza, al-Lāt and Manāh, the three daughters of Allah, had their sanctuaries in the land which later became the cradle of Islam. In a weak moment the monotheistic Muhammad was tempted[7] to recognize these power-

[1] *Sīrah*, p 22. [2] Vol. i, p 922. [3] *Sīrah*, p. 844.
[4] Kalbi, pp. 24-7 [5] *Ibid.* p 16. [6] Koran 37 : 158, 6 : 100.
[7] Cf. Koran 22 : 51-2, 17 : 74-6.

ful deities of Makkah and al-Madīnah and make a compromise in their favour, but afterwards he retracted and the revelation is said to have received the form now found in sūrah 53 : 19-20.[1] Later theologians explained the case according to the principle of *nāsikh* and *mansūkh*, abrogating and abrogated verses, by means of which God revokes and alters the announcements of His will; this results in the cancellation of a verse and the substitution of another for it (Koran 2 : 100). Al-Lāt (from al-Ilāhah, the goddess) had her sacred tracts (*ḥima* and *ḥaram*) near al-Ṭā'if, whither the Makkans and others flocked for pilgrimage and sacrifice. Within such an enclosure no trees could be felled, no game hunted and no human blood shed. Animal and plant life therein partook of the inviolability of the deity there honoured. Of similar origin were the cities of refuge in Israel. Herodotus[2] mentions this goddess under the name Alilat among the Nabataean deities.

Al-'Uzza (the most mighty, Venus, the morning star) had her cult in Nakhlah east of Makkah. According to al-Kalbi,[3] hers was the most venerated idol among the Quraysh, and Muḥammad as a young man offered her a sacrifice. Her sanctuary consisted of three trees. Human sacrifice characterized her cult. She was the Lady 'Uzzay-an to whom a South Arabian offered a golden image on behalf of his sick daughter, Amat-'Uzzay-an[4] (the maid of al-'Uzza). 'Abd-al-'Uzza was a favourite proper name at the rise of Islam.

Manāh (from *manīyah*, allotted fate) was the goddess of destiny[5] and as such represented an earlier phase of religious life.[6] Her main sanctuary consisted of a black stone in Qudayd on the road between Makkah and Yathrib (later al-Madīnah) and she was especially popular with the Aws and the Khazraj, who rallied to the support of the Prophet on his fateful Hijrah from Makkah. As an independent deity her name, associated with dhu-al-Shara, appears in the Nabataean inscriptions of al-Ḥijr.[7] To the present day Arabic versifiers blame all misfortunes on *al-manāya* or *al-dahr* (time).

[1] Al-Bayḍāwi, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, ed. H. O. Fleischer, vol. i (Leipzig, 1846), pp. 636-7; Ṭabari, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. xxvii, pp. 34 *seq.*, vol. xvii, p. 131.
[2] Bk. III, ch. 8. [3] Pp. 18-19. [4] Nielsen, *Handbuch*, vol. i, p. 236.
[5] Cf. Heb. Mĕni, Is. 65 : 11. [6] Kalbi, p. 13.
[7] Cooke, pp. 217; 219; cf. Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris*, vol. iii, 1909-15 (Giessen, 1915), p. 85.

Since the mother's blood rather than the father's formed the original bond of kinship among the Semites and because the family organization was first matriarchal, the Arabian goddess preceded the god as an object of worship.

The Makkan Ka'bah

Hubal (from Aram. for vapour, spirit), evidently the chief deity of al-Ka'bah, was represented in human form. Beside him stood ritual arrows used for divination by the soothsayer (*kāhin*, from Aramaic) who drew lots by means of them. The tradition in ibn-Hishām,[1] which makes 'Amr ibn-Luḥayy the importer of this idol from Moab or Mesopotamia, may have a kernel of truth in so far as it retains a memory of the Aramaic origin of the deity.[2] At the conquest of Makkah by Muḥammad Hubal shared the lot of the other idols and was destroyed.

