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Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity

Greg Fisher

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For Paola
and
in memory of Tom Sizgorich, mentor and friend

Preface

This is an examination of politics at the extremities of Roman power, focusing on the relationship between the Romans and their Arab allies in the sixth century. From the broad perspectives of the Empire's approach towards the barbarians and the short- and long-term effects of imperial policies, it is mostly interested in what the contemporary sources from within and around the Roman Empire said about the Arabs, and, in particular, the Jafnids, and the conclusions we might draw from them. It is important at the outset to state clearly that while the scope of the final chapter extends into the seventh century and the early Muslim Arab occupation of Syria and other parts of the Near East, this is not an investigation of the very particular view of the past produced by the much later Muslim sources. This is not simply because I am not an Arabist by training, but also because there is a need to set the Jafnids and the others who appear in this study within the debates and schemes of Roman imperial history.

Between Empires aims to provide a study of a significant but often under-represented aspect of the Roman world in Late Antiquity. It analyses the evolving relationships between the two dominant empires of the Near East, Rome and Sasanian Iran, and their primary Arab clients, the Jafnids and the Naṣrids. It explores how members of these two groups, building on a pattern of closer contacts between centre and periphery, became increasingly integrated into aspects of the cultural, political, and religious life of the two empires in the period up to approximately AD 600. One of the many results of this process was the emergence of a measurable sense of pre-eminence, status and self-confidence which is visible in their changing activities and attitude towards their patrons. Fragments of information in contemporary literary accounts, inscriptions, and archaeological evidence act as an indicator of shifting and crystallising identities, providing a basis for assessing the problem of how we can understand the role and identity of the two most prominent Arab confederations of pre-Islamic Late Antiquity. It is argued in this study that the dynamics of the relationship between Arab groups and empires were of fundamental importance to the development of discrete identities for the Jafnids and Naṣrids during Late Antiquity.

This study is intended to make a contribution to several areas of scholarship, by, among others, challenging problematic views about the Arab allies of Rome and the Sasanians, and by building on promising avenues of research identified by Robert Hoyland and Mark Whittow. Its main contribution is to offer a more balanced and nuanced picture of where and how we situate the Jafnids and Naṣrids within the broader themes of late antique history in the Near East, as well as within other historical schema such as centre–periphery and uneven power relationships—for instance, those between dominant empires and marginalised peripheral groups. It also aims to show the ways in which some of those aspects which would become important for the later development of Muslim Arab identity, such as the connection between the Arabic language and elites, seem to have begun their development within the political and cultural matrix of the late antique Roman world. By emphasising the importance of the 'late antique setting' to our understanding of historical processes which would go on to take many centuries to develop, it is my aim, here, to offer a new addition to a productive and dynamic field of research which explores the origins of the modern world in the fabric of the ancient.

The Introduction to *Between Empires* briefly discusses the essential background for the analytical chapters which follow, each of which is based around a particular aspect of the relationship between Rome and the Jafnids and the Sasanians and the Naṣrids and, occasionally, the Ḥujrids and the Ḥimyarite kingdom of south Arabia. In Chapter 2, 'Aspects of Arab Christianisation in Late Antiquity', the discussion explores the Christianisation of Arabs on the edge of the Roman Empire, and their participation in late antique religious landscapes. It shows that many contemporary observers understood that the 'conversion' of the Arabs was a stereotypical civilising and sedentarising force, which could bring those from the periphery into the ordered world of the Empire. In the experiences of the Jafnids, a different subtext emerges, showing the ways in which the ruling Jafnid elite manipulated the different opportunities which came with becoming Christian and avoided the most dangerous of the pitfalls which inevitably accompanied Roman ecclesiastical politics. For their part, the Naṣrids avoided making a commitment to any particular religion. In spite of pursuing different strategies, both groups achieved similar results, managing to escape many of the entanglements which were part of the unstable religious environment in the sixth century. This ability to occupy a middle ground without

making an irrevocable commitment was of great importance in protecting the political position of the Jafnid and Naṣrid elites.

Chapter 3, 'Empires, Clients, and Politics', explores the political development of the Jafnids and the Naṣrids from a number of perspectives, including that of the integration of barbarians into the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity. Here, the discussion also uses the example of the Ḥujrids of central Arabia to highlight the processes being analysed. The chapter shows how state support for particular pre-eminent individuals encouraged political power to crystallise around single ruling dynastic families. These families—the Jafnids, Ḥujrids and Naṣrids—derived much of their power from ongoing state sponsorship. This type of centralisation of power also improved the functioning of links between client and sponsor. This chapter gives particular attention to the literary, epigraphic, and limited archaeological evidence which shows how the Jafnids integrated into the world of Roman late antique elites. At the same time, it also shows how integration into the two empires produced a perhaps unintended consequence—an increasing sense of political and diplomatic autonomy for the Jafnids and Naṣrids, up to the last quarter of the sixth century. The general processes at work here are also found within the more general schema of Near Eastern centre–periphery relationships, showing how the Jafnids and Naṣrids can be integrated into broad historical concerns.

Chapter 4, 'Arabic, Culture, and Ethnicity', is the last of the three thematic chapters. It examines the extremely problematic question of whether or not Arabic stood as a distinct marker of ethnic identity, before the advent of Islam and the Muslim conquests of the Near East developed the association between language and identity in a new direction. The chapter discusses the evidence for Old Arabic, including the three Arabic-language and Arabic-script inscriptions of the sixth century, as well as the evidence for the corpus of oral poetry. It also addresses the Nemāra inscription, with its problematic phrase, 'king of all of (the) Arab(s)'. I suggest here that, although it is not possible to answer definitively the question posed at the beginning of the chapter, it is productive to approach the question of what significance should be attached to the numerous linguistic developments within the broader political concerns discussed in the previous chapter. I suggest here that the appearance of Arabic on monumental elite inscriptions, the production of poetry, and developments in the script are perhaps best understood in parallel with the growth in status and

political confidence of Arab elite groups such as the Jafnids. Finally, in its concluding section Chapter 4 briefly considers two other matters of ethnicity which span Late Antiquity and the Early Islamic period—the problem of Abrahamic descent, and the possible late antique origins of the romanticised figure of the bedouin in poetry.

Chapter 5 anticipates the conclusion to this study. Here, I analyse the numerous reasons for the exile of the Jafnids, and the execution of the final Naṣrid leader, showing how their measured political strategies which continuously placed them 'in-between' ultimately brought about their decline. The argument is also placed in the wider context of current debates concerning continuity, change, catastrophe and decline in Late Antiquity.

In Chapter 6, the conclusion, I assess the broader significance of the material analysed in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5. I suggest that, while both the Jafnids and the Naṣrids were able to manage the pressures brought to bear by their imperial sponsors by being active participants in a dynamic, two-way relationship, the long-term growth of both was inevitably capped by Roman and Sasanian power, and both Arab groups were, in the end, overtaken by events. Yet their incomplete integration or subordination—for example, by acting as imperial clients and fighting imperial wars, whilst simultaneously pursuing their own goals—gave them a strong sense of identity, which was largely based around their political activities. Through the Jafnids and Naṣrids we see how Arab elites were developing identities well before Islam, and in ways which were deeply embedded within the cultural matrix of Late Antiquity. Secondly, the history of these groups shows the profitability of approaching Arab elites from numerous wider perspectives—for example, as imperial clients, or as participants in the general historical schema of state–periphery relationships, in the Near East as well as elsewhere. Conceptualising the history of the sixth-century Arabs discussed here in this fashion gives us fresh ways to analyse the difficult and sparse sources. Finally, I suggest that, while they may not have been critical military allies, it is clear that as occasional participants in the religious, political, and cultural world of Late Antiquity the Jafnids and Naṣrids played a small but important role within the numerous strands which link together the sixth century, and the developing Islamic world which came afterwards.

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Contents

Abbreviations

In addition to those abbreviations listed in the Bibliography, please note:

ADAJ	*Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*
AHR	*American Historical Review*
AI	*Ars Islamica*
AncSoc	*Ancient Society*
Ann. Arch. Syr.	*Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes*
Arab. Arch. Epig.	*Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BF	*Byzantinische Forschungen*
BJMES	*British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*
BMGS	*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*
BSMESB	*British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Bulletin*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
CAH	*Cambridge Ancient History*
DaM	*Damaszener Mitteilungen*
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
JAL	*Journal of Arabic Literature*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JFA	*Journal of Field Archaeology*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JLA	*Journal of Late Antiquity*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
LA	*Liber Annuus*
ND Or.	*Notitia Dignitatum (Eastern Empire)*
PSAS	*Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*
ReAug	*Recherches Augustiniennes*
SCI	*Scripta Classica Israelica*
T&M	*Travaux et Mémoires*
TLS	*Times Literary Supplement*

VChr	*Vigiliae Christianae*
WZKM	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

Note

With regard to terminology and transliteration, I have aimed throughout for simplicity and consistency. Where several ways of expressing a Syriac or Arabic letter exist in transliteration, I have chosen a conventionally recognised means of expressing it, in accordance where possible with those used in the *Enyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, and used it throughout. Variations in footnote entries (e.g. Ǧ for J, as in Umma al-Ǧ/Jimal) reflect the titles of original publications; these are retained to avoid confusion. Where several variations on place names exist (e.g. Seis, Usais, al-Usays) I have chosen one and used it throughout. Further, for the sake of simplicity, I have followed e.g. al-Sham, not ash-Sham. For personal names, I have used common means of spelling (e.g. Procopius, not Prokopios).

Maps

1

Introduction

ARABS AND ANTIQUITY

Even as allies of Rome or Sasanian Iran, the people whom we call 'Arabs' would find it difficult to escape the numerous associations, many of them negative, which came with the name in antiquity. In a famous passage, Ammianus dismissed Julian's Saracen militia as of little use as either allies or adversaries, and devoted a digression in his work to describing their bloodthirsty, savage, and uncivilised ways.[1] For Christian authors, Arabs remained a convenient target on which all manner of wrongs could be blamed; such episodes were good rhetoric. The capture of St. Malchus by Arab raiders, who forced him to engage in uncivilised 'nomadic' pursuits and eat half-raw meat, drink camel milk, give up his clothes, and tend to the flocks, made for a dramatic and easily recognisable story for those who read or heard Jerome's *Life* of the saint.[2]

The enduring popularity of the ancient stereotypical prejudice against uncivilised and barbarous nomads was just one aspect of the name 'Arab'.[3] In the eyes of ancient authors, the term shifted in meaning depending on who was using it. It could, and did, describe

[1] Amm. 14.4.1.

[2] Jer. *Vit. Sanct. Malch*. 4–5 (*PL* 23, col. 55).

[3] B. D. Shaw, '"Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk": the ancient Mediterranean ideology of the pastoral nomad', *AncSoc* 13–14 (1982), 5–31. The stereotype has persisted well into more modern times, where it was often tinged with ideas of the romantic and noble savage. Such ideas about the bedouin were common elements in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century accounts of travellers in the Near East. See, for example, G. L. Bell, *The Desert and the Sown* (London, 1907); A. Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* (New York, 1928); J. L. Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and Waha'bys* (London, 1831).

a nomadic lifestyle, with its attendant inevitable connotations of barbarism which traced their roots to as far back as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The name 'Arab' could also be used as an ethnic label to refer to the inhabitants of 'Arab' polities or principalities such as the Nabataean kingdom, or simply to describe those who originated from the place commonly and loosely known then, as now, as 'Arabia'. In the third century AD, the terms 'Saracen' and '*ṭayyāyē*' superseded 'Arab' to become the common broad terms used to refer to the Arab allies of the Romans and Sasanians. Today, the name Arab describes, for many people, Arabic-speaking Muslims inhabiting the nations of the Middle East. All of these terms—tribe, Arab, Saracen, *ṭayyāyē*—are of variable meaning and I will discuss them in more detail throughout. At the outset, however, it is useful to be clear about the frequent appearance of the word 'Arab' in this study. I use it as the most common and convenient label to refer to those peoples from the general geographical region of the Arabian peninsula, including the frontier regions bordering on northern Arabia, whom the soldiers, writers, monks, priests, and others of the Roman Empire encountered and described as such, without any desire to express a particular opinion on ethnicity, nationality, or identity.

A number of Arab tribal groupings or individual leaders came under Roman or Sasanian pressure in Late Antiquity, including the Jafnids, the Naṣrids, and larger, less precisely defined groups such as Maʿadd, Muḍar, Tanūkh or Salīḥ. The sources for these groups vary in their quantity, quality, and reliability. The most prominent of the Arabs in contact with the Romans in the sixth century were the Jafnids, for whom we possess the most abundant source material; to the east, the Naṣrids had long been allies of Sasanian Iran, and, in the sixth century, the Ḥujrids, Maʿadd[4], and others came to the attention of Roman writers as a result of Constantinople's diplomatic adventures in the Arabian peninsula. The Ḥujrids were, during the same period, also clients of the Ḥimyarite kingdom, and Maʿadd also seems to have been contested by the Ḥimyarites, the Romans, and the Naṣrids at different times. Numerous named and unnamed Arab figures appear in Byzantine sources, whose affiliation to a particular group or tribe, if any, is unknown. While I consider a wide range of evidence here for the various Arabs who appear in late antique source

[4] However, Maʿadd may refer to a 'type' of culture, rather than a specific group of people; for this unresolved problem, see Ch. 3.

material, the main interest of this study is in the Jafnids and the Naṣrids, both of whom found themselves pressured to a significant extent by the wide-ranging effects of the ongoing competition between the Romans and Sasanian Iran.

JAFNID OR GHASSĀN: ARAB ELITES

The names Ghassān, Lakhm, and Kinda have become closely associated with the individuals who make up the Arab dynasties known as the Jafnids, Naṣrids, and Ḥujrids in modern scholarship.[5] This terminology—Ghassān for Jafnid, for example—can be misleading, and it is perhaps more desirable to prefer the terms used to refer to the dynasties or 'elites' themselves, that is, the Jafnids, Naṣrids, and Ḥujrids, rather than descriptions such as 'the Ghassānid leader al-Ḥārith'. Labels such as 'Jafnid' are not without their own difficulties, since, like Naṣrid and Ḥujrid, the name is derived from a putative ancestor ('Jafna', 'Naṣr', 'Ḥujr') about whom little or anything may actually be known, and contemporary Graeco-Roman authors do not talk of 'the Jafnids', but prefer to use the names of individuals, such as al-Ḥārith (Arethas) or al-Mundhir (Alamoundaros) for reasons which are unclear. No matter what label we choose to apply, however, it is important to make the distinction between elites and the groups which they led.[6] First, it is clear that in relation to the empires of Late Antiquity, at least, power rested with the individuals, and not the larger groups of people. The Romans, Sasanians, and the leaders of Ḥimyar preferred to create relationships with individuals, not wider groups of people, and Justinian's agreement with al-Ḥārith the Jafnid, for example, was a highly personal one. Al-Ḥārith obtained a major proportion of his power from this individual relationship with the

[5] The works of Irfan Shahid have helped to cement this association.

[6] 'Elite' is best applied here to describe a minority in a position of power, prestige, prominence, or leadership such as that held by the Jafnids. See, for further discussion and definitions, J. Haldon and L. I. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vi, *Elites Old and New in the Early Islamic Near East* (Princeton, 2004), esp. J. Haldon, 'Introduction: elites old and new in the Byzantine and early Islamic Near East', 1–12; M. R. Salzman and C. Rapp (eds.), *Elites in Late Antiquity*, *Arethusa*, 33/3 (2000), 315–468; C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford, 2005), 153–258.

head of the Roman Empire—a position which he had presumably derived initially from his earlier ability to win conflicts, and protect water sources, pasturage, or other objects vital to the success of those around him, as well as fend off contenders for his own position. The Ḥujrid leaders in northern Arabia and the Naṣrids within the Sasanian Empire enjoyed similar links with the Ḥimyarites and Sasanians. On the basis of our evidence, it was these individual elite leaders who created personal agreements with states and empires, and who acted as the 'brokers' or conduits between the tribe and the state.[7]

A second reason to discuss elites separately from groups concerns questions of origin and leadership. To talk of 'the Ghassānid leader al-Ḥārith' supposes that al-Ḥārith led Ghassān in the sixth century, but in actual fact hardly anything is known about Ghassān's whereabouts or composition.[8] Ghassān is described in an inscription from south Arabia, and the name, or one like it, appears in a letter written by Simeon of Beth Arshām and perhaps also again in relation to a monastery in the sixth-century *Letter of the Archimandrites*.[9] Other than these examples, there is no contemporary information for Ghassān and it is not clear if the Jafnid leaders represented by al-Ḥārith and his descendants, who are generally associated with Ghassān, maintained their leadership over it in the sixth century. An analogy can be drawn with Shammar, a federated group of tribes active in Mesopotamia between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. In the seventeenth century the chief of Shammar took them out of Najd, in central Arabia, and in the nineteenth his descendants ruled a confederation of Shammar and other allied tribes in Mesopotamia. Some of Shammar, in the meantime, had stayed in Najd, and the Shammar leaders in Mesopotamia effectively ruled a

[7] Cf. comments made by Beck about the Qashqai, a tribal group in modern Iran: 'Discussion of "the Qashqai" as a political force ought more properly to read, "the Qashqai khans", for they were the power brokers who dealt directly with other powers in the region. Much "Qashqai" history is therefore a history of the Qashqai khans.' See L. Beck, 'Iran and the Qashqai tribal confederacy', in R. Tapper (ed.), *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (London, 1983), 284–313, at 305.

[8] This issue is discussed in more detail in Ch. 3. Most recently, Christian Robin has argued for the separation of Jafnid and Ghassān in 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar, des «Romains» et des Perses (III^{e}–VI^{e} siècles de l'ère chrétienne)', *Semitica et Classica*, 1 (2008), 167–208, and previously advanced a similar argument for Kinda/Ḥujrids in 'Le royaume Ḥujride, dit «royaume de Kinda», entre Ḥimyar et Byzance', *CRAI* (1996), 665–714.

[9] Ch. 2, below.

confederation where Shammar was, in fact, the minority.[10] Whether or not this suggests an accurate picture of Ghassān—whereby the Jafnids and parts of Ghassān travelled north and enrolled the support of new tribes, whilst a significant number stayed behind in south Arabia—it does demonstrate why scholars should be careful about attaching the names of the Jafnids to Ghassān or the Naṣrids to Lakhm, because this can lead to the erroneous impression that they were the leaders of politically cohesive 'kingdoms' or 'states'. As this study shows, it is clear that the power rested with the individual, not the group. Furthermore, while the nature of the Jafnids' power and their political identity developed throughout the sixth century, and would go on to exhibit some features we might normally associate with states, it is clear that the people under their leadership did not constitute a state, and any development trending in this direction was capped by the realities of Roman power.[11] In this study, I use the terms Jafnid, Naṣrid, and Ḥujrid to describe the groups of elite individuals in leadership positions described by Graeco-Roman authors, and thus to make the distinction between them and whichever people lay under their control.

How can we examine these elites? As with the Germanic peoples in the west, analysing the Jafnids or Naṣrids is a challenge, since information about them tends to be scarce, difficult to assess, or unreliable before such people come to the attention of contemporary authors within the Roman Empire. Even then, ethnographic or literary convention could influence which of their activities were described by Roman authors. As a result, there is very little information on the origins of the ruling dynasties and the exact means by which they came to power. Complications arise from these difficulties since it is only through the activities of the elites that we can begin to learn anything about the otherwise anonymous groups of people under their control—whether these were Ghassān, Lakhm, or any number of others—who are rarely, if ever, discussed by our sources.

Reliable information on the Naṣrids is particularly sparse. A certain ʿAmr, 'king of Lakhm', appears on the late third-century Paikuli inscription from Kurdistan as an ally or vassal of the Sasanian

[10] R. Hoyland, 'Late Roman Provincia Arabia, Monophysite Monks and Arab tribes: a problem of centre and periphery', *Semitica et Classica*, 2 (2009), 117–39, at 118.

[11] Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 193, applies the term 'principauté', which evokes the power of the 'prince' or individual, in contrast to that of the state.

Emperor Narseh (293–302), providing some clues to the longevity of the relationship between the Naṣrids and Iran.[12] The nineteenth-century German scholar Gustav Rothstein attempted to reconstruct the history of the Naṣrid dynasty based on Muslim Arab sources, but his version remains speculative because of the lack of a consistent body of contemporary supporting source material.[13] The most active leader of the Naṣrids was al-Mundhir (?505–554), who makes occasional appearances in Roman sources as a result of his enmity with the Jafnids in the mid-sixth century. Menander describes the efforts of al-Mundhir's successor, ʿAmr, in diplomatic initiatives with the Romans around the time of the treaty of 561/2; the last Naṣrid ruler at al-Ḥīrah, al-Nuʿmān (583–*c*.602) appears in contemporary ecclesiastical sources, due to his late 'conversion' to Christianity, but beyond this, there is little other information. For the Ḥujrids the main source of information comprises a small number of south Arabian inscriptions which have allowed scholars to reconstruct some aspects of their relationship with their patrons, the kingdom of Ḥimyar. Through additional brief mentions in late Roman sources, we are given a glimpse into their diplomatic liaisons with Constantinople and their involvement with Maʿadd.

The Jafnids are relatively well-documented in comparison to the Naṣrids or the Ḥujrids. Nevertheless, the early history of the interaction between the Jafnids and the Roman Empire is poorly understood. Ghassān, from whom the Jafnids are believed to have originated, were active in south Arabia in the third century; an inscription from this region, dated to approximately AD 260, refers to the 'kings of the peoples of Ghassān', alongside those of three other groups.[14] If the Jafnids indeed originated in the southern part of the Arabian peninsula, the most straightforward explanation for the ways in which they came into contact with Rome is some form of migration. This might not necessarily have been because of a wholesale movement or as a

[12] H. Humbach and P. O. Skaervo, *The Sassanian Inscription of Paikuli iii*/1 (Wiesbaden, 1983), 71, paragraph 91.

[13] G. Rothstein, *Die Dynastie der Laḥmiden in al-Ḥira. Ein Versuch zur arabisch-persischen Geschichte zur Zeit der Sasaniden* (Berlin, 1899), 60–9 (generally), 70–125 (for specific Naṣrid rulers).

[14] R. G. Hoyland, 'Arab kings, Arab tribes, Arabic texts and the beginnings of (Muslim) Arab historical memory in late Roman inscriptions', in H. Cotton, R. Hoyland, J. Price, and D. Wasserstein (eds.), *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge, 2009), 374–400, at 376.

result of a major event, but could also have occurred as part of the natural movement of peoples who probably depended on seasonal resources, such as oases and pasturage, for some of their sustenance and income. Hoyland suggests that alongside the traditions of pre-Islamic tribal movements there are numerous indications (for example, from changes in the names appearing in ancient north Arabian graffiti) that these migration stories, the products of much later writers, may reflect a partial truth.[15] We can only speculate on the activities of the Jafnids before 500, but around this date the consolidation of power around the leading members of the family began to take shape, with support from Rome. Theophanes reports that an individual named Jabala was worsted in an encounter with Roman forces, after which there was peace and, a generation later, we read in the histories of Procopius about the elevation of his son, al-Ḥārith, under the Emperor Justinian.[16] Over time, a significant degree of political power crystallised around the Jafnids. After al-Ḥārith, who ruled or led between approximately 529 and 569, his son al-Mundhir took over, until his arrest and exile in 582. He was succeeded by al-Nuʿmān, one of his sons, whose exact fate is unknown. Whatever the precise reasons for the movements of Arabs north and into the Fertile Crescent, the case of the Jafnids shows that strong individuals could and did come to the attention of Rome and the Sasanians, through their raids in the southern frontier areas or through their wars with each other which occasionally prompted the intervention of imperial forces.

RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND

What can be learned from studying these late antique Arab elites? In the broadest and most obvious sense, they stand as the immediate antecedents of those who achieved far greater historical prominence

[15] Id., 'Epigraphy and the emergence of Arab identity', in P. Sijpesteijn, L. Sundelin, S. Tovar, and A. Zomeño (eds.), *From Andalusia to Khurasan: Documents from the Medieval Islamic World* (Leiden, 2007), 219–42, at 225–6.

[16] Theoph. *Chron*. 141; al-Ḥārith: Proc. *BP* 1.17.46. Note that Shahid has suggested that the rogue adventurer Amorkesos (Imruʾ l-Qays), who appears in the Roman province of Arabia in about 470, may have been a 'member' of Ghassān, although this is very speculative. I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, 1989), 61.

after the advent of Islam. Yet in spite of this the Jafnids, Naṣrids, and others here are rarely given adequate attention in studies of either the Muslim Arabs or Roman Late Antiquity.[17] They sit uneasily in a conceptual no-man's land, perceived to fit imperfectly into the broader topics of late Roman imperial and frontier history or the history of the Muslims after the seventh-century conquest. As such, they tend to find themselves incorporated into larger works, or simply ignored altogether. Difficult to trace archaeologically, and with only occasional appearances in literary sources, it is tempting to dismiss them as irrelevant or at best tangential to the main historical narrative of the late antique Near East.

Yet to dismiss the fifth- and sixth-century Arabs in this way is to give up a promising opportunity to address a set of compelling historical problems. Even though the source material is generally poor in quantity and difficult to assess, the Jafnids rank among the better-documented groups of Arabs, and examining their interaction with Rome and the ways in which they dealt with aspects of that relationship provides a glimpse into evolving Arab identities, however imprecise, before the mid-seventh century. We can use a study of the Jafnids, complemented by information on the Naṣrids and the Ḥujrids, to provide a further angle on some pressing questions, most notably whether or not the Arabs, in any form, had any political cohesion or political identity before the seventh century. Another question which can be posed is whether or not they spoke Arabic and, if so, whether or not this made any difference to their ethnic identities before the Arabic language became deeply connected, over time, to Islam and a new type of Arab ruling elite. Questions about religious, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural identities are a core research interest in studies of Late Antiquity, form a key background element to this study, and are developed in detail in Chapter 4.[18] We can also

[17] Underscored in the introduction to R. G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London, 2001), 1. A good example of this problem is the recent work of H. Börm, *Prokop und die Perser. Untersuchungen zu den römisch-sasaniden Kontakten in der ausgehenden Spätantike* (Stuttgart, 2007), who notes, 209, that the Arabs are beyond the scope of his study, referring readers to Shahid instead.

[18] The literature is extensive, but see (in addition to material citied in the notes below), essays in S. Mitchell and G. Greatrex (eds.), *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity* (London, 2000); R. Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity* (London, 1999); essays in G. Clarke and D. Harrison (eds.), *Identities in the Eastern Mediterranean in Antiquity: Proceedings of a Conference held at the Humanities*

use the Jafnids and the Naṣrids to investigate additional facets of another enduring historical problem, by situating them in the context of studies which straddle the conceptual division represented by the Muslim conquests of the 630s. Crone and Cook,[19] Garth Fowden,[20] Millar,[21] Bowersock[22] and numerous other authors[23] have all addressed the persistence of tradition, refashioning of old into new, and innovation which characterised a large part of the social, political, cultural, and religious life of the period between the fifth and seventh centuries. It is both promising and worthwhile to situate the Jafnids and Naṣrids within this ongoing debate which, itself, is part of the wider recognition of the permeability of the traditional divisions between historical periods in both east and west in the ancient world.[24]

Within works concerned with Arabs in general or with broader historical themes or ideas, the Jafnids and the Naṣrids play only an occasional role. Few studies are devoted to them, and it is somewhat indicative of the difficulty and scarcity of the sources for the Naṣrids

Research Centre in Canberra 10–12 November 1997, *Mediterranean Archaeology*, 11 (1999); F. Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408–450)* (Berkeley, 2006), which deals extensively with the question of regional identities in the fifth-century Near East, at 84–129; also essays in E. Digeser and R. M. Frakes (eds.), *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Toronto, 2006). Most recently, H. Cotton et al. (eds.), *From Hellenism to Islam*.

[19] P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1977).

[20] G. Fowden, *Qusayr ʿAmra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria* (Berkeley, 2004).

[21] F. Millar, 'The Theodosian Empire (408–450) and the Arabs: Saracens or Ishmaelites?', in E. Gruen (ed.), *Cultural Borrowings and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity* (Stuttgart, 2005), 297–314.

[22] G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1990), esp. 75–6; most recently, id, *Mosaics as History: The Near East from Late Antiquity to Islam* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006).

[23] Briefly, see, for example: on Islam, F. M. Donner, 'The Background to Islam', in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge, 2005), 510–34; on material culture, A. Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria: An Archaeological Assessment* (London, 2007); on Christianity, R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule* (Princeton, 1995).

[24] Influentially, P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London, 1971); id., *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200–1000* (2nd edn, Oxford, 2003); collected essays in G. W. Bowersock, P. Brown, and O. Grabar (eds.), *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); the numerous works on the formation of the early medieval world in the multi-volume Transformation of the Roman World series produced by the European Science Foundation.

in particular that Rothstein's short work is still the only study on the group over a century later. In the last thirty years, even with the rapid growth of interest in the late antique world, only a very small number of works have appeared that are significantly concerned with the topic. In 1982, Sartre's *Trois études* made a comprehensive attempt to assess the many aspects of the relationship between the Roman Empire and the various Arab tribes and individuals whom it encountered on its southern frontier.[25] Ghassān featured prominently in this discussion, and aside from exploring the political and administrative aspects of Roman engagement with the Jafnids, Sartre also attempted to identify the archaeological sites which Muslim authors such as Yāqūt associated with the group, including their reputed base at Jabiya, but with limited success.[26] Sartre also offered an examination of the 'Ghassānid' involvement with Christianity. Previously, John Trimingham's *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* had made the most comprehensive effort, since the works of François Nau and other French Orientalists,[27] to analyse the spread of Christianity among the Arabs in the ancient world.[28] After a lengthy period with Trimingham's work as the only monographic treatment of the topic, Hainthaler's *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam* was published in 2007.[29]

For a variety of reasons, the most prominent work on the Jafnids is the monumental study of Irfan Shahid.[30] In the last two decades, Shahid set out to update and re-work Theodor Nöldeke's study of the Jafnids, originally published in 1887.[31] One of the aims of Shahid's enterprise was to establish the place of the Jafnids and Ghassān within his specific concept of late antique history, through an exploration of

[25] M. Sartre, *Trois études sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine* (Brussels, 1982), 120–99.
[26] Ibid. 177–89.
[27] F. Nau, *Les Arabes chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie du VII^e^ au VIII^e^ siècle* (Paris, 1933); also, P. H. Charles, *Le christianisme des Arabes nomades sur le limes et dans le désert Syro-Mésopotamien aux alentours de l'Hégire* (Paris, 1936).
[28] J. S. Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (New York, 1979).
[29] T. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam* (Leuven, 2007).
[30] Irfan Shahid's multi-volume study began with *Rome and the Arabs: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs* (Washington, 1984). This work was followed by three others: *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, 1995), *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, and *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 2 vols (Washington, 1995, 2002, and 2010).
[31] T. Nöldeke, *Die Ghassānischen Fürsten aus dem Hause Gafnas* (Berlin, 1887).

their role as allies of Rome, as participants in the religious disputes of the sixth century, and through what he saw as a widespread building programme. Shahid has also explored, sometimes problematically, aspects of continuity between the Jafnids and the early Muslims in Syria and Palestine.[32] Shahid's ambitious project has attracted a great deal of attention, and *Rome and the Arabs* and its successors have occupied centre stage for some time, playing a key role, too, in cementing the popular connection between Ghassān and the Jafnid leaders. Yet Shahid's efforts pose significant problems, not least in his choice and use of sources and his ideological desire to present a particular image of Ghassān as a staunchly miaphysite Christian Arab group, loyal to the Roman Empire, and important to Constantinople's ability to defend its frontiers from the Sasanians and their Arab allies. As such, he over-interprets the source material and assigns too much importance to (for example) the role and position of phylarchs.[33] Despite these challenges, Shahid's study is the first major work on the Jafnids since that of Nöldeke. He should be recognised for raising the profile of Rome's Arab allies in scholarship, as well as for collecting and making available for others an extensive and disparate collection of literary source material.

In a review article concerning Shahid for the *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, Whittow, echoing concerns aired by Michael Whitby, confronted the probability that Arab allies of the two empires never exerted a significant influence on their affairs—that the fact that the 'Arabs appear marginal [in the sources] is because they were'.[34] The positive contribution made by Ghassān as the group under Jafnid leadership, in particular, as well as more generally by allied Arabs, was

[32] In addition to *Byzantium and the Arabs*, see, for example: I. Shahid, 'Ghassānid and Umayyad structures: a case of Byzance après Byzance', in P. Canivet and J.-P. Rey-Coquais (eds.), *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam, VII^e–VIII^e siècles. Actes du Colloque international Lyon–Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen Paris–Institut du Monde Arabe. 11–15 septembre 1990* (Damascus, 1992), 299–308. See too a recent review of Shahid's work, A. Walmsley, 'Review of Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, 2/1', *Ancient Near Eastem Stadies*, 44 (2007), 155–6, at 156, which assesses his contribution to the continuity debate.

[33] e.g. Shahid, *Fourth Century*, 518, *Fifth Century*, 500–1, and *Sixth Century*, ii. 1, 26.

[34] M. Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids: writing the history of a 6th-c. tribal dynasty', in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research* (Portsmouth, RI, 1995–2002), ii. 207–24, at 219, commenting on M. Whitby, 'Greek historical writing after Procopius: variety and vitality', in G. R. D. King and Averil Cameron (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, i: *Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, 1992), 25–80, at 80.

a key component of Shahid's overall argument; he conceptualised Ghassān as 'the effective shield of Byzantium against the Arabian peninsula', and was unwilling to consider that they may only have been 'footnotes' to the events of the sixth century.[35] This emphasis on the positives and negatives of the role and position of Ghassān and the Jafnids, expressed through the highly visible works of Shahid, has overshadowed attempts to produce a more nuanced view of the topic. In the same article, though, Whittow sketched the possibilities through a thoughtful comparison with the Ottoman–Rwala relationship, suggesting that like the Rwala, the Jafnids, as well, were neither fully part of, nor excluded from the empire which sponsored them, providing an idea which is developed in detail in this study.[36]

Since the turn of the century the publication of several new works has allowed the debate to build on the work produced by Shahid in new directions. One, Jan Retsö's *The Arabs in Antiquity*, met an unfavourable critical reception despite being extremely useful as a collation of a wide variety of sources. It made a very curious case for a particular set of meanings for the term *ʿarab*, and almost entirely avoided the Jafnids, Naṣrids, and others as they did not fit into the author's argument. Its strange and perplexing conclusions have drawn heavy criticism.[37] On the other hand, Hoyland's *Arabia and the Arabs*, alongside a number of recent articles, began the serious development of what, in my view, is a critical analytical position which I try to advance further here. This is to locate the study of the Jafnids and others in an ancient-historical framework of the kind which has expanded our understanding of the experiences of the Goths, Franks, and other western barbarians, and in a way which avoids the ideological concerns which have plagued Shahid's approach.[38] By doing this we can shift the focus away from the circular question of 'what kind' of allies Arabs might have been, to the far

[35] Shahid, *Fifth Century*, p. xv.

[36] Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids', 222.

[37] J. Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (New York, 2003). For the well-founded criticisms of this work, see reviews by C. Robinson, 'Review of Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity*', *TLS* 5216 (21 March 2003), 9; R. G. Hoyland, 'Review of Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity*', *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies*, 5/1 (2003), 200–2; perhaps most scathingly, G. Bowersock, 'Review of Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity*', *AHR*, 109/1 (2004), 293.

[38] See Hoyland, *Arabia*, 236–43; most recently, id., 'Arab kings, Arab tribes, Arabic texts'.

more productive question of how links to the Roman and Sasanian empires may have influenced the political, social, and cultural development of the Jafnids and the Naṣrids.

These are the basic issues which form the background for this study. Very little is written about the central problems considered here, and the Arab allies of the two late antique powers tend to appear either as small parts of wider studies or the central foci of works which demonstrate significant methodological problems. *Rome and the Arabs* and its successor volumes have unfairly dominated the debate, as each scholar dealing with the Jafnids or Ghassān is obliged to accept or refute Shahid's conclusions.

There is a need to advance our understanding of the Jafnids, Naṣrids, and others in a way which recognises them as dynamic participants within the late antique imperial world. As a part of this we should attempt to analyse them from the perspective of broader historical concerns, such as the debate over continuity and change in the seventh-century Near East, which is considered in the concluding chapter to this study, their place in the formation of ethnic, linguistic or cultural identities, or how their experiences compare with those of other peripheral groups at the edge of empire in other periods. As a contribution I offer here a detailed exploration of three interrelated aspects of the relationship between the Jafnids and the Naṣrids and Rome and Sasanian Iran. I show how the leaders of these groups became occasional participants in the religious life, political life, and cultural landscape of the empires which patronised them. They used the opportunities which they found through such participation to fashion identities for themselves which were partly, but not entirely, a response to their interaction with their late antique patrons. As a result, I show the ways in which discrete 'Arab' identities were developing well before the advent of Islam, in tandem with and partly as a result of events in the two empires; some aspects of these identities helped to provide a basis for the formation of later, Muslim identities. In doing so, I want to emphasise the importance of the late antique Near East—in particular, the opportunities for the growth of peripheral allies created by the perpetual conflict between Rome and the Sasanians—for the emergence of such identities. The Jafnids and Naṣrids were an integral part of Late Antiquity, even if they may not have rated very highly in importance to the immediate military and political concerns of their imperial patrons. Ultimately, the often neglected history of these Arab leaders affords another illustration

of the links between aspects of the Near East of the fifth and sixth centuries ruled by Rome and the Sasanians, and between aspects of the Near East which eventually came under control of the Muslim caliphs after the conquests of the seventh century.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

With very few exceptions, it is only with their appearance in the pages of Late Roman and Byzantine authors, or in inscriptions within the Roman or Sasanian empires that it becomes possible to trace the history of the Arabs explored here with any confidence. Even then speculation and imagination are often needed to try to reconstruct the stories of the wider groups of people involved on the basis of what inscriptions or authors have to say about the activities of their leaders and elites.

There are four main categories of historical source material concerned with the subjects of this study. First, there is a small amount of information from classicising authors such as Procopius (d. after 562) or Menander (active second half of 6th c.) The approach that these authors took to their subject matter, which, in the case of the *Wars* or the work of Menander, was still very much constrained by a Thucydidean framework which encouraged a focus on foreign and military policy, meant that the Jafnids and Naṣrids typically appear only when they form part of the wider concerns of the narrative itself.

This type of historiographical concept tended to limit engagement with social and economic history, and also meant that, for Procopius, there could be no real discussion about religious affairs beyond any confluence with foreign and military policy.[39] Furthermore, Procopius' approach does not always meet modern expectations—'Procopius was

[39] Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London, 1996 [1985]), 25, 33–4, 120–1, 134, 150, 264–5; for Menander's influences, education and style, see the introduction in Menander, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, ed. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool, 1985), 1–31; Whitby, 'Greek historical writing', 30–54. On Procopius see too A. Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philanthropy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia, 2004), and discussing both Cameron and Kaldellis, particularly with regard to the literary qualities of both authors, M. Whitby, 'Religious views of Procopius and Agathias', in D. Brodka and M. Stachura (eds.), *Continuity and Change: Studies in Late Antique Historiography* (Cracow, 2007), 73–93.

an excellent reporter rather than an historian'[40]—and this can provide challenges to any modern assessment of the causes of the events which he describes. This is further complicated by the fact that, for Procopius, a significant element of causality was deeply embedded in the supernatural. The roles of divine will and *tyche* and the precise connection between the two is a subject of considerable discussion amongst scholars examining Procopius, and while there is no clear consensus, it is important to note, for example, the correlation of success or failure to virtue or fate, which might observe any attempts which Procosius may have made to introduce a truly critical angle to his work.[41]

A further problem is presented by his interest in personalities and a distinctly individual approach to people and incidents, such as his deep interest in the personality of the Emperor Justinian or his patron Belisarius. Both of these individuals hold prominent places in his writing, and his shifting attitudes towards them, either through the portrait of Justinian in the *Secret History* or his growing disenchantment with Belisarius throughout the *Wars*, are very noticeable. Procopius served as the personal secretary to Belisarius for nearly thirteen years (*c.*527–*c.*540) and this personal experience influenced the selection of events for his work, as well as the way in which he wrote about them.[42]

Finally, there is also the problem that he is the only source for much of the period he describes, making it difficult to find controls for his interpretation of events. Classically educated, and a writer who took his historiographical models from the past, he also found it hard to move beyond traditional perspectives about barbarians. This included the Arab allies of Rome, and perhaps skewed aspects of the picture of the Jafnids which is found in the *Wars*, although this cannot be taken for granted.[43] Nevertheless, central to the importance of his writing for the

[40] Cameron, *Procopius*, 151.