The pagan Ka'bah, which became the Palladium of Islam, was an unpretentious cube-like (hence the name) building of primitive simplicity, originally roofless, serving as a shelter for a black meteorite which was venerated as a fetish. At the birth of Islam the structure was that rebuilt in 608 probably by an Abyssinian from the wreckage of a Byzantine or Abyssinian ship destroyed on the shore of the Red Sea.[3] The usual sacred territory (*ḥaram*) spread around it. Annual pilgrimages were made thither and special sacrifices offered.

Moslem tradition maintains that the Ka'bah was originally built by Adam according to a celestial prototype and after the Deluge rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael.[4] Its custody remained in the hands of the descendants of Ishmael until the proud banu-Jurhum, and later the banu-Khuzā'ah, who introduced idol worship, took possession of it. Then came the Quraysh, who continued the ancient Ishmaelite line. While engaged in the rebuilding Ishmael received from Gabriel the Black Stone, still set in the south-east corner of the structure, and was instructed in the ceremonies of the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*).

Allah

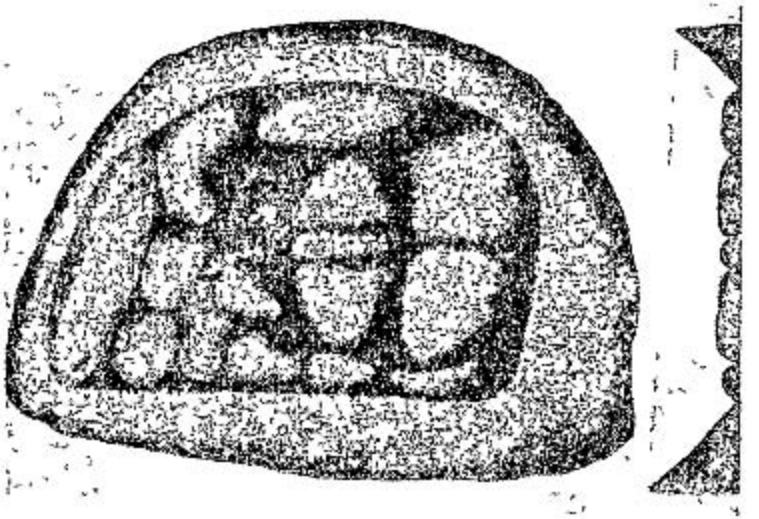
Allah (*allāh*, *al-ilāh*, the god) was the principal, though not the only, deity of Makkah. The name is an ancient one. It occurs in two South Arabic inscriptions, one a Minaean found at al-'Ula and the other a Sabaean, but abounds in the form HLH in the Liḥyānite inscriptions of the fifth century B.C.[5] Liḥyān, which

[1] *Sīrah*, pp. 50 *seq.*

[2] The Arabic word for idol, *ṣanam*, is clearly an adaptation of Aramaic *ṣēlēm*.

[3] Cf. al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makkah*, ed. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1858), pp. 104-7; Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. ii, pp. 17-18. [4] Koran 2 : 118-21. [5] Winnett, p. 30.

evidently got the god from Syria, was the first centre of the worship of this deity in Arabia. The name occurs as Hallāh in the Ṣafa inscriptions five centuries before Islam [1] and also in a pre-Islamic Christian Arabic inscription found in umm-al-Jimāl, Syria, and ascribed to the sixth century.[2] The name of Muḥammad's father was 'Abd-Allāh ('Abdullāh, the slave or worshipper of Allah). The esteem in which Allah was held by the



From Ali Bey, "Travels"

THE BLACK STONE OF AL-KA'BAH

pre-Islamic Makkans as the creator and supreme provider and the one to be invoked in time of special peril may be inferred from such koranic passages as 31 : 24, 31; 6 : 137, 109; 10 : 23. Evidently he was the tribal deity of the Quraysh.

Though in an inhospitable and barren valley with an inclement and unhealthy climate this sanctuary at Makkah made al-Ḥijāz the most important religious centre in North Arabia.

Other pagan deities such as Nasr[3] (vulture), 'Awf (the great bird) bear animal names and suggest totemic origin. As for future life, nowhere in the authenticated ancient literature do we find expressed a clear and precise idea of it. The few vague

[1] Dussaud, *Les Arabes en Syrie*, pp. 141-2.

[2] Enno Littmann, *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete*, vol. vii (1929), pp. 197-204.