[41] Ibid. 131–3; Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea*, esp. ch. 5; D. Brodka, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie. Studien zu Prokopios von Kaisareia, Agathias von Myrina und Theophylaktos Simokattes* (Frankfurt, 2004), esp. 40–56; Whitby, 'Religious views of Procopius and Agathias', 86–7, asserting that despite these difficulties Procopius remained interested in analysing causality and did so in a more rigorous fashion than Theophylact.

[42] Cameron, *Procopius*, 134–50; see as well the useful distillation provided by W. Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (New York, 2007), 213–26.

[43] e.g., on al-Ḥārith and his troops at Callinicum (531). See G. Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War, 502–532* (Leeds, 1998), 200–7, esp. 204 n. 31. The supposed treachery of al-Ḥārith in abandoning the battlefield and leaving Belisarius to defeat was examined by Shahid, *Sixth Century*, i/1. 134–6, who supposed that Procopius (*BP* 1.18.35)

concerns of modern historians is the fact that Procopius was a witness to or participant in much that he describes and, through the circles in which he worked and lived, had access to numerous official documents. This is also the case with Menander. His text presents its own set of difficulties, not least the fact that it survives only in fragments in the tenth-century compilations of the *Excerpta de Sententiis* and the *de Legationibus*. The editorial process has also condensed his record of events. Yet Menander was also well-placed to have access to important documents, and his work contains a valuable record of the treaty of 561/2 between the Romans and the Sasanians.[44]

Procopius and Menander constitute the two main classicising writers used here, although Agathias (d. *c.*580) and Theophylact (active first half of the seventh century) appear briefly in a number of places. These four different authors shared the same historiographical tradition; Menander had after all set himself the task to continue the history of Agathias, whilst Agathias complimented Procopius on his accuracy and Theophylact acknowledged his debt to the same author on occasion.[45] Above all it is important to keep in mind the constraints which the classicising framework imposed on these authors, especially where the deeds and place of barbarians are concerned; it is also useful to note that while Thucydides may still have been the inspiration for the stylistic model, changes in the politics and culture of the Christian Roman Empire meant that ecclesiastical and political historiographies were not as far removed from one another in style as they once had been, and elements once the preserve of ecclesiastical historians could now be found in classicising works as well.[46]

was biased against al-Ḥārith, but his 'treachery' cannot be proved. As Greatrex points out, neither Procopius nor Malalas provide convincing support to the rumours which they report, and 'allegations of treachery, it should be remembered, would serve the interests of all Roman leaders forced to explain their conduct in the battle.' If anything, al-Ḥārith, like al-Mundhir, his son, were convenient targets for easy blame. See too Cameron, *Procopius*, 146–7 and Whitby, 'Greek historical writing', 77, and the episode concerning similar accusations against al-Mundhir (below, Ch. 3 n. 207).

[44] Blockley, *Menander*, 3–6; Cameron, *Procopius*, 3, 134–6.

[45] Blockley, *Menander*, 6; on Theophylact see M. Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare* (Oxford, 1988), 227–30 (for relationship to the work of Menander); see id., 'Greek historical writing', 25–6; Averil Cameron, *Agathias* (Oxford, 1970); Agath. *Hist*. pref. 22; Theoph. Sim. *Hist*. 2.3.13.

[46] See P. Allen, *Evagrius Scholasticus: The Church Historian* (Leuven, 1981), 20; and n. 50, below.

Ecclesiastical historians writing in Greek constitute another aspect of the literary source material. References to Arabs are sometimes found in the narratives of the fifth-century authors Sozomen (b. *c.*400) Socrates (b. *c.*380) and Theodoret (b. *c.*393), usually in the context of their adoption of Christianity and its consequences; such brief reports constitute important glimpses into the growing relationships between empire and periphery in the fourth and fifth centuries.[47] These authors continued the tradition begun by Eusebius, and focused on the affairs of the church, the actions of Christian heroes, and the eradication or 'conversion' of pagans.[48] Of these three authors only Theodoret was actively involved in the affairs of the church, but all three aimed to describe church history and the activities of prominent Christians between the reigns of Constantine I and Theodosius II, and the works of Sozomen and Socrates, in particular, were highly popular and reached a wide audience.[49]

Evagrius, Zacharias Rhetor, and John of Ephesus followed this tradition, although in substantially different ways influenced by the religious disputes of the fifth and sixth centuries. Evagrius (b. 532/7, still living in 594) provided a Chalcedonian continuation to Eusebius, writing against the views of the miaphysite Zacharias Rhetor, whose Greek writings (lost) were epitomised in Syriac in the version, edited by E. W. Brooks, which now remains. The style of Evagrius, where ecclesiastical narrative is conjoined with descriptions of secular and natural events, reflects the closeness of ecclesiastical and political historiographical styles in this period, and in some respects his approach to the subject matter reflects that of Agathias and Theophylact. Like Theophylact, Evagrius was also favourable to the Emperor Maurice, and this creates problems for assessing the Emperor's role in the fortunes of the Jafnids towards the end of the sixth century. Another problem is found in the fact that Evagrius favoured a divine explanation for causation, and the analysis of the driving forces behind

[47] See usefully on Socrates et al. D. Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (London, 2002), 108–16 (Socrates), 117–25 (Sozomen), 126–34 (Theodoret), with background, biographical data, and influences; on Sozomen's famous description of the Christianisation of the Arab leader Zokomos, see now Millar, 'Theodosian Empire', 309–13.

[48] Whitby, 'Greek historical writing', 54–5.

[49] Treadgold, *Early Byzantine Historians*, 134–212.

the events which Evagrius describes are often presented, as well, from a distinctly personal perspective.[50]

John of Ephesus is the most prominent Syriac author who writes about the Jafnids, although there are a wide variety of Syriac sources which mention Arabs or discuss them in some way. These have been very usefully traced by Segal.[51] Early Syriac authors, many of whom were inevitably affected by the same types of prejudices, stereotypes, and ideas to which authors writing in Greek were prone, were aware of people sometimes described as Arabs in the populations of Hatra and Edessa, as well as a region called ʿArab,[52] but the emergence of the term *ṭayyāyē* as a means to refer to non-settled Arabs, appearing as early as the beginning of the third century in *The Book of the Laws of Countries*, from the school of Bardaiṣan, parallels the replacement of *Arab* or *Scenite* with *Saracen* in Graeco-Roman sources.[53] In the fifth and sixth centuries, Arabs also appear in the Syriac *Life* of the pillar saint, Symeon the Stylite, appealing to him for healing and conversion, as well as the *Chronicle* of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite which describes events in Mesopotamia at the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth centuries; Joshua describes Arabs in alliance with the Romans and the Sasanians, and fighting on their behalf.[54]

There is also the *Chronicle* of *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē*, also known as the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, which preserves other works, particularly parts of John of Ephesus which are unknown elsewhere.[55] John, who lived between *c*.507 to some time around 588—the exact date is not precisely known—is the most problematic of all the ecclesiastical writers. John provided biographies of holy men, published in the *Patrologia Orientalis* series (translated by Brooks) as the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, stories intended to provide stirring spiritual models

[50] On Evagrius, see *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, trans. and comm. M. Whitby (Liverpool, 2000), especially the introduction, pp. xiii–lxiii. On the matter of causation, see pp. l–li; 'secular' style, p. xlvii. Allen, *Evagrius*, 5–10, 14–20, also offers a useful introduction to Evagrius' background and concerns as an author.

[51] J. B. Segal, 'Arabs in Syriac literature before the rise of Islam', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 4 (1984), 89–124.

[52] e.g. Hatran kings could be called 'king of ʿ*arb*'; this is a problematic term; see the discussion in connection with the Nemāra inscription, in Ch. 3.

[53] Segal 'Arabs in Syriac literature', 93–101, 113–14.

[54] e.g. *V. Sym. Styl.* 56; Josh. Styl. *Chron.* 57, 88.

[55] W. Witakowski, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē: A Study in the History and Historiography* (Uppsala, 1987).

for his audience. The most difficult work is however his *Ecclesiastical History*. This originally consisted of three parts; parts one and two, published together, have been lost and survive only in later excerpts or compilations, or when they are used by other authors such as Michael the Syrian as source material. Much of part two, dealing with John's eyewitness account of the effects of the bubonic plague, survives in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*. The only section of the work which survives intact in the majority (but still with substantial lacunae) is part three, which has been edited and provided with a Latin translation by Brooks.[56]

Most of part three seems to have been written whilst Tiberius II was Emperor (578–82). Van Ginkel suggests that it was in many respects an 'afterthought', produced in response to the persecution of the miaphysites at the end of the reign of Justin II during which John himself was arrested and thrown into prison. These events had a profound impact on the way he approached this part of his history, which is a highly personal, propagandistic, and partisan account of the shifting fortunes of the miaphysites during his time, intended to underscore the place of the miaphysites as preservers of 'orthodox' doctrine. As such, it is the opposite of the work of the Chalcedonian Evagrius. This part of the ecclesiastical history also had distinct eschatological concerns, reflected in John's interest in the many wars in which the Empire was engaged during this time.[57]

The style of the work reflects the political overtones found in the works of Joshua the Stylite and Zacharias Rhetor, and also features aspects of the late antique 'secular' historiographical tradition characterised by Procopius, Agathias, and others. John was also concerned with themes which put an especial emphasis on the actions of the individual, such as the internal controversies amongst the miaphysites, the struggle against those who opposed them, imperial military affairs, and the role, power, and legitimisation of the position of the social elite. He was deeply interested in the person of the Emperor and his divine authority. He was hostile to Justin II, under whom he

[56] John of Ephesus, *Iohannis Ephesini Historiae ecclesiaticae pars tertia*, ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks, 2 vols, *CSCO* Scr. Syr. 3, 54–55 (Paris, 1935–36). There is also an English translation, *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History of John, Bishop of Ephesus*, trans. R. Payne-Smith (Oxford, 1860), now out of date and in urgent need of revision.

[57] J. van Ginkel, 'John of Ephesus: a monophysite historian in sixth-century Byzantium', D. Litt. thesis, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1995, 46–68 (on parts 1 and 2), 70–85.

had been imprisoned, but knew Tiberius II personally and is sympathetic to him. This may explain his fiery indignation, which borders on disbelief, over the arrest of al-Mundhir, which was instigated at the behest of Tiberius.

The focus on the individual and the affairs of the miaphysites also explains why John provided more information about the activities of the Jafnids than his classicising contemporaries, as both al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir were closely linked to the fortunes and aspirations of the miaphysites in Syria, particularly in the attempts to heal discord between different parties in the third quarter of the sixth century.[58] Yet this also means that the portrait of the Jafnids found in the narrative of John is subject to interpretative difficulties, and presents a problem when it comes to assessing the causes of the change in position of the Jafnids at the end of the sixth century. An additional problem is presented by Brooks's editing, as there is still some doubt over where the material detailing the affairs of the Jafnids should be placed.[59] Nevertheless, precisely because he is one of the few authors to discuss the Jafnids in detail, he is an important source for this study.

Finally, amongst the literary sources there are a number of chronicles which cover events during this period, notably those by Malalas and Theophanes, as well as the anonymous *Chronicle to 1234*. Chroniclers tended to update and edit existing sources, before adding information from their own lives. Historical hindsight affected which material was included and which was excluded, and chronicles, like histories, were not immune from personal or ideological influence. The *Chronicle* of the twelfth-century west Syrian (miaphysite) patriarch Michael the Syrian, for example, had distinctive ideological interests and a certain perspective on the past, which certainly shaped the way that the information of previous authors was used and presented.[60]

[58] van Ginkel, 'John of Ephesus', 12–19, 105–8, 119–22, 207–16. See too usefully, Whitby, 'Greek historical writing', 79.

[59] ibid. 82.

[60] Whitby, 'Greek historical writing', 59–66; J. van Ginkel, 'Making history: Michael the Syrian and his sixth century sources', in R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum VII: Uppsala University, Department of Asian and African Languages, 11–14 August 1996* (Rome, 1998), 351–8; see as well A. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, 1993), pp. xxviii–xxix, on ideological and methodological issues surrounding the compilation of these works.

The second major category of sources is the very limited amount of archaeological material, which offers some insight into the activities of the Jafnids and Naṣrids. Here, though, we lack some very basic information, since al-Ḥīrah, the Naṣrid 'centre', was investigated in the 1930s but never fully excavated,[61] and the reputed Jafnid centre at Jabiya still remains to be found. On the other hand, the advances in archaeological survey and interpretation (especially since Tchalenko's influential work on the Belus massif), ongoing excavation work in Syria, and completed and published excavations from sites such as Reṣāfa, provide a great deal of useful data.[62] One particular problem is that of the relationship between the Jafnids and physical structures and building programmes, which will be discussed further throughout this study.

The third set of sources is the very small corpus of epigraphic data in Syriac, Arabic, or Greek related to the Jafnids (for the Naṣrids, the only such information comes from the Paikuli inscription, mentioned above). A small number of these inscriptions appear to have been produced by the Jafnids or those close to them. There is also a corpus of south Arabian inscriptions, collected and analysed by Ryckmans, Robin, and others. A small number of these offer some insight into the activities of the Ḥujrids in north and central Arabia. A particular problem with interpreting inscriptions is trying to assess the weight we should give to certain elements—for example, in Chapter 4, one of the key difficulties of analysing the inscriptions where Greek and Arabic appear side by side is to assess what exactly only several lines of Arabic can reveal about the identity of those who paid for the inscription.

[61] On work at al-Ḥīrah, see the discussion in Ch. 2.

[62] C. Foss, 'The near eastern countryside in late antiquity: a review article', in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Roman and Byzantine Near East*, i. 213–34, offers a useful discussion, covering in particular the re-evaluation of G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du nord*, 3 vols (Paris, 1953–8), offered by G. Tate, *Les campagnes de la Syrie du nord du II^e^ au VII^e^ siècle. Un exemple d'expansion démographique et économique à la fin de l'antiquité* (Paris, 1992), and the impact of the only systematic excavations to have taken place to date, J.-P. Sodini, G. Tate, B. Bavant, S. Bavant, J.-L. Biscop, and D. Orssaud, 'Déhès (Syrie du nord). Campagnes I–III (1976–1978). Recherches sur l'habitat rural', *Syria*, 57 (1980), 1–304. See too C. Foss, 'Syria in transition, A.D. 550–750: an archaeological approach', *DOP*, 51 (1997), 189–269. The excavations at Reṣāfa have been published in five volumes under the direction of Thilo Ulbert, between 1984 and 2002.

The final group of source material is the set of literary accounts produced after the advent of Islam by Muslim authors. Muslim sources offer a substantial amount of information on the Jafnids, Ghassān, Naṣrids, and Lakhmids, with al-Ṭabarī, for example, including much about the Naṣrids and al-Ḥīrah which he obtained from Ibn al-Kalbī. Others, such as the encyclopaedist Yāqūt (575/1179–626/1229) or the philologist and historian Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (b. 280/893, d. after 349/961) recorded the monuments supposedly associated with the Jafnids, as well as their dealings with the Roman Empire,[63] even if Ḥamza's list is now generally accepted to be greatly exaggerated.[64]

There is continued debate over the place and value of Muslim Arabic sources in addressing the various aspects of Arab history, with both Humphreys and Crone, for example, identifying some of the key questions involved with their application for assessing the very beginnings of Islamic society.[65] There are other issues, too, such as the interest and

[63] For a useful introduction to some of the main issues, especially the fundamental one of the complex ways in which early Muslim historical accounts were created, see R. S. Humphreys, *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (rev. edn, London, 1991). Recently the fundamental sceptical work of Albrecht Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung* (Bonn, 1973), has been updated and translated. See now A. Noth, with L. I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, trans. M. Bonner (2nd edn, Princeton, 1994). See as well F. M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, 1998). Donner's work has aroused some controversy, especially over his suggestion that the early Muslim community, up to a certain point, was unconcerned with historical writing. For a response to this, see A. Elad, 'Community of believers of "holy men" and "saints" or community of Muslims? The rise and development of early Muslim historiography', *JSS*, 47/1 (2002), 241–308, and Humphreys, 69–74, on the merits of Donner's work. See as well the very useful article by J. Johns, 'Archaeology and the history of early Islam: the first seventy years', *JESHO*, 46/4 (2003), 411–36. See too the comments by L. Conrad, 'The Arabs', in *CAH* 14, 678–700, at 678, on the difficulties of these historical sources, saying that it is clear that they 'represent a fluid corpus that adopted a range of argumentative views on issues important at the time the accounts were being transmitted and the sources compiled'.

[64] See Sartre, *Trois études*, 182; most recently, D. Genequand, 'Some thoughts on Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, its dam, its monastery and the Ghassanids', *Levant*, 38 (2006), 63–84, at 78; on the problems concerning Ḥamza's list of 'Ghassānid buildings' see the discussion in Ch. 2.

[65] e.g. Humphreys, *Islamic History*, 69, on the way early Muslim sources approach 'the earliest decades of Islamic society', and also general discussions in Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, as well as P. Crone, *Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity* (Cambridge, 1980).

emphasis on ideological and genealogical concerns which may have affected the ways in which Muslim writers conceptualised the past.[66] The 'elevation' of the Jafnids by Ḥamza into builders of monuments and monasteries and the information on the Naṣrids provided by al-Ṭabarī in his narrative on Roman and Sasanian affairs may, for example, have been dependent on contemporary issues, such as a desire to provide certain groups of their own times with a claim to a regal, imperial past. From this perspective the Jafnids and Naṣrids could be aggrandised through a deep connection to the empires which patronised them, but the stories might have been substantially disconnected from the actual events of the sixth century.

Authors such as Kister, Olinder, Rothstein, Nöldeke, and others discussed at regular points throughout this study have all made strong use of the material included in these sources to provide information on the various Arab groups of the fifth and sixth centuries, and, most recently, Crone has demonstrated once more their potential by integrating them into her analysis of the sixth-century Meccan leather trade.[67] In this study, however, I wish to examine the Jafnids and Naṣrids from the perspective of the non-Muslim sources, in part to avoid the distortion which can result from focusing on a group of source material which approaches the period from a substantially different world view. Certainly, Shahid's attempt to use both Muslim and non-Muslim sources showed very clearly the difficulties related to their use, particularly in the way in which they affected the picture provided by the Graeco-Roman source material. As a result I use Muslim sources sparingly in this study, although occasionally (as in the case of much of al-Ṭabarī's narrative on al-Ḥīrah and the Naṣrids) they may constitute some of the only information available and are included to help provide structure. Nevertheless, it is the Greek and Syriac authors, as well as archaeological and epigraphic data, which form the foundation of the study.

One of the aims of this study is to incorporate, in tandem with the primary source analyses, a comparative theoretical framework which has its basis in enquiries into the formation of ethnic groups. As part of this I will include the extremely useful work on the Germanic

[66] T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge, 1994), 232–3; Humphreys, *Islamic History*, 74.

[67] P. Crone, 'Quraysh and the Roman army: making sense of the Meccan leather trade', *BSOAS*, 70/1 (2007), 63–88.

barbarians produced by Pohl, Heather, and others, alongside work on the frontiers of the Roman Empire which (as noted earlier) Hoyland has identified as an appropriate point from which to explore the history of the Jafnids,[68] but I also want to keep in mind as part of this framework a very useful body of research which was originally developed from an anthropological perspective for researching colonial American history.[69] Its conceptual compatibility with developments in ancient frontier theory, best represented by Whittaker, who has demonstrated that frontiers on the ground are not always static borders,[70] and the exploration of ancient boundaries, as reflected by works such as Boyarin's *Border Lines*,[71] suggests that it will be a constructive way to analyse the issues and problems addressed here. It is also compatible with the type of comparative approaches which use other Near Eastern examples, such as the Ottoman–Rwala example applied by Whittow. This 'borderlands' approach is

[68] See the discussion with references in Ch. 3.

[69] The most important anthropological influence has been that of F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Long Grove, Ill., 1998 [1969]), which showed how boundaries between groups were constructed and maintained, and emphasised, in particular, the ways such boundaries could be crossed. Barth provides a useful update on the salient points in id., 'Boundaries and connections', in A. P. Cohen (ed.), *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values* (London, 2000), 17–36.