[3] Koran 71 : 23.

references may be explained as an echo of Christian dogma. The hedonistic Arabian character was too much absorbed in the immediate issues of life to devote much thought to the hereafter. In the words of an old bard:

> We spin about and whirl our way through life,
> Then, rich and poor alike, at last seek rest
> Below the ground in hollow pits slate-covered;
> And there we do abide [1]

As the Bedouins frequented the settled towns of al-Ḥijāz for the exchange of their commodities, and particularly during the four months of "holy truce", they became inoculated with some of the more advanced urban beliefs and were initiated into ritualistic practices of the Ka'bah and the offering of sacrifices. Camels and sheep were offered at Makkah and at various stones (*ansāb*) elsewhere which were regarded as idols or altars. In the pilgrimage to some great shrine of the urban Arabians lay the most important religious practice of the nomad. The "holy truce" included what became in the Moslem calendar the eleventh, twelfth and first months of each year (dhu-al-Qa'dah, dhu-al-Ḥijjah and Muharram) together with a fourth month in the middle (Rajab). The first three were especially set aside for religious observance, and the fourth for trade. Al-Ḥijāz, through its somewhat central position, its accessibility and its location on the main caravan route running north and south, offered an unexcelled opportunity for both religious and commercial activity. Thus arose its 'Ukāz fair and its Ka'bah.

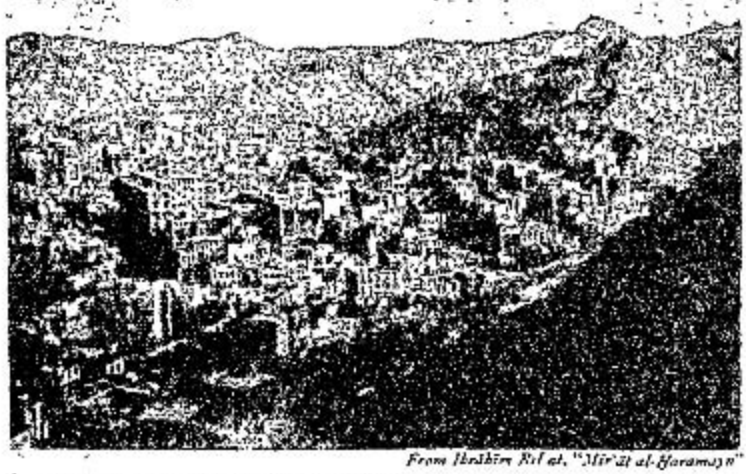
The three cities of al-Ḥijāz al-Ṭā'if

Al-Ḥijāz, the barren country standing like a barrier (*ḥijāz*) between the uplands of Najd and the low coastal region called Tihāmah (netherland), could boast only three cities: al-Ṭā'if and the two sister cities Makkah and al-Madīnah.

Al-Ṭā'if, nestling among shady trees at an altitude of about 6000 feet and described as "a bit of Syrian earth", was, as it still is, the summer resort of the Makkan aristocracy. Burckhardt, who visited the town in August 1814, declared the scenery en route the most picturesque and delightful he had seen since his departure from Lebanon.[2] Its products included honey, water-melons, bananas, figs, grapes, almonds, peaches

[1] Abu-Tammām, p 562, cf Lyall, *Translations*, p. xxvii
[2] John L. Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia* (London, 1829), vol. i, p. 122.

and pomegranates.[1] Its roses were famous for the attar which provided Makkah with its perfumery. Its vines, according to a tradition handed down in *al-Aghānī*,[2] were introduced by a Jewess who offered the first slips as a present to a local chief. Its wine, though in great demand, was less expensive than the foreign



From Ibrāhīm Rif'at, "Mir'āt al-Haramayn"

MAKKAH FROM THE MOUNTAIN OF ABU-QUBAYS, WITH MOUNT ḤIRĀ' IN THE BACKGROUND, 1908

brand celebrated in Arabic poetry. Of all places in the peninsula al-Ṭā'if came nearest to the koranic description of Paradise in sūrah 47 : 16–17.