[70] C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore, 1994). The Shifting Frontiers series of conferences has also done much to develop a more nuanced picture of borders, frontiers, and boundary lines. See on this R. W. Mathisen and H. S. Sivan (eds.), *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot, 1996). See as well the many responses to Parker's *Romans and Saracens*, especially those which have emphasised the permeability of cultural and physical boundaries, such as P. Mayerson, 'Saracens and Romans: micro–macro relationships', *BASOR*, 274 (1989), 71–9, and the lively debate in the same journal (1986–7) between Parker and E. B. Banning. The work of Benjamin Isaac has also been very influential in revising our understanding of the ways in which the Romans were likely to have conceptualised their frontiers. See B. Isaac, 'The meaning of the terms *limes* and *limitanei*', *JRS*, 78 (1988), 125–47, and *Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1990), which also responds importantly to E. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore, 1976), which argued for a defence-in-depth policy on the part of imperial planners. The sequel to this work has now appeared, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009).

[71] D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2004). In this work, Boyarin explored the ways in which early Christians developed their religion by defining it against Judaism, and also engages with the ways in which Judaism developed under the influence of a Christian Roman Empire. On the latter see especially S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, 2001).

particularly well-suited to the study of peripheral or frontier zones, whether geographical, cultural, social, or political, where the focus is on exchange and interaction across nominal boundaries. The best borderlands studies, such as those dealing with the dialogue between Spanish colonisers and missionaries and Native Americans, or the ways in which Native Americans in the Great Lakes took advantage of the ongoing conflict between Britain and France in the eighteenth century to improve their political position, emphasise the fluidity and two-sided nature of such interactions.[72] Indeed, the real strength of this theoretical approach lies in its ability to illuminate the ways in which marginalised groups were and are often able to control aspects of their development, when dealing with powerful imperial entities which, on the surface, appear to control seemingly one-sided relationships. Carefully applied, the 'borderlands' framework offers an extremely flexible way to approach the engagement between empires, peripheries, and frontiers, and also encourages us to view the history of people such as the Jafnids from a macrohistorical perspective which is not confined to the specific context of the ancient world.

There is also an additional benefit to dealing with the empire–Arab relationship from this methodological angle, as artificial divisions and dichotomies pervade many facets of what is discussed here. The somewhat false but ideologically powerful partition between nomadic and settled is a good example, as is the enduring conceptual border between agricultural lands and the desert or steppe. Advances in anthropology have demonstrated that nomads, mobile people who may have derived their sustenance from pastoralism, and settlers, those who did so from agriculture, shared aspects of their economies, society, and culture which were essential to the proper functioning of both parts of society. As with other conceptual opposites, the categories of 'nomad' and 'settled' are best understood as occupying places on a sliding continuum, with any number of possibilities located in between; these ideas

[72] e.g, C. Radding, *Wandering Peoples: Colonialism, Ethnic Spaces and Ecological Frontiers in Northwestern Mexico, 1700–1850* (Durham, NC, 1997); W. L. Merrill, 'Conversion and colonialism in northern Mexico: the Tarahumara response to the Jesuit mission program, 1601–1767', in R. W. Hefner (ed.), *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (Berkeley, 1993) 129–64; R. White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991); J. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002).

reflect the modern approach to frontiers as permeable cultural and political spaces.[73] Nevertheless, mental frontiers and boundaries continue to exist alongside more imposing physical ones such as rivers and mountains. They inevitably influenced the ways in which ancient authors wrote about the world around them, as well as about the Arabs whom they occasionally encountered, observed, or heard about, on the edges of the Roman Empire.

GEOGRAPHY

The geography of the Near East, controlling its most valuable commodity, water, has played a significant role in the history of the region and has important implications for understanding the interactions between the Arabs, the Romans, and the Sasanians.[74] The Fertile Crescent (see Map 1) provided relatively well-watered land for settlement and supported the large cities, villages, and farms of the two empires, sustaining their populations and providing the basis for economic activity. South of the crescent lay the desert, receiving less than 200 millimetres of rain per year, the amount needed for farming without irrigation. These desert regions were and still are comprised of significant geographical variety—plains of gravel, sandstone, lava or basalt, as well as lush oases, areas of pasture and flowers, and scrubland—but presented, for the most part, immense challenges to settlement.[75]

[73] The literature on this topic is extensive, but see most recently collected essays in J. Szuchman, *Nomads, Tribes, and the State in the Ancient Near East: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Chicago, 2008), building on, for example, the influential study of A. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World* (2nd edn, Madison, 1994); essays and introduction in P. C. Salzman (ed.), *When Nomads Settle: Processes of Sedentarization as Adaptation and Response* (New York, 1980); id. and J. G. Galaty (eds.), *Nomads in a Changing World* (Naples, 1990); and U. Fabietti and P. C. Salzman (eds.), *The Anthropology of Tribal and Peasant Pastoral Societies: The Dialectics of Social Cohesion and Fragmentation* (Pavia, 1996).

[74] The best overview of the geography of the region is found in M. Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium, 600–1025* (Berkeley, 1996), 15–37. See as well K. Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (London, 2003), 11–15, 161–6; Isaac, *Limits*, 9–14; G. W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (4th edn, Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 5–11; D. Kennedy and D. Riley, *Rome's Desert Frontier from the Air* (London, 1990), 24–8.

[75] Whittow, *Making of Byzantium*, 32–6; Kennedy and Riley, *Rome's Desert Frontier*, 24–8.

Map 1. The Near East, indicating the 200mm rainfall line, after O. Kennedy and D. Riley, *Rome's Desert Frontier from the Air* (London, 1990), 25.

Inevitably, there was occasional conflict between the populations of the desert and the settled lands of the two empires. The modern anthropological studies discussed above have shown definitively that this conflict was not nearly as stark as once thought, although when water was unavailable or when the arrival of summer reduced the amount of grazing for their animals, the inhabitants of the desert sometimes had little choice but to take advantage of what was 'the greatest oasis of them all' to their north.[76] Beyond this conflict, though,

[76] Whittow, *Making of Byzantium*, 33.

lay patterns of regular contact, based around the poverty of the desert environment, patterns of seasonal migration, the need for pasture and water, and opportunities to exchange goods; settled populations would also have an interest in the desert, which was used by travellers as well as for commercial purposes. In Late Antiquity the extension of settlement and fortifications well into the frontier zones only served to increase the frequency of connections and links between the deserts and the settled lands. Within these frontier zones, the physical manifestations of the Roman Empire, such as the forts and outposts of the so-called *limes Arabicus*[77] or the *strata Diocletiana*, which sometimes punctuated the edge of the cultivatable land, formed places where business could be transacted, caravans watered, religious activities conducted, and frontier disputes settled. One of the most interesting of these frontier locations was the city of Reṣāfa (Ch. 2), with which the Jafnids would associate themselves in the sixth century. The desert would also become a popular choice for individuals wishing to withdraw from society for religious contemplation, and it is not a coincidence that many of the early religious contacts between Christian monks and priests, and Arabs, took place in these liminal regions, which, created by the ecology of the Near East, also formed the practical extent of Roman military and political power.

Competition between the Romans and the Sasanians ensured that the vast empty desert between the two, broken only by the occasional settlement, and the grand oasis city of Palmyra, would not be ignored. No army would cross the desert if there was another way—for example, along the Euphrates—but the people who lived in the desert would become of more interest to Rome and the Sasanians as conflict between the two intensified, as Roman settlement expanded, and as the unpredictable conditions in the desert occasionally forced increased levels of contact across the frontiers. The Arabs of the desert, who would gain a reputation for martial ability and prowess on horseback, would come to the attention of both empires and be used by them to try to find a military or political advantage. And so, as zones of contact between the desert and the settled lands, the frontier areas came to assume a certain degree of importance. We may not then be surprised that while the Jafnids made visits to Constantinople, the places with which they are usually associated

[77] The phrase of S. T. Parker, *Romans and Saracens: A History of the Arabian Frontier* (Winona Lake, 2nd., 1986).

were to be found at, or close to, the edges of the Empire where the settled lands gave way to the steppe and the desert. Places important to the Jafnids included Jebel Seis, in the barren lava desert south of Damascus but which, on occasion, could provide significant amounts of water (Ch. 3); Reṣāfa; and Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī (Ch. 2), a late Roman monastic site to the west of the oasis at Palmyra. These were all places where shelter and water could be obtained, and political and cultural activities conducted, but without too great a commitment or assimilation to Roman politics or culture. The Naṣrids seem to offer a similar situation. Much of their history is difficult to assess accurately, but while they made their base at al-Ḥīrah in Iraq, the location of which is squarely within the fertile territory created by the river Euphrates and close to the Sasanian capital at Ctesiphon, they also seem to have had interests in more remote places. One of these may have been al-Khawarnak, a desert retreat; its exact location is not securely known, but the French explorer Massignon identified a possible site during his expedition to the area in 1907, lying just within reach of the rich lands near the Euphrates.[78]

One of the conclusions of this study is that the Jafnids were neither fully outside nor inside the Roman Empire, and this ensured that they would always remain a people 'in-between'. The geography of the Near East was an important factor in creating this outcome, because it tended to concentrate the contact between people such as the Jafnids and the agents of the Roman Empire in the frontier regions which lay at the edge of Roman power. While not always under direct Roman control, they were still close enough to feel its political pressures and its cultural and religious influences, and these were key factors in the development of Jafnid Arab identity in Syria and northern Arabia in the sixth century.

ROME AND THE SASANIANS

Finally, the dominance of Rome and Iran in the history of the Near East is a factor of considerable importance to this study.[79] The

[78] See Ch. 6.

[79] Reliable sources for the history of the Sasanians are very rare; much of the history of their conflict with Rome must be reconstructed from other sources,

enduring conflict between the Romans and the Parthians, and then, after 224, between the Romans and the Sasanians, ensured a long-lived demand for effective frontier allies. Competition for influence at the fringes of imperial power provided opportunities for petty kings, adventurers, and local rulers to form alliances with one, or both, of the two empires. The list of potential allies was long; the Romans formed agreements with kings of Armenia, with the Lazi and Tzani, with groups of Avars, with Slavs, Huns, and, of course, when imperial interests shifted southwards, with Arabs.

The conflict between Rome and Iran was not new. L. Cornelius Sulla had concluded a treaty of friendship with the Parthians during the last century of the Republic, but Roman ambitions brought Crassus to defeat at Carrhae in 53 BC and began a long, drawn-out conflict punctuated by periods of wary peace. Trajan pushed the Roman frontiers into Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Arabia; his rule was instrumental in establishing an enduring Roman interest in the east.[80] At the end of the second century, Septimius Severus launched an ambitious invasion of the Parthian Empire, capturing Ctesiphon and occupying northern Mesopotamia. One of the consequences of these actions was a greater commitment to the Near East, and a greater frequency of conflict.[81] Much later, the conflict took a new turn when the Parthians were overthrown by Ardashir, the first of the

including Roman classicising historians and ecclesiastical histories composed in Greek and Syriac. For an overview, especially on the ideology of the Sasanians and the efficiency of government, a driving force in the threat which they posed to the Romans, see J. Howard-Johnston, 'State and society in late antique Iran', in V. S. Curtis and S. Stewart (eds.), *The Idea of Iran*, iii: *The Sasanian Era* (London, 2008), 118–31. Generally, on Rome and Iran in the Near East: F. Millar, *The Roman Near East. 31 BC–AD 337* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); R. C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy: Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (London, 1992); Isaac, *Limits*; G. Greatrex, 'Byzantium and the east in the sixth century', in Maas (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 477–509; id., *Rome and Persia at War*, 502–532; J. Howard-Johnston, 'The two great powers in Late Antiquity: a comparison', in Averil Cameron (ed.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, iii: *States, Resources and Armies* (Princeton, 1995), 157–226; B. Dignas and E. Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals* (Cambridge, 2007), esp. the concise historical sketch pp. 9–49; A. D. Lee, *Information and Frontiers: Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. 15–23.

[80] Millar, *Roman Near East*, esp. 99–102, on Trajan, campaign of AD 114 in Armenia; Mesopotamia, 115–16, and in Arabia, at the Persian Gulf, before his death in 117, and Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 81–5.

[81] Isaac, *Limits*, 15; Millar, *Roman Near East*, 120–6.

militant Sasanian dynasty,[82] and who, Dio claimed, had designs on Roman territory as far as the eastern Mediterranean.[83]

Wars against Sasanian Iran, and the search for allies along the frontier, made certain that the Romans would make a long-term commitment to the defence of the Eastern Empire. The nature of Roman motives is a subject of some considerable debate, but Isaac's argument that the Romans held designs and ambitions on parts of the Parthian and Sasanian empires is compelling; whether or not the Sasanians truly desired to acquire the lost territory of the Achaemenids is another matter, but they were unwilling to allow a lasting Roman presence east of the Euphrates, and both made repeated invasions into the territory of the other.[84] The Roman commitment in the east which endured throughout Late Antiquity as a result of this situation is visible in the establishment of a permanent military presence, especially in the deserts of Syria along the *strata Diocletiana*, the chain of forts and bases south to the Red Sea, and, as well, the fortified cities of the frontier regions—Dara, Nisibis, Singara, Amida, Zenobia, Reṣāfa, and others.[85]

The Sasanians proved dangerous and formidable enemies. Shapur I famously captured the Roman Emperor Valerian at Edessa in 260, commemorated in the rock reliefs at Naqsh-ī-Rustam, in Fars, and recorded in the so-called *Res Gestae Divi Saporis*.[86] Shortly afterwards Aurelian dealt decisively with the revolt of Palmyra, a city which had formed an important buffer between the Romans and Sasanians and which, under Odaenathus, had performed an invaluable service in the defence of Syria.[87] The removal of this buffer increased the likelihood

[82] Herodian, 6.2.6–7; Dio 53.2.1–2; Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy*, 101–2.

[83] Dio 53.3.

[84] Isaac, *Limits*, 19–53; Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity*, 56–8.

[85] *Strata*: J. W. Eadie, 'The transformation of the eastern frontier, 260–305', in Mathisen and Sivan (eds.), *Shifting Frontiers*, 72–82; M. Konrad, 'Research on the Roman and early Byzantine frontier in North Syria', *JRA* 12 (1999), 392–410. On the fortifications of the *limes Arabicus*, Parker, *Romans and Saracens*; D. Kennedy, *The Roman Army in Jordan* (London, 2004), cities, Isaac, *Limits*, 252–60, although it is important to note the variety in purpose of such installations, most notably discussed by Isaac, *Limits*; see too G. Fisher, 'A new perspective on Rome's desert frontier', *BASOR*, 336 (2004), 49–60, responding to Parker's arguments.

[86] 'Res Gestae Divi Saporis', ed. and trans. A. Maricq, *Syria*, 35 (1958), 245–60.

[87] Zos. *Hist. Nov*. 1. 54–6; *SHA Aurel*. 26–7. Palmyra's position as a trading post and wealthy centre between Rome and Iran was not dissimilar to that of Hatra, which was heavily contested by both empires in the third century. Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity*, 19–22.

of further conflict on a substantial scale, and, indeed, in 282, Carus embarked on a major invasion to the east, which resulted in the capture of the Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon.[88] This goal was also on the mind of Julian, who attempted a large invasion of the Sasanian Empire in 363. The offensive failed, Julian succumbed to the wounds he had received in battle,[89] and a hurried peace was agreed from a position of great disadvantage by his successor Jovian (363/4).

The fifth century was relatively quiet, although religious tensions, focused on Christian 'refugees' from Iran, caused a brief conflict in 421/2.[90] Stubbornness over the somewhat reasonable requests from the Sasanians for a Roman financial contribution to the defence of the Caucasus caused tension,[91] acting as the catalyst for a short war in 441 which also had its origins in attempts by Theodosius II to fortify the eastern frontier regions.[92] In the sixth century the Sasanians renewed their aggressive stance towards the Roman Empire. One cause of the new conflict was the urgent Sasanian need for money to fill their depleted treasury; requests and threats directed at the Romans, designed to achieve this aim, were not met kindly by Anastasius (491–518) and provoked a conflict in which the Romans lost Amida.[93] Similarly, Roman attempts to fortify the border regions which lay between the two empires, especially the city of Dara, opposite the Sasanian fortress at Nisibis, caused friction.[94] Neither empire was able to conclusively eliminate the other, if indeed that was ever an aim, but as competition escalated, the Romans and Sasanians found themselves locked in a military stalemate with little opportunity to make progress in traditional theatres, such as Mesopotamia. The conflict continued throughout the sixth century, leading eventually to a devastating series of events which culminated in a serious Sasanian offensive and occupation, reversed

[88] SHA *Car.* 8.1.
[89] Amm. 25.3.
[90] F. Decret, 'Les conséquences sur le Christianisme en Perse de l'affrontement des empires romain et sassanide', *ReAug* 14 (1979), 91–152, at 150–2.
[91] Joh. Lyd. *De Mag.* 3.52.
[92] R. C. Blockley, 'Subsidiaries and diplomacy: Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity', *Phoenix*, 39 (1985), 62–74, at 66; Z. Rubin, 'Diplomacy and war in the relations between Byzantium and the Sassanids in the fifth century AD', in P. Freeman and D. Kennedy (eds.), *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East: Proceedings of a Colloquium held at the University of Sheffield in April 1986* (Oxford, 1986), ii. 677–95.
[93] Proc. *BP* 1.7.1–2.
[94] Ibid. 1.10.1–9.

only, at the last gasp, by the daring exploits of Heraclius on the eve of the Muslim invasions.

As each side sought to gain an advantage through military means or, alternatively, diplomatic intrigue, Roman and Sasanian interest in Armenia,[95] the Caucasus,[96] and Arabia[97] increased, drawing the people who lived there into imperial affairs in more direct ways than before. In the end, clientship would subordinate Tzani, Lazicans, Arabs, and others to the interests of their patrons, and would exert immense political, cultural, and religious pressures on these groups. Yet at the same time, it also provided unprecedented access to the means, especially for the elites placed between the empires, in Arabia, in Iberia, in Armenia, and elsewhere, to build wealth and power through becoming associated and involved in the affairs of these two powerful states.

Millar has argued for the central importance of the 'framework created by imperial power' for the understanding of the history of the Near East.[98] If we are to properly understand the role and place of groups of Arabs such as the Jafnids, the Naṣrids, and indeed the Ḥujrids in the sixth century, then we must carefully integrate them into a historical framework which acknowledges the broader context of the late antique Near East, and most importantly, the wider consequences of the relationship between the two last great empires of antiquity, which created the conditions for dynastic groups such as the Jafnids to develop in the ways argued here.

[95] The Romans had long been interested in Armenia, and there were many attempts to win its loyalty. It was divided between the Romans and Sasanians after Julian's failed invasion in 363, but remained contested under Anastasius and Justinian. See M.-L. Chaumont, *Recherches sur l'histoire d'Arménie de l'avènement des sassanides à la conversion du royaume* (Paris, 1969); Isaac, *Limits*, 234–5; Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 173–88.

[96] Particularly Iberia and Lazica, of strategic importance because of the small number of passable routes between north and south. The territory of Iberia controlled the vital pass of the Caucasian Gates. See Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 189–90.

[97] *Provincia* Arabia was annexed in 108 (Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 81–5), but the Arabian peninsula proper would assume much greater importance in the fifth and sixth centuries. This is discussed in Ch. 3.

[98] Millar, *Roman Near East*, 23.

2

Aspects of Arab Christianisation in Late Antiquity[1]

INTRODUCTION

Closer contacts with the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries introduced the Arabs of the Syro-Mesopotamian steppe to a world where religious affiliation was never very distant from issues of political power and control. To some extent, the two had always been entwined in such a way, but for the post-Constantinian Roman world Christian monotheism constituted an overt and significant influence on the identity of the Roman Empire.[2] On the periphery, religion was rarely absent from political interests and could be used as an effective tool to bind subject peoples to the Empire, a process which more often than not laid claim less to religious transformation than to assimilation and acculturation.[3] Yet while monotheistic

[1] An earlier and briefer treatment of this topic was presented to the 'Late Antique Crossroads in the Levant' conference, held in Montreal, 1–4 November 2006, and will appear in the published proceedings of the conference edited by Ellen B. Aitken and John M. Fossey, vol. 22 of the series McGill University Monographs in Classical Archaeology and History.