The name Makkah, the Macoraba of Ptolemy,[3] comes from Sabaean *Makuraba, meaning sanctuary, which indicates that it* owes its foundation to some religious association and therefore must have been a religious centre long before Muḥammad was born. It lies in the Tihāmah of southern al-Ḥijāz, about forty-eight miles from the Red Sea, in a barren, rocky valley described in the Koran (14 : 40) as "unfit for cultivation". The thermo- Makkah

[1] Cf. ibn-Baṭṭūṭah, *Tuḥfat al-Nuẓẓār*, ed. and tr. C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti, 3rd impression, vol. i (Paris, 1893), pp. 304-5.

[2] Vol. iv, p. 75, ll. 9-10.

[3] *Geographia*, ed. Nobbe, Bk. VI, ch. 7, § 32.

meter in Makkah can register almost unbearable heat. When the famous Arab traveller ibn-Baṭṭūṭah[1] of Tangier attempted the circumambulation of the Ka'bah barefooted, he failed because of the "flames" reflected by the stones.

Older still than the south-to-north "spice road" which passes through it, the city early became a midway station between Ma'rib and Ghazzah. The commercially minded and progressive Makkans soon rendered their city a centre of wealth. A Makkan caravan which was involved in the Badr skirmish (Mar. 16, 624) while returning from Ghazzah consisted of a thousand camels, according to al-Wāqidi,[2] and carried merchandise worth 50,000 dinars (about £20,000). Under the leadership of the Quraysh, the custodians of the Ka'bah, who were evidently responsible for making that sanctuary a national shrine and the 'Ukāẓ fair a commercial and intellectual rendezvous, Makkah's pre-eminence became secure.

Al-Madīnah

Yathrib (YTHRB of the Sabaean inscriptions, Jathrippa of Ptolemy),[3] lay some 300 miles north of Makkah and was much more favoured by nature than its southern sister. Besides lying on the "spice road", which connected al-Yaman with Syria, the city was a veritable oasis, especially adapted for the cultivation of date-palms. In the hands of its Jewish inhabitants, the banu-Naḍīr and banu-Qurayẓah, the town became a leading agricultural centre. Judging by their proper names and the Aramaean vocabulary used in their agricultural life these Jews must have been mostly Judaized clans of Arabian[4] and Aramaean stock, though the nucleus may have been Israelites who fled from Palestine at the time of its conquest by the Romans in the first century after Christ. It was possibly these Aramaic-speaking Jews who changed the name Yathrib into Aramaic Medînta, the explanation of the name al-Madīnah (Medina) as "the town" (of the Prophet) being a comparatively late one. The two leading non-Jewish tribes were the Aws and the Khazraj, who came originally from al-Yaman.

Cultural influences in al-Ḥijāz: v. Saba'

Though not in the main stream of world events, pre-Islamic al-Ḥijāz could hardly be said to have been in a backwater. Its exclusiveness is post-Muḥammadan and dates from the eighth

[1] Vol. i, p. 281.
[2] *Al-Maghāzi*, ed. Alfred von Kremer (Calcutta, 1855-6), p. 198.
[3] Bk. VI, ch. 7, § 31; variant Lathrippa.
[4] Ya'qūbi, vol. ii, p. 49, designates the Arabian tribes from which they descended.

year of the Hijrah, when Makkah was captured and the twenty-eighth verse of sūrah nine revealed.[1] In the first century after Muḥammad, however, there flourished in his birthplace a number of Christian and Jewish physicians, musicians and merchants.

The earlier South Arabian civilization could not have altogether passed away without leaving some trace in its northern successor. The inscription (542–3) of Abrahah dealing with the break of the Ma'rib Dam begins with the following words: "In the power and grace and mercy of the Merciful [*Raḥman-an*] and His Messiah and of the Holy Spirit".[2] The word *Raḥman-an* is especially significant because its northern equivalent, *al-Raḥmān*, became later a prominent attribute of Allah and one of His names in the Koran and in Islamic theology. Sūrah nineteen is dominated by *al-Raḥmān*.[3] Though used in the inscription for the Christian God, yet the word is evidently borrowed from the name of one of the older South Arabian deities. *Al-Raḥīm* (the compassionate) also occurs as the name of a deity (RḤM) in pre-Islamic and Sabaean inscriptions.[4] Another South Arabic inscription uses *shirk*, association in the sense of polytheism, the kind of *shirk* against which Muḥammad vehemently and fervently preached and which consisted of the worship of one supreme being with whom other minor deities were associated. In the same inscription occurs the technical term denoting unbelief, *KFR*, as in North Arabic.[5]

2. Abyssinia

The Semitic population of the south-western coast of the Red Sea found its way thither, as we have learned, by gradual infiltration from south-western Arabia. These Abyssinians, as they were later called, formed an important part of the great international commercial "trust", which under Sabaeo-Ḥimyarite leadership monopolized the ancient spice trade, the main artery of which passed through al-Ḥijāz. For about fifty years prior to the birth of the Prophet, the Abyssinians had their rule established in al-Yaman, and in the year of his birth we find them at the gates of Makkah threatening its precious Ka'bah with

[1] See below, p. 118; cf. Bayḍāwi, vol. i, p. 383; Ṭabari, *Tafsīr*, vol. x, p. 74.

[2] E. Glaser, *Mitteilungen der vorderasiatischen Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1897), pp. 390, 401; cf. *Corpus inscriptionum Semiticarum*, pars iv, t. i, pp. 15-19.

[3] *Raḥmanān* appears as title of the Christian God in a fifth-century South Arabic inscription.

[4] Dussaud and Macler, *Voyage archéologique*, p. 95, l. 10; Dussaud, *Arabes*, pp. 152-3.

[5] J. H. Mordtmann and D. H. Müller in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, vol. x (1896), pp. 285-92.

destruction. Makkah itself was the abode of an Abyssinian, presumably Christian, colony. Bilāl,[1] whose stentorian voice won him the unique distinction of becoming the Prophet's muezzin, was an Abyssinian negro. The koranic references to the sea and its tempests (sūrahs 16 : 14, 10 : 23–4, 24 : 40), which are characterized by unusual clarity and vividness, are an echo of the active maritime intercourse between al-Ḥijāz and Abyssinia. When the infant Moslem community was hard pressed by the pagan Quraysh it was to Abyssinia of all lands that they turned for refuge.[2]

3. Persia

In the century preceding the establishment of Islam, Zoroastrian Persia was contesting with Abyssinia for supremacy over al-Yaman. Knowledge of the military art of Persia was passing into Arabian possession from the south and also from the north through Persian Arabia, with its capital al-Ḥīrah. Tradition relates that it was Salmān the Persian who taught the Prophet how to dig a trench for the defence of al-Madīnah.[3]

Al-Ḥīrah, the Arab satellite of Persia, was the main channel through which not only Persian cultural influences but, later, Aramaean Nestorian influences percolated into the Arabia of pre-Muḥammadan days. As these Nestorians formed later the main link between Hellenism and nascent Islam, so now they acted as a medium for transmitting northern cultural ideas, Aramaic, Persian and Hellenic, into the heart of pagan Arabia.

4. Ghassānland

Just such an influence as the Nestorians of al-Ḥīrah had on the Arabs of the Persian border was exerted by the Monophysites of Ghassānland upon the people of al-Ḥijāz. For four centuries prior to Islam these Syrianized Arabs had been bringing the Arab world into touch not only with Syria but also with Byzantium. Such personal names as Dāwūd (David), Sulaymān (Solomon), 'Īsa (Jesus), were not uncommon among the pre-Islamic Arabians.

[1] His tomb is still standing in Damascus.

[2] Such Ar. words of Ethiopic origin as *burhān* (proof), *ḥawārīyūn* (Christ's disciples), *jahannam* (hell, originally Heb.), *mā'idah* (table), *malak* (angel, originally Heb.), *miḥrāb* (niche), *minbar* (pulpit), *muṣḥaf* (holy book), *shayṭān* (Satan), point to Christian Abyssinian influence over Moslem Ḥijāz. Al-Suyūṭi cites in ch. 38 of his *al-Itqān* (Cairo, 1925), vol. i, pp. 135-41, 118 foreign words in the Koran.