[2] G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 3–4, 57, who makes a powerful (although sometimes overstated) case for the conjoining of monotheism and political power; also id., 'Varieties of religious community', in Bowersock et al. (eds.), *Interpreting Late Antiquity*, 82–106, at 89; A. al-Azmeh, 'Monotheistic kingship,' in A. al-Azmeh and J. M. Bak (eds.), *Monotheistic Kingship: The Medieval Variants* (Budapest, 2004), 9–30, at 14; see too H. A. Drake, 'The impact of Constantine on Christianity', in N. Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2006), 111–36, at 111–13.

[3] M. Maas, '"Delivered from their ancient customs": Christianity and the question of cultural change in early Byzantine ethnography', in K. Mills and A. Grafton (eds.), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Rochester, NY, 2003), 152–88, at 159.

ideology was conjoined with that of empire in powerful ways, late antique religious landscapes did not always match the rhetoric and frequently offered extensive room for manoeuvre.[4] Even after the concerns of Christian authors drifted away from the focus on Christianity as a civilising force to address the internal divisions within the sixth-century Christian world, the opportunities to manipulate and be manipulated did not entirely disappear.

This chapter examines one small aspect of this picture: the Christianisation of Arab groups during Late Antiquity. Focusing on textual, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence, it examines the consequences not only of adopting Christianity, which necessarily involved choosing to be publicly identified with a powerful cultural and political force, but also of choosing the opposite—avoiding an association with the Christian religion. These processes, played out within the limits of Rome as well as Sasanian Iran, involved the two dominant Arab elite dynasties of the fifth and sixth centuries, the Naṣrids of al-Ḥīrah, and the Jafnids, allied to the Roman Empire.

PART ONE: PROCESSES, CONSEQUENCES, AND SUBTEXTS OF CHRISTIANISATION

Processes

The arrival of Christianity altered the categories of inclusion and exclusion, used by authors to construct the ways through which barbarians or non-Romans might join the Empire.[5] During the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, religion appeared alongside traditional influences—law, buildings, and classical culture—as a civiliser which might remake and transform frontier peoples into reliable Christian allies.[6] In many cases, the Christianisation of a peripheral people, or the formal incorporation of a group which was already Christian, resulted in political alliance or subordination. It could also promote the centralisation of power around a Christian leader, as

[4] R. Lim, 'Christian triumph and controversy', in Bowersock et al. (eds.), *Interpreting Late Antiquity*, 196–218, at 197; see too A. D. Lee, 'Traditional religions', in Lenski (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 159–83, at 172–3.

[5] Maas, ' "Delivered from their ancient customs" ', 153–7.

[6] Ibid. 161; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 3.

seems to have occurred in Axum and Iberia.[7] Christianity became a critical ingredient in political affairs; in his version of an argument between Lazican elders over the possible results of cultural and political subordination to either Rome or Iran, Agathias has the pro-Roman speaker, Phartazes, argue that alliance with Iran would be a disaster, as the Lazi would be prevented from exercising their right to Christian worship. Phartazes continued, saying that without the collateral offered by common religious ties, any alliance with Persia could only be illusory and insecure.[8] Such religious bonds had important consequences that went well beyond matters of belief or ritual and, while the classicising speech of Phartazes is clearly constructed, it points to the fact that religion in general (and Christianity in particular) was understood to be conjoined with political power in deep and compelling ways.

From a literary perspective, where Arabs were Christianised, stereotypical ideas about nomadic barbarism were dominant, and the narratives detailing their entry to the Christian *oikumenē* tend to focus on the most basic ethnographic elements. In remarkably one-sided narratives cast in the biblical language of renewal, redemption, and rebirth common to the classic accounts of conversion, and driven by dramatic signs and symbols,[9] Arab groups encountered wandering eremites and monks who had withdrawn from predominantly settled areas to pursue an ascetic existence. These desert holy men were allegedly the primary agents in the introduction of Christianity to Arab groups, and for the majority of the time accomplished this task through the healing of the sick, lame, and childless. For example, Cyril of Scythopolis tells the story of how a certain Aspebetos adopted Christianity after St Euthymius cured his son Terebon of an ailment which (for notable dramatic effect) an Iranian *magus* had been unable

[7] C. Haas, 'Mountain Constantines: the Christianization of Aksum and Iberia', *JLA*, 1/1 (2008), 101–26.

[8] Agath. *Hist.* 3.12.7–8; see too Proc. *Aed.* 3.7.6; *BP* 1.12.2–4; also Evag. *HE* 5.7, on the Armenians, which offers similar themes.

[9] On the mechanics of Christianisation in this fashion, see Lim, 'Christian triumph', 198; R. MacMullen, 'Two types of conversion to early Christianity', *VChr* 37/2 (1983), 174–92, at 180; id., *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100–400)* (New Haven, 1984), 25; also R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), 189–90; see too P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, 1992), 128.

to heal.[10] The ecclesiastical historian Sozomen describes the story of Zokomos, leader of an anonymous Arab group Christianised by a wandering monk during the same time period. Childless, he was told to pray to God for a healing; he miraculously had a son, and in consequence his entire tribe became Christian with him.[11] There are other examples. In the *Life of St Hilarion*, Jerome emphasises the frequency with which the saint awed his Arab audience by driving out evil spirits.[12] Theodoret relates the successful rehabilitation of an Arab queen, as well as another Arab individual who asked Symeon to heal a paralysed man.[13] Sometimes the simple figure of the ascetic was enough: Symeon Stylites reportedly awed the Arabs who came into contact with him, stunning them into becoming Christians and abandoning the use of pagan icons.[14] Through these stylised and vivid episodes, barbarian Arabs were transformed by becoming Christian: from a lower state of being, they were able to achieve membership in an ordered Christian world where they could safely cast aside false gods, renounce the meat of camels and wild asses, and follow a civilised existence.[15]

These highly rhetorical accounts were designed to emphasise the perceived dramatic changes brought about by a new faith in God, and the rejection of a pagan past. Yet they leave little room for manoeuvre and tend to obscure the complex processes that accompanied 'conversion'. 'Conversion' implies a simple one-way event, a perspective reinforced by ancient narratives such as those discussed here as well as works on the phenomenon by early modern and twentieth-century authors and anthropologists.[16] But the acculturative and assimilative

[10] Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth*. 15; see too on this Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 109, and Isaac, *Limits*, 246–7.

[11] Soz. *HE* 6.38.

[12] Jer. *Vit. Hil*. 1–12, 25 (*PL* 23, col. 41.).

[13] Theod. *HR* 16.21.

[14] *V. Sym. Styl*. 56; see similar ideas in the life of Symeon in Theod. *HR* 26.13, also *HR* 16.15; *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 7, 133), describing the work of Abraham the Great (491–586) in turning Arabs away from the 'cult of the star'; generally on these issues, P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge, 1995), 65.

[15] Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth*. 15.

[16] The literature is extensive: for the classic account, see: A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford, 1933); see as well H. J. Mol, *Identity and the Sacred: A Sketch for a New Social-Scientific Theory of Religion* (Oxford, 1976), discussed by H. C. Kee, *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective* (London, 1980), 76; for a discussion of twentieth-century perspectives, see R. W. Hefner, 'Introduction: world building and the rationality of conversion', in *Conversion to Christianity*, 3–44, at 10, discussing in turn J. G. Frazer, *The Golden*

process of Christianisation was characterised by any number of social, political, and cultural effects which went far beyond a passive acceptance of Christian religion. A particularly fruitful area of research in this regard has focused on the American colonial era, where careful studies of the interactions between representatives of the European empires and colonial natives have identified the dynamism and immense variability of experiences of Christianisation. The subtleties in the Christianisation process which such studies address are useful to keep in mind when assessing the Christianisation of peripheral people by priests, monks, and bishops of other, older empires.[17]

In the ancient world, Christian religious practice could become part of sacred landscapes in numerous ways. Graeco-Roman deities found equivalencies in non-Graeco-Roman religion, such as al-ʿUzzā for Aphrodite or Allāt for Athena;[18] and so, as Christianity entered the religious consciousness of the Near East, it was reported that the Nabataeans and Egyptians worshipped a virgin goddess who gave birth to a god-child, suggesting that Christian practice was being actively absorbed within indigenous traditions.[19] The Syriac life of St Symeon describes polytheist 'pagan' villagers who used Christian boundary markers to ward off mice and werewolves,[20] while in late

Bough (London, 1922), M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston, 1956), R. Bellah, 'Religious evolution', *American Sociological Review* 29 (1964), 358–74, and C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973).

[17] Useful studies include: Merrill, 'Conversion and colonialism in northern Mexico', 156; J. J. Klor de Alva, 'Spiritual conflict and accommodation in New Spain: toward a typology of Aztec responses to Christianity', in G. Collier, R. I. Rosaldo, and J. D. Wirth (eds.), *The Inca and Aztec States 1400–1800: Anthropology and History* (New York, 1982), 345–66, esp. 350–6; J. Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, Calif., 1992); A. M. Josephy Jr., *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest* (New Haven, 1965); D. J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, 1992), 117; see too W. B. Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred. Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford, Calif., 1996); A. Greer, 'Conversion and identity: Iroquois Christianity in seventeenth-century New France', in Mills and Grafton (eds.), *Conversion*, 175–98.

[18] Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, 20, 39–40.

[19] Epiph. *Panarion. haer.* 51.22.9–12.

[20] *V. Sym. Syr.* 61, 63, discussed by Brown, *Authority*, 66; cf. G. W. Bowersock, 'Polytheism and monotheism in Arabia and the three Palestines', *DOP* 51 (1997), 1–10, at 6: 'In Caesarea sat a Christian bishop, while pagan gods were cultivated alongside the Talmudic investigations of rabbis . . . At Petra, amid the rock tombs of ancient Nabataean worthies, and virtually adjacent to a Nabataean temple, stood a Christian church within earshot of the annual celebration of the birth of the indigenous god Dusares.'

antique Egypt an Alexandrian noble appealed to Christ for healing, but did so on the grounds that his horoscope might come true.[21] Epigraphic evidence points to the ease with which non-Christian belief continued to exist alongside or mix with its Christian corollary; sometimes the simple addition of the '+' cross symbol could transform a habitually used non-Christian formula into a Christian one.[22] Adherence to or use of Christianity was therefore quite compatible with familiar symbols of 'pagan' or polytheistic belief,[23] and, as well, with certain aspects of the hierarchical Neoplatonist background to late antique religion which, as has been recently argued, was trending towards a non-Christian monotheism.[24]

Consequences

The Christianisation of the leaders of peripheral peoples inevitably brought change linked to the organisational structures of the Roman state, and this could sometimes go far beyond the receipt of any spiritual message. Manifesting even a superficial interest in Christianity endowed those who took advantage of it with increased social mobility, granting access to a wider imperial world with new opportunities.[25] It might even bring unexpected benefits, as Theodoret describes in his anecdote about a village which received a tax break

[21] *Miracula SS. Cyri et Johannis* 20, discussed by Brown, *Authority*, 69.

[22] e.g. *IG* 12.8, no. 582, which Christianises a traditional form of inscription calling for the safe passage of boats with the decidedly un-Christian names of *Poseidon* and *Asklepius*; for more on this see F. R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization, c.370–529*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1993–4), i. 183–4.

[23] Hoyland, *Arabia*, 139: 'if you believe in many gods . . . there is no reason to be hostile to gods not your own, nor any bar to paying them and their faithful your respects'; see too A. al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London, 1997), 10; Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, 6; Brown, *Authority*, 67–8, calls pagans 'impenitent *bricoleurs*' and 'hackers of the supernatural'; see too D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, 1998), which offers a nuanced and anthropologically influenced assessment.

[24] al-Azmeh, 'Monotheistic kingship,' 15, 19; M. Frede and P. Athanassiadi (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1999).

[25] Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 116, who writes that one motive for conversion 'was the way its adoption facilitated social and political relationships with the Roman authority'; R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London, 1986), 319; see too D. K. Jordan, 'Afterword: boundaries and horizons', in Hefner (ed.), *Conversion*, 305–21, at 308; Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, 115, writing of the benefits (protection from settlers and soldiers) which arrived with Christianisation.

for becoming Christian.[26] As interactions with the *oikumenē* became more sophisticated, opportunities for advancement emerged through imperial recognition of barbarian convert leaders through military service, stipends, and patronage. At the very least, converts achieved a new social respectability which distanced them from the label 'barbarian' or 'savage' and which allowed them to take part in 'la politique chrétienne locale'.[27] The Arab adventurer Amorkesos, who had already seized the island of Iotabe in the Gulf of Ayla, depriving Constantinople of valuable tax revenue, was able to legitimise his acts (and gain imperial recognition as phylarch) through the double ploy of sending a bishop ahead on his behalf and then offering the pretence of Christianity in front of the Emperor, who seems to have had his own reasons for playing along with the ruse.[28]

Yet while the veneer of Christianity jointly presented by Leo and Amorkesos provided a semblance of legitimacy to an otherwise suspect political transaction, it also threatened to entangle the Arab adventurer in a subtly concealed and passive mechanism of control, and here there emerges a different side to the apparent benefits of Christianisation. For Amorkesos, his 'acceptance' of Christianity had the restrictive effect of rendering him as a political subordinate to the Emperor within a hierarchy which was neither of his choosing, nor his creation.[29] The new 'alliances', too, could be one-sided. The anonymous Arabs led by Zokomos, whose Christianisation is described by Sozomen, became enemies of the Sasanians, almost by default, after their leader became Christian. Fowden overstates the issue when he describes those like Zokomos as 'spiritually dependent' on Rome, and one suspects that the anti-Sasanian posture of this group had more to do with subsidy and political support than religion; yet the results were the same.[30]

Christianisation was an important tool for the Empire. When another peripheral group, the Tzani, became Christian, they too provided soldiers to Rome, a reflection of how becoming Christian might facilitate incorporation into the machinery of the Roman

[26] Theod. *HR* 17.2–3.

[27] R. G. Hoyland, 'Anasartha, Andarin et les villes de la steppe', *Dossiers d'Archéologie et Sciences des Origines* 309 (2005/6), 72–3, at 73.

[28] Malchus, fr. 2.

[29] Cf. Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, 117, on similar processes in New Spain.

[30] Soz. *HE* 6.38; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 120.

Empire.[31] For the Tzani, too, the imposition of forts and other buildings in their territory, a process which paralleled their Christianisation, reflects their perceived place within Justinian's programme of renewal, which included the subjugation and re-conquering of a number of regions on the edge of the Empire.[32] Elsewhere, the fifth-century cold war between Rome and the Sasanians had demonstrated the role of religion in winning and controlling political affiliates;[33] and, aside from the Tzani and Lazicans, Justinian's political-missionary efforts with the Blemmyes, Nobades, and Heruls aimed to bring them into the Roman Christian orbit, 'converting' them into political neutrals.[34] Relations with Ḥimyar in south Arabia too were usually far better during the periods when the kingdom possessed a Christian ruler.[35] In addition, although it is unlikely that Constantine deliberately imposed Christianity on the Goths,[36] Ulfila's work north of the Danube was met with some resistance by an astute Gothic leadership who saw it as 'an extension of Roman imperialism',[37] or, at the very least, viewed Christianity's influence as a 'fifth column' which threatened to bring them within the control of imperial interests.[38]

Christianisation sometimes included settlement or sedentarisation as a goal or an unintentional side effect. The bringing of order, which settlement achieved, had a civilising effect in the eyes of Christian authors. This anthropological phenomenon is visible in the reorganisation of space and the construction of buildings which occurred

[31] Proc. *BP* 1.15.26; *Aed.* 3.6.6–8.

[32] Maas, '"Delivered from their ancient customs"', 165; Proc. *Aed.* 3.6.9–14, describing the construction of forts, roads—and churches. The political dimension of Christianisation is a key aspect of the *Buildings*.

[33] See discussion in Z. Rubin, 'Diplomacy and war', 683; also, Decret, 'Les conséquences sur le Christianisme en Perse'; most recently, F. K. Haarer, *Anastasius I: Politics and Empire in the Late Roman World* (Cambridge, 2006), 47–8, and Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity*, 210–31.

[34] e.g. the Christianisation and pacification of Heruls under Justinian: Proc. *BG* 6.14.28–36, reported too by Evag. *HE* 4.20; see as well L. van Rompay, 'Society and community in the Christian east', in Maas (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 239–66, at 250–1; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 103–4.

[35] Haarer, *Anastasius*, 41.

[36] As correctly noted by M. Kulikowski, 'Constantine and the northern barbarians', in Lenski (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, 347–76, at 361–3.

[37] P. Heather, 'The late Roman art of client management: imperial defence in the fourth century west', in W. Pohl, I. Wood, and H. Reimitz (eds.), *The Transformation of Frontiers: From Late Antiquity to the Carolingians* (Leiden, 2001), 15–68, at 24–5.

[38] Kulikowski, 'Constantine and the northern barbarians', 361–3; Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy*, 116–17, 141.

alongside evangelisation. The forts and other buildings built by Justinian in Tzanian territory fulfilled such a role, and this is another reason why the Gothic leadership viewed Ulfila's mission with a certain degree of suspicion. Those who were seen to be nomads were particularly susceptible to such pressures. The proportion of those who settled against those who did not, and whether or not the description of nomads in literature is even a partial reflection of the reality on the ground, is very much unknown, although it is reasonable to imagine that some, like the elites, had more of a reason to settle than others because of their more intimate associations with the Empire. Nevertheless, the arrival of a strong pressure to settle in parallel with Christianisation, in other periods, has typically presented a severe challenge to traditional lifeways and group identity and cohesion, and it is very likely that settlement pressures were brought to bear on steppe Arabs as they were introduced to Christianity.[39] This need not have been a sinister process of the type described by historians of the American colonial era—in some examples it was the 'converts' themselves who engaged, voluntarily, in settlement around newly constructed buildings, as we find in the narrative concerned with the followers of Petrus (the newly baptised Aspebetos) and St Euthymius. Indeed, the existence of the Palestinian 'Parembole' or 'Encampment', of which Petrus/Aspebetos was the first bishop, suggests an image of the steady settlement of an unknown number of Arabs, the followers of Aspebetos, who remained and settled in the region.[40] These were drawn, according to Cyril of Scythopolis, to come to Euthymius for baptism and to worship God. Beneath the rhetorical aspects of the story, the suggestion remains that the adoption of Christianity by these individuals, under the leadership of Peter, and the guidance of Euthymius, was indeed resulting in settlement.[41] Interestingly, this hints at the ways that the Christianisation of the elite or leaders might prompt the settlement of others as a natural consequence of sorts, and the story of Peter raises the possibility of a correspondence with the situation faced by the Jafnids and those under their control. Did the

[39] e.g. for Spanish missionary attempts to force settlement alongside the introduction of Christianity, see Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 277; T. Braatz, *Surviving Conquest. A History of the Yavapai Peoples* (Lincoln, Nebr., 2003), 23.

[40] Shahid, *Fifth Century*, 40–9, 181–90.

[41] Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.* 15; Shahid, *Fifth Century*, 40–9, 181–90.

Christianisation of the Jafnids prompt the settlement of a wider number of people? It is certainly a possibility. The issue of settlement is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, but it is, in the end, an open question.

While any settlement in the Palestinian Parembole may have been a 'passive' result of Christianisation, in the Syriac *Life* of the miaphysite bishop of Tikrīt, Aḥūdemmeh (consecrated through the agency of Jacob Baradaeus; d. *c.*575[42]), we find what seems to be a more conscious programme of control. Part of the *Life* describes his efforts to evangelise the surrounding regions, and as part of this programme, Aḥūdemmeh made every attempt to draw Arab groups living in marginalised steppe areas towards 'settled' centres of Christian activity. This was, if nothing else, a subtle attempt to entice them away from areas where they might not easily be controlled, and to place them under the supervision of the local church, no doubt with the goal of moving them away from what was perceived to be an errant lifestyle.[43]

Settlement was not the only change which could result from Christianisation. As economic opportunities and traditional lifeways were altered by the incorporation of natives into a Christian imperial world, societies became stratified into new elite and non-elite levels, which were framed in imperial terms.[44] Stratification (or differentiation) involved a change in identity which was most acutely felt by the elite, who had to contend the most with the realities of new institutional, religious, political, or cultural affiliations. This was the natural consequence of closer involvement with imperial affairs and the assumption of high military, administrative, or ecclesiastical

[42] Biographical information in Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 106.

[43] *Hist. Ahud.* 4 (*PO* 3, 26–7); Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 106–7; Fowden, *Barbarian Plain* 121–3. The efforts of Aḥūdemmeh should also be seen within the context of Roman–Sasanian competition, and the use of missionary activity for political purposes. The energetic bishop is said to have built a church that resembled the shrine of S. Sergius at Reṣāfa to deter his local group of Arab pastoralist 'converts' from leaving his sphere of influence. Also, Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 121.

[44] See e.g. R. van Dam, *Becoming Christian: The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia, 2003), 50; in other periods: J. Adelman and S. Aron, 'From borderlands to borders: empires, nation-states, and the peoples in between in North American history', *AHR*, 104/3 (1999), 814–41, at 830–1; Radding, *Wandering Peoples*, 17, 252–6, 262–3; Weber, *Spanish Frontier*, 105–6.

positions, itself an increasingly frequent characteristic of the interaction between Roman and barbarian.[45] One example of the problems which this could cause is given by Ammianus, describing the career of the Frankish officer Silvanus. Under political suspicion from his Roman superiors, Silvanus was contemplating flight to the Franks on the 'other' side of the Rhine, when it was made known to him that he could not expect a strong welcome by a people who now viewed him as 'too' Roman. It was principally his close involvement with the Roman military hierarchy which had earned him this dilemma.[46] A few high-ranking individuals were able to maintain membership in multiple groups, such as Mallobaudes, who appears as *comes domesticorum* as well as king of the Franks; a recent study of Ostrogothic Italy has shown the ease with which social identities could be manipulated, but the higher the position, the harder it was to operate in such a way.[47] It is likely that eventually even individuals such as Mallobaudes would have come under pressure to identify more clearly with one affiliation or another.[48]

Among Arab groups developing closer ties with the Empire, the emerging prominence of individual group leaders who became bishops or received Roman titles and imperial recognition acts as an indicator of the process of stratification. Tribal elites could be divided from their groups by such events, which introduced new, externally ordered social hierarchies, constituting significant change for groups with a background characterised by a history of relative

[45] Cf. Hoyland, 'Arab kings, Arab tribes, Arabic texts', placing the situation of the Arabs within this wider imperial context, and discussing the possible social changes within tribal groupings as a result; for an anthropological perspective on the process for peoples from nomadic or pastoralist backgrounds, see Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, 218; B. Barber, *Social Stratification: A Comparative Analysis of Structure and Process* (New York, 1957).

[46] Amm. 15.5.15; Kulikowski, 'Constantine and the northern barbarians', 366–7; K. F. Stroheker, *Germanentum und Spätantike* (Zürich, 1965), 19–21; Heather, 'Late Roman art', 41–3.

[47] P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489–554* (Cambridge, 1997), 192–3: in Ostrogothic Italy, the ebb and flow of the Justinianic conquest produced 'Goths' and 'Romans' in varying measure, depending on where the advantage lay. Different membership criteria 'were fully available for use, if one had the right associations, believed that one had the right associations, or could convince people that one had the right associations'.

[48] Amm. 31.10.6; G. Greatrex, 'Roman identity in the sixth century', in Mitchell and Greatrex (eds.), *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity*, 267–92, at 268–9, 274.

isolation from the society and culture of the Empire.[49] In the *Life of St Euthymius*, Aspebetos changed his name to 'Petrus' following his baptism and was subsequently elevated to a position in the military administration, and, under his new name, became bishop, appearing as a participant at the Council of Ephesus in 431. It might be wondered how he was perceived by the majority of his people whom he had brought to Roman territory from Iran, and who had been baptised, unasked, and were now led by a 'Roman' bishop.[50] The most dramatic examples of stratification of this kind are provided by the Jafnid elite. The Jafnid leaders al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir both made official visits to Constantinople in their capacity as Christian allies of the Empire,[51] and they also appear in the literary and epigraphic record replacing consuls and emperors in dating formulas,[52] and, as the recipients of the Roman title *patrikios*, were elevated as new figures of importance within the imperial hierarchy.[53]

Ultimately, stratification could dramatically increase the rate of acculturation of a very small percentage of a group, typically the elite who stood to benefit the most from a closer association with imperial authority. But with imperial titles and money came a closer attachment to the Empire that was not experienced by all and, as a result, the cohesion of the group could be threatened. The social pressures and changes which formed part of the cultural package which arrived alongside Christianity carried—especially for relatively powerful leaders such as al-Ḥārith or al-Mundhir—a threat that, like Silvanus, one might become unrecognisable to the people to whom one felt one

[49] For anthropological perspectives, see Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, 218–27; F. M. Donner, 'The role of nomads in the Near East in Late Antiquity (400–800 C.E.)', in F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys (eds.), *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* (Madison, 1989), 73–88, at 78; G. M. Kressel, 'Being tribal and being pastoralist', in Fabietti and Salzman (eds.), *The Anthropology of Tribal and Peasant Pastoral Societies*, 129–38, at 131; in the same volume, P. C. Salzman, 'Peasant Pastoralism', 149–66, at 155, using the Baluch of SE Iran as an example.

[50] Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.* 20.

[51] Theoph. *Chron.* 240 (al-Ḥārith, in 563); Joh. Eph. *HE* 220 (3.4.39–42) (al-Mundhir, in 580). Since the standard edition of John's work is split between the Syriac text and the translation, I have included both references here. The first is to the Syriac text, and the second, cited by book and chapter, is for the translation.

[52] e.g. Wadd. 2110; *IGLS* 2553b, d, from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī.

[53] Al-Ḥārith as *patrikios*:*IGLS* 2553b, d, Theoph. *Chron.* 240. Mundhir as *patrikios*: Wadd. 2562c, from al-Burj, near Damascus; also Joh. Eph. *HE* 220 (3.4.39–42).

belonged or to whom one was perceived by others to belong, with destructive cultural, social, and political consequences.

Subtexts

Christianisation was not a one-sided process, and for the Arab subjects of the mainly benign late antique religious encounters, Christianity arrived in specific ways which, while offering them the prospect of closer ties with the settled, imperial world, also offered the chance to take advantage of a curious sense of separation. On the basis of our sources, the first point of contact between Arabs and Christianity often occurred in marginal steppe locations far from settled environments, while the instigators of Christianisation—monks, hermits, and other wandering holy men—were themselves divergent from mainstream settled society, having chosen to remove themselves from the *oikumenē*. Following the presentation of Christianity, efforts to confirm and strengthen the 'beliefs' of converts sometimes occurred in remote locations through the efforts of these itinerant holy men.[54]

The prominence of the cultural idea of 'nomad' as a figure divergent from mainstream society also gave life to this perception of separateness. As mentioned earlier, this might not have accurately reflected the reality on the ground, where the anonymous Arab groups appearing in the Graeco-Roman sources probably consisted of a mix of settled, semi-nomadic and nomadic sections. While nomadic pastoralism undoubtedly continued to exist at this time, it is highly probable that the sedentarisation of certain elements, led and perhaps encouraged by the elite, was occurring. Yet the idea of separation inherent in the ancient concept of the nomad may have slowed assimilation and helped to offset the political aspects which accompanied Christianisation. This might have allowed the stratified elite, who were most likely to benefit from settling within the Empire, but also to be the most affected by the political consequences of such an act, to maintain a connection with any of the semi-nomadic or nomadic elements of the group which may have been under its control. From this perspective we should not be surprised that the

[54] e.g. Soz. *HE* 6.38; Athanasius *V. Ant.* 50, telling of the frequency of contact between desert holy men and pastoralist Arabs.

efforts to foster a more sedentary lifestyle among the 'pastoralists', discussed above, were couched in familiar terms which partially rendered them ineffective. No doubt they were presented in this way with the opposite intention. In his efforts to convert the Arabs nearby, Aḥūdemmeh went to as many Arab encampments as possible; yet after establishing the faith, he is reported to have named the new churches after the chiefs of the tribes, an act designed to encourage their association but also one which might have had quite unintentional consequences.[55] St Euthymius is reported to have told Aspebetos and his followers to settle—but to do so by erecting tents around the church they were supposed to build; in the Syriac *Life* of Symeon, we find the same kinds of imagery.[56] Following the presentation of Christianity, its liturgy and rituals could also be adapted to maintain a familiar appearance and encourage further involvement: the 'churches' built beneath the tents of the Arabs in the story of St Symeon are only figurative representations, but portable altars existed, and it was possible for the eucharist to be celebrated even in the absence of an altar.[57] During and following Christianisation, religious affiliations and interests continued to reflect a subconscious distancing from settled society. The cult of St Sergius, popular amongst the Arabs of both the steppe and settled areas such as the Ḥaurān (see Map 2), contained an intrinsic connection to the steppe itself. Recast as a rider, Sergius could be conceptualised as 'a saint on horseback, a speedy guardian of cameleers', who, as Elizabeth Fowden speculates, perhaps held an 'immediate appeal' to those who lived in or travelled through the steppe, acting as their 'guide and divine protector'.[58] Fowden also describes a rare link to non-Christian worship provided by a stone relief found in the Ḥaurān and depicting a rider on horseback sharing a distinct iconographic similarity to extant depictions of St Sergius. Tentatively identified as the pagan armed rider god ʿAziz, the relief hints at the ways Christianity could be reworked into familiar patterns with links to powerful cultural stereotypes or ideas, such as that of nomad, with the result that the link

[55] *Hist. Ahud.* 4 (*PO* 3, 26–7).
[56] Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.* 15; *V. Sym. Syr.* 77.
[57] M. Debié, 'La Christianisation des Arabes nomades', *Dossiers d'Archéologie et Sciences des Origines*, 309 (2005/6), 16–24, at 19; cf. the Jesuits in colonial North America, who learned native languages so that they could better Christianise indigenous peoples.
[58] Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 38–9.

between Christianity and highly visible aspects of the culture of the Empire, such as physical churches, buildings, villages, and other tangible symbols of imperial religion, culture, or political power, was not consistently reinforced.[59]

Archaeology provides further clues to the nature of this process, supplementing the sparse source material. Ongoing research in the Levant, while acknowledging the many difficulties inherent in identifying sites related to pastoralists (some of whom possibly continued to make up the groups under Jafnid control throughout Late Antiquity) shows that the arguments for the complete invisibility of mobile people should be revised.[60] It can still of course be very difficult to identify individuals who used such sites, as Dauphin's account of a martyrion in the Golan shows. Dauphin reported that archaeological survey at al-Ramthāniye provided tentative evidence of enclosures consistent with those found in the Negev and associated with the remains of nomadic encampments from Late Antiquity.[61] An inscription on the martyrion commemorating the founding of the richly decorated building lists a Flavius Naʿamān, a Roman

[59] Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 40–1.

[60] e.g. I. Finkelstein and A. Perevolotsky, 'Processes of sedentarization and nomadization in the History of Sinai and the Negev', *BASOR* 279 (1990), 67–88; see in response S. A. Rosen, 'Nomads in archaeology: a response to Finkelstein and Perevolotsky', *BASOR* 287 (1992), 75–85, with full references. Rosen acknowledges the 'relative scarcity of artifactural remains' at nomadic campsites, but effectively demonstrates through a discussion of site survey in the Negev, Sinai, and Jordan that not only are campsites visible and recordable, but even items as archaeologically ephemeral as tent sites can also be detected. See also E. B. Banning and I. Köhler-Rollefson, 'Ethnographic lessons from the pastoral past: camp locations and material remains near Beidha, southern Jordan', in O. Bar-Yosef and A. Khazanov (eds.), *Pastoralism in the Levant: Archaeological Materials in Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, 1992), 181–204, at 181–2; also R. Cribb, *Nomads in Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1991), 65; S. A. Rosen, 'A Roman-period pastoral tent camp in the Negev, Israel', *JFA* 20/4 (1993), 441–51; C. Chang and H. A. Koster, 'Beyond bones: toward an archaeology of pastoralism', in M. B. Schiffer (ed.), *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, 9 (New York, 1986), 97–147.

[61] C. Dauphin, 'Pèlerinage ghassanide au sanctuaire byzantin de Saint Jean-Baptiste à Er-Ramthaniyye en Gaulantide', in E. Dassman and J. Engeman (eds.), *Akten des XII. Internationalen Kongresses für Christliche Archäologie, Bonn 22.-28. September 1991*, 2 vols (Münster, 1995), ii. 667–73; comparisons from S. A. Rosen, 'The case for seasonal movement of pastoral nomads in the Late Byzantine/Early Arabic Period in the south central Negev', in Bar-Yosef and Khazanov, (eds.), *Pastoralism in the Levant*, 153–64, at 154; in the same volume, G. Avni, 'Survey of deserted Bedouin campsites in the Negev Highlands and its implications for archaeological research', 241–54.

ordinarius, as its sponsor, and its plan is consistent with churches elsewhere in the Ḥaurān.[62] Dauphin identified the site with the Ghassānids, based purely on sixth-century ceramic evidence (the time during which the Jafnids were most active) and the fact that the shrine lay within the putative 'territory' of the group, in Dauphin's opinion, but this is very debatable.[63] Nevertheless, what is interesting about this religious place is the apparent intersection of modes of settled and non-settled spatial organisation. The presence of the martyrion forms an unambiguous religious element, complemented, perhaps, by the tentative identification of two makeshift open-air buildings as chapels. These recall similar roughly made double-course unroofed structures thought to be mosques, found at late antique Negev campsites.[64] Such identifications, based on the orientation of the structures and, in the case of al-Ramthāniye, the evidence of stones inscribed with Christian symbols, are indeed highly speculative. Nevertheless, this combination of a well-built and lavishly decorated religious structure, linked to a person of position in the Roman hierarchy, located in uplands of marginal agricultural value and apparently patronised by those following a mobile lifestyle, all suggests how nomadic and sedentary spheres of life might converge, all framed within a Roman, Christian context. Most importantly, it is not an isolated example.

PART TWO: THE JAFNIDS AND NAṢRIDS BETWEEN THE ROMANS AND SASANIANS

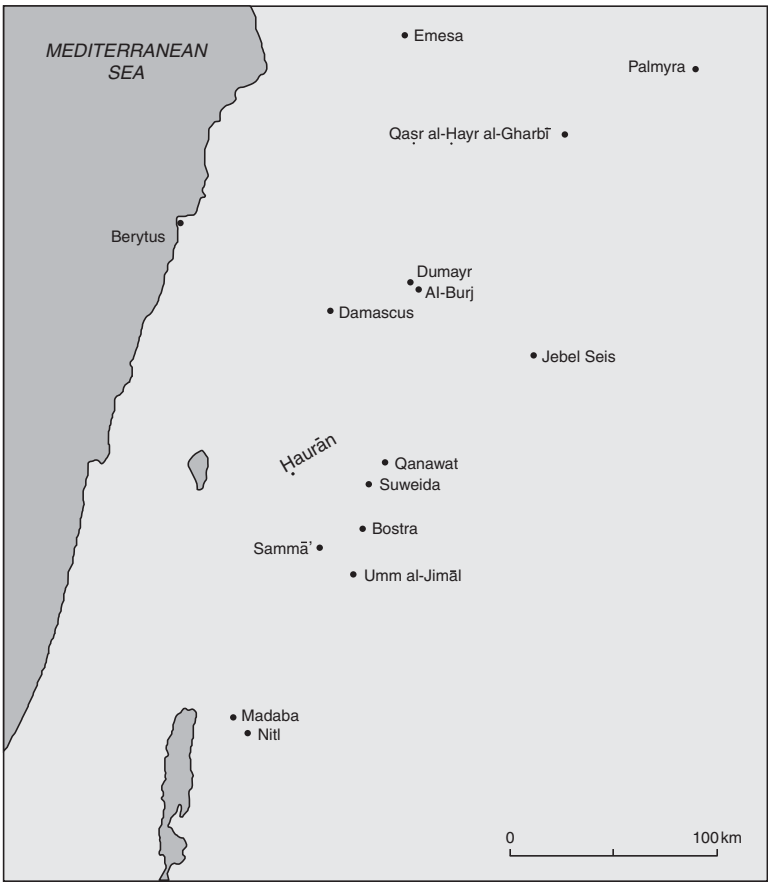
The Jafnids

The Jafnids cannot be clearly identified at al-Ramthāniye, but they do appear in contexts elsewhere which display an ever-increasing involvement with the religious life of the Roman Empire throughout

[62] Dauphin, 'Pèlerinage ghassanide', 667–70.

[63] There is evidence of reconstruction in the 6th century, and Roman ceramics at the site are also consistent with this date. But there is no clear indication of Jafnid or 'Ghassānid' involvement. See Shahid, *Sixth Century*, ii/1, 136–7, who is also sceptical about the presence of Ghassān at al-Ramthāniye.

[64] Dauphin, 'Pèlerinage ghassanide', 671; Rosen, 'Case for seasonal movement', 154.



Map 2. Western Syria, indicating key sites discussed in the text related to evidence for the Jafnids.

the sixth century. Most recently, the excavation of a church complex at Nitl, located to the south-east of Madaba in Jordan (see Map 2), has provided some of the most interesting suggestions yet about the Jafnid involvement in Christianity.[65] The rich mosaic finds at the Nitl church offer prayers for the artisans, offerings from imperial

[65] The church was visited numerous times by European explorers (e.g. see *DPA* II, 335), but only recently excavated under the direction of M. Piccirillo. See B. Hamarneh, *Topografia Cristiana ed insediamenti rurali nel territorio dell'odierna Giordania nelle epoche Bizantina ed Islamica V–IX sec.* (Vatican City, 2003), 266–7.

officials, a prayer for the health of a phylarch named Thaʿlaba, and an acclamation, in Greek, for 'Erethas, the son of Al-Arethas' (*Ὼ Ερεθα υἱὸς Ἀλ Ἀρεθυ*).[66] A number of authors, including Piccirillo, the excavator of the Nitl church, suggest that Thaʿlaba was a member of the Jafnid elite, and that the presence of this name here indicates the burial place for himself and his family.[67] There is no clear evidence for this and the identity of Thaʿlaba is unknown. The name does appear in a contested passage of Theophanes, where it is sometimes linked to Kinda or the Ḥujrids, although this too is by no means certain.[68] On the other hand, it is much more plausible that the second invocation refers to the Jafnid leader al-Ḥarīth, who was probably contemporary with the construction of the mosaics.[69] If so, the church and its mosaic inscriptions would indicate a public and highly visible link between the Jafnids and architectural and stylistic expressions of Christian affiliation common to the region.[70]

Another such link is found in an inscription recovered from the village of Sammāʾ, calling for the protection of the 'illustrious phylarch Abū-Karib' (*ἐνδοξ[ότατον] φύλαρχ[ον] Αβου Χιριβ*), a figure whom Sartre has convincingly identified as the brother of al-Ḥārith.[71] Sartre considers that the lintel inscription was probably comissioned by the villagers of Sammāʾ and not by the phylarch himself, but his appearance in this inscription in a common Christian formula derived from Psalm 120, and placed as here on a lintel designed to protect those who pass under it—a common architectural feature

[66] M. Piccirillo, 'The church of Saint Sergius at Nitl: a centre of the Christian Arabs in the steppe at the gates of Madaba', *LA* 51 (2001), 267–84, at 281–2.

[67] Ibid. 283: 'it is to be considered as a sepulchral church for the high ranking members of the Banu Ghassan family living in the region of Madaba'; Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 79, is in agreement. Both authors note the location of the Thaʿalaba mosaic 'around the entrance of the underground burial chamber', which 'shows that they were planned together'. Shahid suggests that it was a dynastic burial place for a wide range of Jafnid leaders, which is stretching the idea too far. See I. Shahid, 'The sixth-century church complex at Nitl, Jordan: The Ghassānid dimension', *LA* 51, (2001), 285–92, esp. 291.

[68] Theoph. *Chron.* 141; G. Olinder, *The Kings of Kinda of the Family of Akil al-Murār* (Leipzig, 1927), 48, 51–3.

[69] Piccirillo, 'The church of Saint Sergius', 284, determined from a comparison between the tesserae at Nitl and Madaba which places their construction in the first half of the sixth century.

[70] Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 79.