[3] See below, p 117. Ar. *firind* (sword), *firdaws* (Paradise, sūr. 18 : 107; 23 : 11), *sijjīl* (stone, sūr. 105 : 4), *barzakh* (obstacle, sūr. 23 : 102; 55 : 20, 25 : 55), *zanjabīl* (ginger, sūr. 76 : 17, see below, p. 667), etc., are of Persian derivation.

This northern influence, however, should not be over-estimated, for neither the Monophysite nor the Nestorian church had enough vitality to make its religious ideas contagious. The material collected by Père Cheikho[1] does not suffice to show that Christianity had struck deep root anywhere in North Arabia, yet it reveals many pre-Islamic poets as familiar with certain floating Christian ideas and Christian terms. A considerable number of Aramaic words passed into the ancient Arabic vocabulary.[2]

5. The Jews

The monotheism affecting Arabia was not entirely of the Christian type. Jewish colonies flourished in al-Madīnah and various oases of northern al-Ḥijāz.[3] Al-Jumaḥi († 845) devotes a section of his biographies[4] to the Jewish poets of al-Madīnah and its environs. *Al-Aghāni* cites a number of Jewish poets of Arabia. But the only supposedly Jewish poet who left us a *dīwān* was al-Samaw'al (Samuel),[5] of al-Ablaq near Taymā', a contemporary of Imru'-al-Qays. His poetry, however, has nothing to differentiate it from the current heathen type, and therefore al-Samaw'al's Judaism has been rightly suspected. In al-Yaman Judaism is supposed to have attained the dignity of a state religion under the aegis of dhu-Nuwās.

In summing up it may be safely stated that al-Ḥijāz in the century preceding the mission of Muhammad was ringed about with influences, intellectual, religious and material, radiating from Byzantine, Syrian (Aramaean), Persian and Abyssinian centres and conducted mainly through Ghassānid, Lakhmid and Yamanite channels; but it cannot be asserted that al-Ḥijāz was in such vital contact with the higher civilization of the north as to transform its native cultural aspect. Then too, although Christianity did find a footing in Najrān, and Judaism in al-Yaman and al-Ḥijāz, neither seems to have left much of an impression on the North Arabian mind. Nevertheless the anti-

[1] *Al-Naṣrāniyah wa-Ādābuha*, 2 pts. (Beirūt, 1912, 1919, 1923), *Shu'arā' al-Naṣrāniyah*, 2 vols. (Beirūt, 1890)

[2] *Kanīsah* and *bī'ah* (church), *dumyah* and *ṣūrah* (image, picture), *qissīs* (monk), *ṣadaqah* (alms), *nāṭūr* (watchman), *nīr* (yoke), *faddān* (acre), *qindīl* (lamp, originally Latin *candela*) are illustrations. Latin *castrum* gave Syriac *qaṣra* and Western Aramaic *qeṣra* from which Arabic *qaṣr* (castle, palace) came and was re introduced into Europe in the form of Italian *castero*, Spanish *alcdzar*.

[3] *Jibrīl* (Gabriel), *sūrah* (revelation, chapter), *jabbār* (most powerful), illustrate Hebrew words in the Arabic vocabulary.

[4] *Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā'*, ed. J. Hell (Leyden, 1916), pp. 70 74.

[5] *Dīwān al-Samaw'al*, 2nd ed., ed. Cheikho (Beirūt, 1920).

quated paganism of the peninsula seems to have reached the point where it failed any longer to meet the spiritual demands of the people and was outgrown by a dissatisfied group who developed vague monotheistic ideas and went by the name of Ḥanīfs.[1] Umayyah ibn-abi-al-Ṣalt († 624), through his mother a second cousin of the Prophet, and Waraqah ibn-Nawfal, a cousin of Khadījah, were such Ḥanīfs, though several sources make Waraqah a Christian. On the political side the organized national life developed in early South Arabia was now utterly disrupted. Anarchy prevailed in the political realm as it did in the religious. The stage was set, the moment was psychological, for the rise of a great religious and national leader.

[1] Loan-word from Aramaic through Nabataean; N. A. Faris and H. W. Glidden, *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, vol. xix (1939), pp. 1-13; cf. Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Baroda, 1938), pp. 112-15. Further archæological and linguistic research will probably confirm the importance of the influence of Nabataean culture not only on Islam but also on early Christianity.