[71] M. Sartre, 'Deux phylarques arabes dans l'Arabie byzantine', *Muséon*, 106 (1993), 145–54, at 151.

during this period—is a further indication of the public connection between senior Jafnids and Christianity.[72]

The most prominent archaeological evidence for such connections is found at the site of Reṣāfa in northern Syria. Reṣāfa was the location of the major shrine to St Sergius within the Roman Empire, and the cult was linked to the Arabs,[73] and enjoyed a close assocation with the Jafnids. Proof of their involvement and patronage there is provided by a Greek inscription in the small cross-in-square structure outside the perimeter walls of the city of Reṣāfa, reading 'the fortune of al-Mundhir triumphs' (*+νικᾷ ἡ [τ]ύχη Αλαμυνδά[ρ]ου*).[74] The building, well-constructed and elaborately decorated with friezes, crosses, and sculpture in relief,[75] is one of the very few that can be reasonably accepted as having been built or commissioned by the Jafnids. The problem of 'Ghassānid' building was noted briefly in the first chapter and it is worth stressing here Genequand's recent assessment of the issue, where he sensibly argues for a rejection of the lists of buildings compiled by Hamza al-Iṣfahānī and accepted by Shahid, in favour of accepting as 'Jafnid' only those for which there is contemporary epigraphic or literary confirmation. Here, the inscription in the al-Mundhir building provides such confirmation that it was patronised, commissioned, or built with the approval of the Jafnids.[76]

The building was originally identified as an audience hall, but Elizabeth Fowden has argued convincingly that it fulfilled both religious and secular functions, acting as a church as well as a gathering space where disputes could be settled, members of the peoples over whom the Jafnids exercised control received during the pilgrimage to the shrine of St Sergius, and, above all, where al-Mundhir could demonstrate his political authority.[77]

In her work on Reṣāfa, Elizabeth Fowden conceptualised the al-Mundhir building in terms of al-Mundhir's political and religious

[72] Ibid. 151; other examples include *IGLS* 9037, 9038.
[73] Theoph. Sim. *Hist*. 5.1.7; *Hist. Ahud*. 4 (*PO* 3, 29).
[74] *SEG* 7. 188.
[75] Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 149–51.
[76] Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 78.
[77] For discussions on the purpose of the building, see J. Sauvaget, 'Les Ghassanides et Sergiopolis', *Byzantion*, 14 (1939), 115–30; G. Brands, 'Die sogenannte Audienzsaal des al-Mundir in Reṣāfa', *DaM* 10 (1998), 237–41; E. K. Fowden, 'An Arab building at al-Rusāfa-Sergiopolis', *DaM* 12 (2000), 303–27. See Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 167–70, and the discussion on these views by Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 78. I agree with Genequand that E. K. Fowden's interpretation, discussed here, is the most likely.

interests. Fowden showed that its plan was closely related to the baptistry of Reṣāfa's 'basilica A' as well as sixth-century churches elsewhere in Syria, linking it stylistically to contemporary Roman Christian architecture.[78] The inscription, following a standard formula found elsewhere in the East, confirmed 'al-Mundhir's skilful adoption of the cultural language of Rome',[79] and, together, the use of Roman architectural and epigraphic conventions reflected 'al-Mundhir's choices as an Arab ally' of the Empire.[80] Once again, it seems, the case of the al-Mundhir building, like the church at Nitl, is another ordinary example of the involvement of the Jafnids with Christian forms familiar throughout this part of the Empire.

From this perspective, it might then be asked whether or not the al-Mundhir building was simply a way to exert influence over the disparate peoples whom the phylarch controlled, by demonstrating his association with the literal and figurative language of the Empire, or whether its message might perhaps have been directed elsewhere. The placement of a building of such importance at a substantial settlement such as Reṣāfa, and the use of architectural and inscriptional elements which encouraged identification with Rome, could not avoid a close association with the Empire and Christianity and the concomitant projection of power that these entailed. The building has little in common with what is known of the constructions of pastoralists elsewhere in the Near East, where the remains of even the most sturdily built nomadic camps are distinctly ephemeral in character.[81] Yet the al-Mundhir building was deliberately placed outside the walls of Reṣāfa, a fact which Whittow comments on very effectively, noting that: 'one might interpret it as the equivalent of a great shaykh's seven-pole tent, but built in stone and in a Roman idiom . . . it lay outside the city, isolated like an immovable tent from any other structures'.[82]

The intriguing positon of the al-Mundhir building, which divorced the Jafnids from the urban context represented by the city, was also reinforced by that of Reṣāfa itself. The city was in a middling location between the Romans and the Sasanians, and stood along the edge of the ecological divide between steppe, desert, and farmland, offering

[78] Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 153.
[79] Ibid. 159–60.
[80] Ibid. 160.
[81] Rosen, 'Case for seasonal movement', 154–7, for a discussion of the three main types of nomadic campsites uncovered by survey.
[82] Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids', 222.

the different aspects of these three regions. Reṣāfa could provide vast stores of water in its underground cisterns, and the land around the site in the winter is often green and lush, but is scorching and dry in the summer months. Procopius explains that Reṣāfa was perceived to lie within the 'Barbarian Plain' (*τὸ Βαρβαρικὸν Πεδίον*), an indistinct and contested frontier zone which, like other borderlands regions, was politically ambiguous.[83] This created, like al-Ramthāniye, an acceptable space for both nomadic and sedentary actions free of overt political associations and power. The isolation of the al-Mundhir building also created a link to Sergius that was, to some extent, dissociated from the city of Reṣāfa, within whose walls the shrine was located. This fact allowed the Jafnids to present a connection to the saint which was maintained on their own terms.[84] The al-Mundhir building thus differs from the other examples, like the church at Nitl, for instance, by providing a subtle subtext to such apparent clear Christian affiliation. The numerous layers of meaning that the building offered distanced the Jafnids from the Empire, whilst allowing them to appropriate its symbols for their own ends; and so the building also served to take control of the role of fixed points, such as the steppe churches of Aḥūdemmeh or locations where water was stored, in fixing and controlling the relationship between centre and periphery, turning it to the advantage of the Jafnids, who could use the location as a point of control over those whom they encountered there whilst, at the same time, avoiding too close a connection with the Roman Empire.[85]

This sense of 'connected separation' also finds parallels in what has been suggested for the early Islamic *quṣūr*. The putative connection between the *quṣūr* and buildings linked to the Jafnids will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, but here it is worth considering one of the possible functions of the al-Mundhir building. In his work on Qusayr ʿAmra, Garth Fowden suggested that sites such as al-Ḥumayma, the home in the remote desert of southern Jordan of the political exile ʿAlī, were 'at once remote from the intensely Umayyad atmosphere of Damascus and its satellite *quṣūr*, and well-placed, right

[83] Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 1; Proc. *BP* 2.5.29.

[84] Cf. Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 151, who believes that the building was placed where it was because of the putative location of S. Sergius' original resting place outside the city walls, close to the exquisite ornamental northern gateway of Reṣāfa.

[85] Cf. ibid. 5, where Fowden notes that 'one of the most important factors that emerges [in the study of S. Sergius] is the role of architecture and fixed points . . . in the lives of the pastoralists and semi-pastoralists who inhabited the frontier zone.'

by the road that linked the port of Ayla . . . by way of Maʿan to Damascus, for the gathering of news and gossip'.[86]

Al-Mundhir was not yet an exile, but the location of the building at Reṣāfa, a day's march from Callinicum and in something of a remote position, but, simultaneously—like al-Ramthāniye—at the confluence of several well-travelled routes popular with pilgrims, merchants, and pastoralists, certainly favoured similar associations. The communicative aspect was a key element of the early *quṣūr*, both in the dissemination of a particular image of an elite, and, also, in the cultivation of relationships with the peoples of the steppe.[87] With this in mind, we might recall the sumptuous ivories recovered from al-Ḥumayma with their Iranian-inspired motifs, the elaborate 'classical' frescoes at Qusayr ʿAmra, and the decorations within the al-Mundhir building. All demonstrated and displayed the sophistication of their patrons and tenants.[88] With the al-Mundhir building, the Jafnids occupied a space on a major crossroads site, remote from Constantinople, but indeed 'well-placed' to communicate their own vision of themselves and stay in touch with matters closer to the heart of the settled world.[89]

Reṣāfa then bears witness to the intersection of numerous cultural, political, and religious themes discussed here. The subtle convergence of a familiar architectural plan, Roman epigraphic convention, an ambiguous political space, and the decision to emplace the al-Mundhir building in a steppe context, but closely connected to a major urban site, allowed al-Mundhir to provide a parallel discourse to his role as a Christian ally of Rome. Al-Mundhir avoided, perhaps, the fate of someone like Silvanus, who had managed to divorce himself from the Franks on the 'other' side of the river.

The use of space at Reṣāfa preserved an essential sense of separateness. Al-Mundhir was able to use what was functionally expedient to him, and so the al-Mundhir building, at once a religious space with

[86] G. Fowden, *Qusayr ʿAmra*, 282; on Ḥumayma, see J. P. Oleson, K. ʿAmr, R. Foote, J. Logan, B. Reeves, R. Schick, 'Preliminary report of the al-Ḥumayma Excavation Project, 1995, 1996, 1998,' *ADAJ*, 43 (1999), 411–50.

[87] This issue will be discussed in more detail in Ch. 6.

[88] G. Fowden and E. K. Fowden, *Studies on Hellenism, Christianity and the Umayyads* (Paris, 2004), 145, on the Q. ʿAmra frescoes: 'they attest to a rather advanced state of Mediterranean acculturation on the part of their Umayyad patron and his immediate circle'; Fowden, *Qusayr ʿAmra*, 284–8.

[89] Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 67–70, 76; Dauphin, 'Pèlerinage ghassanide', 672, for similar comments on al-Ramthāniye.

distinct architectural, cultural, and political connections to Rome, was also simultaneously a vehicle for the demonstration and dissemination of his power to a quite different audience, showing that, while he was now a Christian Roman ally deeply involved in imperial affairs, his position was still relevant in other quarters as well.

In the ancient written sources the Jafnids are often presented as clearly and unambiguously aligning themselves with the miaphysite Christians of the Empire. The evidence for this is derived in the majority from partisan sources such as the twelfth-century author Michael the Syrian, who was the west Syrian patriarch between 1166 and 1199, or the sixth-century writer John of Ephesus. Michael's *Chronicle* is a complex document, dependent on earlier sources, including the *History* of John of Ephesus, and infused with ideological considerations intimately linked to his own position as patriarch. In the *Chronicle* he includes a suspiciously stylised portrait of al-Ḥārith engaging in theological debate over the nature of the Trinity with Ephrem, the Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch whom Justinian had apparently sent to see the Jafnid leader.[90] The setting, with al-Ḥārith meeting a senior representative of the Chalcedonian clergy, is designed to offer a strong portrayal of the importance of the Jafnids in miaphysite ecclesiastical circles and, in the story, al-Ḥārith rebuffs Ephrem's attempts to win him over to the Chalcedonian cause. Refusing to eat the same bread with him, al-Ḥārith compares food from Chalcedonian hands to the 'nomadic' (and therefore culturally inferior) meal of camel meat. The story is formulaic in the stress it places on two irreconcilable opposites, and is a more accurate reflection perhaps of Michael's concerns with, and perspectives on, the divisions between Chalcedonians and miaphysites that had, by his day, become very much more apparent.[91]

In his Syriac *History* and in his *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, John of Ephesus, who focused a great deal on the deeds of individuals and who held a partisan interest in the affairs of the Jafnids, also portrays both al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir as prominent supporters of miaphysitism. John describes the importance of al-Ḥārith's agency in convincing

[90] Mich. Syr. *Chron*. 246–7.

[91] Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 142–3; van Ginkel, 'Making history', at 357, on the sources and purpose of the *Chronicle*. The framework of the *Chronicle* is very much concerned with showing how the miaphysites had 'always survived under pressure', and the vignette about al-Ḥārith should be understood from this perspective.

Theodora, in 542, to supply two bishops (one of whom was Jacob Baradaeus) to the miaphysites.[92] John also tells of al-Mundhir's efforts to put an end to a destructive argument between various disputing miaphysite factions,[93] and al-Mundhir is also credited with convening a council in Constantinople while visiting Tiberius in March 580, to heal the rift between the supporters of Jacob Baradaeus, Paul ('the Black') and the Alexandrians, represented by their patriarch Damian, about which more is said below. In all of this both al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir are held up as worthy supporters of the miaphysites in their disputes with the Chalcedonians, as well as with other miaphysite factions in Syria, where they appear as powerful individuals who hold the ability to convene warring factions and who might restore some stability to the miaphysites.

Further evidence for the Jafnid connection to miaphysitism is found from two other sources—a series of inscriptions originating from the earlier phases of Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī and a Syriac letter from 138 senior miaphysite clergy in Arabia to Jacob Baradaeus (henceforth, *Letter*).[94]

Qaṣr al-Ḥayr, located well to the north-east of Nitl between Damascus and Palmyra (for its location, see Map 2) was excavated in the 1930s by Schlumberger.[95] Four Greek inscriptions, found in a reused position, indicate that at least part of the Qaṣr al-Ḥayr structure included a monastery, and the site has been identified with a site named Haliarum, which appears in the *Letter*.[96] The inscriptions provide two references to the Jafnid leader al-Ḥārith. The first commemorates an archimandrite who dates his tenure to when Flavius Arethas (al-Ḥārith) was phylarch, while the second is an acclamation

[92] Joh. Eph. *Vitae* (*PO* 19, 153–4); V. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford, 2008), 222–3.

[93] Joh. Eph. *HE* 208–9 (3.4.21–2); Debié, 'La Christianisation des Arabes nomades', 23; see too W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1972), 32.

[94] BM. Syr. 14602, published by Chabot in his edited collection of miaphysite church materials, *Documenta ad origines monophysitarum illustrandas* (Leuven, 1952), originally published by Th.-J. Lamy, 'Profession de foi adressé par les Abbés d'Arabie à Jacques Baradée', *Actes du XIe Congrès des Orientalistes, section sémitique* (Paris, 1898), 117–37.

[95] See D. Schlumberger, 'Les fouilles de Qasr el Heir el-Gharbi', *Syria*, 20 (1939), 366–72.

[96] *Documenta* 223 (= Chabot, 155); see too Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 70.

addressed directly to al-Ḥārith, apparently celebrating a visit to the monastery. This second inscription is dated to 870 of the Seleucid era, which corresponds to 569, shortly before the Jafnid leader died.[97]

There are a number of interesting points here. First, the inscriptions, like those at Nitl and Reṣāfa, are in Greek, demonstrating a conscious choice for expression in the dominant administrative and ecclesiastical language of the Constantinopolitan Empire. In fact, all of the extant inscriptions that connect the Jafnids to Roman monuments or religious sites are in Greek, and the sole Arabic inscription that can be connected to the Jafnids is found in a very different context.[98] Secondly, the use of the name Flavius, often used to denote 'men of influence and power', expresses a direct connection to the Christian Empire. Whilst its use was quite common, its appearance here is still significant in that it expresses a desire to be associated with Roman power.[99] Thirdly, the inscription commemorating the archimandrite uses as its reference point the time when al-Ḥārith held the office of phylarch, and does not mention an emperor or other imperial official. This points to a recognition of al-Ḥārith's local and regional power which is consistent with the prominence accorded to him by John of Ephesus. It is notable that a similar commemoration is made to al-Mundhir, the son of al-Ḥārith, on an inscription at a house at al-Ḥayyat in the Ḥaurān.[100]

Does this rare link between the Jafnid leader and a miaphysite monastery support the claims made by John of Ephesus, namely, that the Jafnids were intimately associated with the miaphysite 'cause'? A possible answer to this question is to view the inscriptions as denoting a monastery built, financed, or patronised by the Jafnids. This position is not without its proponents.[101] However, there is no evidence that Qaṣr al-Ḥayr was a 'Jafnid building', either through any distinctive architectural features, or through a building inscription.

[97] *IGLS* 2553b, d; Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 70.

[98] This inscription from Jebel Seis will be discussed in connection with the Greek inscriptions in more detail in Ch. 4.

[99] The name recalls the Flavian dynasty of Constantine. A recent analysis of the Petra Papyri reveals, alongside the prominence of the regal Nabataean name 'Obadion', a large number of instances of 'Flavius'. See L. Koenen, 'The carbonized archive from Petra', *JRA*, 9 (1996), 177–88, at 187–8. It is also worth recalling here the instance of the name in connection with martyrion at al-Ramthāniye.

[100] *IGLS* 2110. See the discussion in Ch. 3.

[101] For example, see Sartre, *Trois études*, 182; Shahid, *Sixth Century*, ii/1, 206–9.

In fact, none of the surviving inscriptions records who paid for or built the structure.[102] The inscriptions referring to al-Ḥārith are a reflection of the esteem accorded to him, but they do not tell us anything else; and so all that can be said reliably about the Qaṣr al-Ḥayr inscriptions in this regard is that they provide proof of the Jafnids' relative importance in the region and connect them to a miaphysite monastery. They are not evidence for the role of the Jafnids as patrons of miaphysitism operating on the levels anywhere near those accorded by John or Michael the Syrian.

There is also the *Letter*, dating from 569–70. Written as a confirmation of faith to Jacob Baradaeus by the heads of the monasteries in Arabia, the *Letter* also condemned the so-called tritheists (those who accepted the idea that each person of the Trinity had an individual nature and substance),[103] and provides through its signatures a long list of monasteries aligned with the miaphysites. How closely were the Jafnids linked to the monasteries named in the *Letter*? Place names related to Ghassān in later Arabic poetry, and perhaps connected to the Jafnids, appear in the *Letter*.[104] There is the debatable possibility that a 'monastery of the Ghassānids' (*'ysny*) as well as a monastery of 'Jafna' (*gwfnt*) can be extrapolated from the document, although quite precisely what this might mean is open to debate.[105] One of the signatures, however, is particularly interesting. The signatory, a subordinate of the abbot, refers to al-Mundhir as *patrikios* and a 'friend of Christ', and this certainly suggests once again that the Jafnids were closely and prominently allied to the miaphysite position.[106]

These are the pieces of evidence which may point to the alignment of the Jafnids with the miaphysites, although John of Ephesus and Michael the Syrian need to be used with caution because of their pro-miaphysite bias, and the application of the evidence from Qaṣr al-Ḥayr is limited for the reasons explained above. In the case of the *Letter*, its purpose is to stress the problems of tritheism, not to demonstrate the role of the Jafnids in miaphysitism. The collection of documents edited by Chabot in which the *Letter* appears was deliberately compiled to focus partly on rejecting the tritheists and

[102] Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 74–77.
[103] van Rompay, 'Society and community', 254.
[104] Hoyland, 'Late Roman Provincia Arabia', 117.
[105] *Documenta* 224 (= Chabot, 156) for the monastery of *'ysny*, and 214 (= Chabot, 148) for the monastery of *gwfnt*. Shahid, *Sixth Century*, 2/1, 183–219.
[106] *Documenta* 223 (= Chabot, 155).

partly on supporting Paul, who was involved in the struggle against the tritheists in Egypt.[107] In fact, the only thing that the *Letter* proves is that anti-tritheist miaphysite Christianity was widespread in the region of the signatories,[108] and, given that this was the region most commonly associated with the Jafnids, it is not inconceivable that a number of people linked to the Jafnids were members of or connected with the monasteries mentioned in the *Letter* or identified themselves with the miaphysites.[109] It is therefore not surprising that the *Letter*, like the Qaṣr al-Ḥayr inscriptions for al-Ḥārith, offers recognition to al-Mundhir as a powerful local leader. Therefore, while this evidence continues to suggest a public and highly visible connection between the Jafnids and Christianity, continuing the picture given by Nitl and Reṣāfa, and certainly points to a degree of involvement with miaphysite currents in Syria, it is by no means clear that the Jafnids were strong and irrevocable supporters of miaphysitism. This therefore leads to the possibility that in the fluid religious landscape of late sixth-century Syria, there was more room for manoeuvre than appears at first glance.

Both Chalcedonian and miaphysite positions were characterised by numerous rifts and schisms of varying severity in the sixth century; any picture of two well-defined and opposing religious movements would be misleading. For the miaphysites, the ordination of Jacob Baradaeus was a key event in the spread of miaphysitism into the peripheries of the Empire, but any effort he may have made to instil unity was somewhat undermined by problems such as tritheism or the bitter three-way dispute between the followers of Jacob, Paul, and the troublesome patriarch of Alexandria, Damian, in 579/80. This was the most prominent quarrel with which the Jafnids would become involved, and had begun because the consecration of Paul met with serious opposition from senior miaphysites, who perhaps saw in him the establishment of a rival hierarchy which might undermine Jacob Baradaeus. A schism soon followed between the supporters of Paul and Jacob and, later, the former group and the Alexandrians, after their newly ordained patriarch Peter (575–8) deposed Paul. As Baradaeus had offered his support to Peter by consenting to his actions, he earned

[107] A. van Roey and P. Allen (eds.), *Monophysite Texts of the Sixth Century* (Leuven, 1994), 265–303, for a discussion of the authorship of the collection.
[108] As noted by Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 184.
[109] Cf. Hoyland, 'Epigraphy and the emergence of Arab identity', 230–2.

the enmity of the supporters of Paul, and when Peter was succeeded by Damian (patriarch 578–606) the dispute continued to smoulder.[110]

While all this carried on, the Chalcedonians, who were not unified either, but had the benefit for much of the time of having the backing of the Emperor, expended much of their energy attempting to negotiate with miaphysite leaders who were frequently in disagreement with one another; the death of Baradaeus in 578 removed one of their most charismatic and eloquent representatives, who might have been able to provide the miaphysites with the leadership they desperately needed.[111] But at the same time the popularity of miaphysitism ensured that it operated with 'some sort of imperial approval', an ambivalence which was reflected in imperial policy, which alternated between persecution and reconciliation and which ensured that negotiations to resolve the problems between the two positions did not come readily to an end. Indeed, it was not until the 580s that the divisions between Chalcedonians and the miaphysites started to solidify to the extent that to be identified with a particular position involved giving up the ability to switch as easily to the other.[112] The situation for much of the sixth century can therefore be defined as extremely changeable. Although the persecutions under Justin I were probably hard to forget, imperial policy under Justinian, where the prosyletisation of peripheral peoples like the Nubians was carried out under anti-Chalcedonian auspices, cloaked the divisions between the Chalcedonian and miaphysite positions with sufficient ambiguity, especially on the periphery, to allow those such as the Jafnids to operate as allies of a Chalcedonian Emperor and patronise miaphysitism in Arabia at the same time.[113]

All of this suggests therefore that the appearance of the Jafnids as patrons of miaphysitism until the demise of al-Mundhir in 580 should not be accorded the particular and singular degree of weight that previous commentators have sometimes given it.[114] What we

[110] See Allen, *Evagrius*, 32–4.

[111] Id., 'The definition and enforcement of orthodoxy', *CAH* 14, 811–34, at 825–8, 831.

[112] van Rompay, 'Society and community', 250–1, 261–2; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 126–7.

[113] van Rompay, 'Society and community', 250–1.

[114] e.g. Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 284, esp. 297: 'the emergence of the Monophysite kingdoms'; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 130: 'we must turn to the Ghassanid Arabs . . . if we are to glimpse something of what it meant to be a

should look for instead is the importance of opportunities within miaphysitism and the various disputes and schisms which were available to astute political operators such as al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir. For example, the persecutions during the reign of Justin I (518–27) had left the miaphysites of Arabia and southern Syria with few bishops, and al-Ḥārith was able, through his actions, to portray himself as a strong supporter of miaphysitism, cultivating a significant base of broad support and enhancing his personal prestige. The role that the Jafnids played in the consecration of Jacob Baradaeus, with which, and with the ordination of priests which followed later on, the miaphysites moved further away from Chalcedonian authority, also raised their profile amongst supporters of miaphysitism.

After al-Ḥārith's death, al-Mundhir continued the association between his family and the miaphysites, by coming to the aid of Paul.[115] Despite the turn in his fortunes Paul remained a powerful figure, and supporting him offered the Jafnids the opportunity to extend their own power through association. A few years later, al-Mundhir was again involved in efforts to reconcile the supporters of Paul, Jacob, and Damian, who represented the Alexandrians, this time at the invitation of the Emperor Tiberius.[116] Divisions within miaphysitism not only threatened the unity of the Empire, but also the power base of the Jafnids. If those divisions could be healed—especially if done so at the behest of the Emperor, on whose goodwill the Jafnids depended to a significant extent—the Jafnids might gain access to unparalleled opportunities for political and personal prestige far beyond association with a patriarchal see.[117] But failure to succeed as a moderator could also produce unwelcome setbacks, as al-Mundhir found when he was deceived by Damian—who signed the agreement and then recanted—and the meetings with Tiberius failed, at the expense of a good deal of al-Mundhir's credibility.

Monophysite polity', and 'from the 540s onward the Ghassanid ruler Harith ibn Jabala also became personally committed to Monophysitism'.

[115] Joh. Eph. *HE* 67–8 (3.2.8).

[116] Ibid. 218–222 (3.4.38–41).

[117] Cf. Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 285, who links al-Ḥārith's involvement with the miaphysites to his desire to exploit 'his political position'. See as well Allen, 'The definition and enforcement of orthodoxy', 831–3; cf. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 120, suggesting that the connection between the Jafnids and the Empire ensured relative safety for miaphysites in areas of Jafnid influence; also Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids', 218.

Ultimately, it was in the best interests of the Jafnids to protect the popular religious position in the region where they lived. As long as the miaphysites failed to find common ground, they were unlikely to have been either reconciled effectively to the Chalcedonians or to have maintained the remarkable web of support between Syria and Egypt which had thus far contributed to keeping miaphysitism both alive and respectable.[118] Appearing as occasional 'staunch protectors of the miaphysite cause'[119] thus provided a number of good opportunities, and also helped the miaphysites through their connection to the Jafnid leaders,[120] who cultivated a considerable degree of political influence in the second half of the sixth century. Supporting the miaphysites provided the Jafnids with political leverage within their own areas of influence—the Ḥaurān and Syrian steppe regions south and east of Damascus. It also mitigated the consequences of closer involvement with the Empire and Constantinople, by taking advantage of the broad, highly visible and well-publicised divisions between Chalcedon and its opponents and the political connotations, especially, of Chalcedonian Christianity, which was intimately connected to the person of the Emperor for much of the time. Supporting miaphysitism offered the ability to be seen to maintain a semblance of religious and political distance where it suited, and probably appealed to a large number of those who were inclined to give their backing to the Jafnids. In short, it was an ideal and extremely practical way to work a religious middle ground which was becoming tighter and more limiting as the religious arguments of the sixth century wore on.

I have argued here so far that the Christianisation of Arab groups on the periphery of the Roman Empire can be understood in a number of ways. Specifically, I have suggested that while acculturation and assimilation to Christianity were typically conjoined with significant sociocultural and political side-effects, the nature of the process of Christianisation allowed for a variety of either deliberate or less-intentional responses which not only slowed the impact of such side-effects, but also allowed for those Christianised to be so while maintaining fundamental links to ideas of a world which was at odds

[118] van Rompay, 'Society and community', 250–2, 254–5; Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 324, 330.
[119] van Rompay, 'Society and community', 261.
[120] Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 80.

with the perceived civilising effects of adopting Christianity. The power of the ideas of nomad and the steppe became, in this respect, one possible way by which new Arab Christians might remain separate and distinct while they participated in the new world of imperial Christianity.

For the Jafnids, a more complex response to the effects of Christianisation is apparent. Their appearance as 'protectors' of miaphysitism, visitors to Constantinople to petition for bishops, and their connections to Christianity via inscriptions and mosaics demonstrate a noticeable degree of stratification. At the same time, as the elite, the Jafnids stood to gain the greatest political benefit from becoming Christian, and manifesting a Christian identity certainly had the advantage of smoothing relations with the Empire. I would suggest as well that through their use of sites such as the al-Mundhir building at Reṣāfa the Jafnids were also able to retain an important connection to those who were less involved with the Empire or Christianisation than themselves. We know very little about the people who were under the leadership of the Jafnids, but it would have been critical for the Jafnids to keep their support, as well as the general support of miaphysites elsewhere in Arabia and Syria. In these ways the Jafnids were able to remain 'in-between', connected to the heart of the Empire through their Christianisation and involvement in religious matters, but keeping the appearance of being separate and distinct, a fact which provided some equality to their acculturation and assimilation to the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity.

The Naṣrids and al-Ḥīrah

While the Jafnids managed their relationship with imperial Christianity through a structured detachment from certain aspects of the Roman Empire, the Naṣrids, the ruling dynasty at al-Ḥīrah, pursued a different course in a religious environment of considerable diversity. Al-Ḥīrah was favourably located in a place conducive to trade (see Map 3) and, in Bosworth's opinion, had grown into a significant settlement from an early date,[121] but in reality we know remarkably little about al-Ḥīrah, the Naṣrids, or the people over whom they ruled.

[121] C. Bosworth, 'Iran and the Arabs before Islam', *CHI* iii/i, 593–612, at 597–8.

Map 3. The northern Arabian peninsula and the Near East, showing the location of al-Ḥīrah.

This latter group is conventionally called the Lakhmids, but this label is misleading and the tribal makeup of the people who lived at or around al-Ḥīrah is not precisely known. Furthermore, there is virtually no contemporary literary evidence for the Naṣrids, secondary work is sparse, and their base at al-Ḥīrah has received only a minimal amount of attention from archaeologists. Talbot Rice carried out a very limited amount of survey and excavation work at al-Ḥīrah in 1931–3, which brought to light a number of churches with plaster walls, brick floors, and wall-paintings, and he tentatively dated these churches to the sixth or seventh century, noting too that they shared stylistic features with those uncovered nearby at Seleucia-Ctesiphon

as well as to some within the Roman Empire.[122] Most recently a group of Japanese archaeologists working near al-Ḥīrah have identified what they believe to be a monastic site at Ain Sha'ia, but have done little or no work at al-Ḥīrah itself.[123] However, the sparse physical evidence for Christianity in and around the city supports indications in the ancient sources that Christian practice and worship were widespread there. According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, a monastery was founded before 410,[124] and in 424 Simeon, a Nestorian bishop of al-Ḥīrah, played an active part in the Synod of Markabta.[125] The *Chronicle of Seert* also claims that the Nestorian bishop Abraham the Great, who founded monasteries in Mesopotamia and worked to convert Arabs in Babylonia, had begun his career at al-Ḥīrah.[126] Conrad, Bosworth, and Trimingham give credence to the tradition that around and in al-Ḥīrah there was a substantial population of settled Christians (sometimes called the 'Ibad', or 'servants of God').[127] Hainthaler suggests that the number of anti-Chalcedonian Christians in the region might have swelled in the second half of the sixth century, perhaps as a result of persecutions or general religious uncertainties in the Roman Empire.[128]

Christianity was a minority religion in the Sasanian Empire. This fact, combined with the politically charged undercurrents of Christianisation which occasionally attracted persecuted Iranian Christians to the Roman Empire, placed the Naṣrids in an unusual and difficult position. On the evidence we possess they did not, as has sometimes

[122] D. Talbot Rice, 'The Oxford Excavations at Hira', *AI*, 1/1 (1934), 51–73, at 54–7; comparisons with Ctesiphon, see O. Reuther, *Die Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Ktesiphon-Expedition im winter 1928–29* (Wittenberg, 1930), 11; Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 85.

[123] See Y. Okada, 'Early Christian architecture in the Iraqi south-western desert', *Al-Rāfidān*, 12 (1991), 71–83. Note here that the article by E. C. D. Hunter, 'Syriac inscriptions from al-Hira', *Oriens Christianus*, 80 (1996), 66–81, is titled in a very misleading way and actually has nothing at all to do with al-Ḥīrah.

[124] *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 5, 310); also discussed by Nau, *Les arabes chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie*, 39; D. Talbot Rice, 'Hira', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 19 (1932), 254–68, at 256; also Conrad, 'The Arabs', 685.

[125] *Syn. Or*. 285, 676.

[126] *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 7, 133).

[127] Conrad, 'The Arabs', 679–80; Bosworth, 'Iran and the Arabs', 596–9; Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 156–7; Charles, *Le Christianisme des arabes nomades*, 55; as well, Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 86.

[128] Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 100.

been asserted,[129] openly identify with Christianity. Their prominence as long-term allies of the Sasanians probably meant that a direct affiliation with Christianity would be undesirable, and, at the very least, might cause unwanted difficulties, even if they chose to be identified with Nestorianism, which had, perhaps, the benefit of being somewhat divorced from the Chalcedonian Christianity favoured by the majority of the Roman emperors in the sixth century,[130] even if Christians in the Sasanian Empire were hardly immune from persecution from Mazdaeans or the state.[131]

The solution for the Naṣrids was thus to play to both groups. We should not underestimate the importance of the relationship with the Sasanians, from whom they derived a significant amount of their power. In stark contrast to the Jafnids, whose main areas of influence and activity were physically remote from Constantinople, the Naṣrids not only received the right to raise taxes from Sasanian-granted estates, in Bosworth's opinion, but also lived in the shadow of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and, under their leader al-Mundhir (418–33), may have acted as key players in ensuring the succession to the throne of Bahrām (420–38), who was, according to al-Ṭabarī, raised in the Naṣrid court at al-Ḥīrah.[132] If this is true, it is possible to glimpse the way in which the Naṣrids might have managed competing interests. Bahrām was the anti-Mazdaean candidate for the throne, and the priesthood of the Sasanian state religion had, at the death of the relatively tolerant Yazdegard I in 421, indulged in a persecution of Christians and had encouraged the Naṣrids to become involved.[133] In supporting Bahrām and remaining neutral towards Iranian Christians, al-Mundhir avoided entwining the Lakhmids in a potentially dangerous entanglement with the unpredictable Mazdaean priesthood, but, perhaps more importantly, he also avoided alienating the substantial Christian minority and, at the same time, further cemented the longstanding relationship between the Naṣrids and

[129] e.g. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 120; Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 288.

[130] Cf. Rothstein, *Dynastie*, 143; Fowden, 'Varieties of religious community', 94–5; van Rompay, 'Society and community', 258.

[131] Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 189.

[132] Al-Ṭabarī i. 855–7; Bosworth, 'Iran and the Arabs', 599.

[133] Rothstein, *Dynastie*, 66–7; Decret, 'Les conséquences sur le Christianisme', 150–2.

the Sasanian leadership. One thus acted as a counterbalance against the other.[134]

From the Roman perspective, Naṣrid leaders were naturally to be demonised for their continued failure to convert to Christianity. Perhaps the most notorious Naṣrid in Roman literature was al-Mundhir III (506–54), known to Graeco-Roman authors as Alamoundaros. Zacharias and Procopius both describe his alleged sacrifices of Christians to the pagan goddess al-ʿUzzā; his victims purportedly included four hundred nuns and a son of al-Ḥārith. Such stories had obvious propaganda value.[135] Nevertheless, there are some clues that al-Mundhir was following a double line with regard to Christianity and, intriguingly, he was reported to 'be' a Christian or supporting Christianity at much the same time as he was supposedly slaughtering Christian prisoners.[136] Al-Mundhir was also happy to use Christian envoys where it suited him. In 530 he sent a deacon named Sergius to treat, successfully, with the Romans on his behalf.[137] Furthermore, the Naṣrids did not prevent anti-Chalcedonian missionaries from working in the environs of al-Ḥīrah, and Simeon of Bēth Arshām was active in promoting miaphysite Christianity in opposition to the local Nestorians.[138] While this may not have endeared the Naṣrids to the Nestorian hierarchy, it did have the benefit of avoiding any clear religious institutional commitment and preserved a long-lived ability to move between the diverse religious communities that made up the part of the Sasanian Empire which fell under nominal Naṣrid control.

[134] Cf. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 110, with a similar observation.

[135] Zach. Rhet. *HE*. 8. 5; Proc. *BP* 2.28.13; see too Evag. *HE* 6.22; see as well Rothstein, *Dynastie*, 139.

[136] Theod. Lect. *Epit*. 513 (cf. Theoph. *Chron*. 158–9); Rothstein, *Dynastie*, 142. Theodore's text in Theophanes describes the baptism of al-Mundhir into what appears to be Chalcedonian Christianity, and describes an attempt by Severus to win him over to miaphysitism. It would seem (as Mango and Scott observe in their English translation and commentary of Theophanes' *Chronicle*, 242, n. 18, in the first instance) that this episode is either an invention or, equally possibly, that al-Mundhir's baptism was part of the double act in which he was engaged. See as well the discussion in Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 88–9, who is also doubtful; see too (giving too much credence to the idea that the Naṣrids became Christian) Haarer, *Anastasius*, 39.

[137] Malalas, *Chron*. 466.

[138] van Rompay, 'Society and community', 257; Joh. Eph. *Vitae* (*PO* 17, 140, 145–6), on his efforts to proselytise amongst the people connected to al-Nu'mān. Simeon was the anti-Nestorian, miaphysite metropolitan bishop of Bēth Arshām, near the Sasanian capital at Ctesiphon; for his biography, Joh. Eph. *Vitae* (*PO* 17, 137–58).

Throughout the sixth century there are indications that the Naṣrids were cultivating an increasingly fine balance between appearing to be Christian and appearing to have no affiliation whatsoever. In 523/4, Abramius, the father of the celebrated Byzantine diplomat Nonnosus, was sent to al-Ḥīrah by Justin I to negotiate the release of two Roman generals captured in battle.[139] Not finding al-Mundhir at the site, Abramius and his entourage caught up with him at Ramleh, an encampment in the desert where al-Mundhir had simultaneously received an embassy from Dhū Nuwās, the anti-Christian king of Ḥimyar, who informed al-Mundhir of the massacre at Najrān in north Arabia. There is some plausible speculation that Dhū Nuwās was looking for support from the Naṣrids, perhaps even in the form of an anti-Christian persecution.[140] The Naṣrids do not seem to have responded favourably to these overtures; aside from the political problems this might cause at home—or, indeed, in his army[141]—Hind, the wife of al-Mundhir, may have been a Christian of Kinda.[142] According to the *Chronicle of Seert*, Hind went on to give her name to a monastery near al-Ḥīrah,[143] and her son ʿAmr (554–70) was apparently mentioned on a church inscription of the same monastery. This does not necessarily amount to proof that ʿAmr had openly espoused Christianity', but such a link suggests a continuation of the tolerant (or ambivalent) line of his predecessors and, for internal consumption, at any rate, it seems that ʿAmr was not hostile to Christians living within the Naṣrid orbit.

Following the short reign of ʿAmr's son, al-Mundhir (*c*.580–582/3), his successor, al-Nuʿmān (583–*c*.602), is reported to have adopted Christianity, becoming in the process the first and last Naṣrid ruler to do so openly. According to Evagrius, who provides his report in the manner of a Eusebian 'conversion' notice, al-Nuʿmān melted down a golden Aphrodite, and requested baptism, following a conversion topos familiar in the literature. Al-Nuʿmān's Christianisation is also

[139] Zach. Rhet. *HE*. 8.3.

[140] Ibid. the speculation is on the part of Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 169, and I. Shahid, *The Martyrs of Najrân: New Documents* (Brussels, 1971), at 268.

[141] Zach. Rhet. *HE*. 8.3, describing tensions within the Christian ranks of Mundhir's force after hearing about the Najrān massacre.

[142] Al-Ṭabarī 1. 900.

[143] *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 13, 442).

described by the *Chronicle of Seert*.[144] Al-Nuʿmān was, in any case, short-lived, as he was imprisoned and executed by the Sasanian Emperor after either failing to support him in a dynastic struggle, or, alternatively, causing harm to his favourite poet.[145]

The sparse evidence for the Naṣrids and the lack of any major archaeological evidence creates immense difficulties in assessing their attitude towards Christianity. Nevertheless, the Naṣrids also faced the need to manage their involvement with a competing set of interests, within which religion played a prominent role. In particular, while the Naṣrids cultivated a stable 'capital', al-Ḥīrah, they too faced the need to remain relevant to a disparate group which included not only the diverse residents of the town but also those of the steppe and in the desert regions who were economically and politically dependent on the access to markets, military protection and employment offered by the Naṣrids and the Sasanian Empire. In addition to their ongoing hostility towards the Jafnids, the Naṣrids seem to have been locked into a long and sometimes violent competition with the Ḥujrids, who controlled a strategic section of Arabia and lay within the corridor linking Ḥimyar to Byzantium. As we will see in the following chapter, both the Roman Empire and Sasanian Iran had clear motivation to control this part of Arabia, and the confluence of Roman, Naṣrid, and Sasanian interests again points to the complexity of the Naṣrid position, and, in particular, their need continually to enhance and protect their power base against all eventualities.[146] The most efficient way to balance the competing affiliations of the Sasanian leadership, Nestorian Christians, Mazdaeans, non-Christians, and, indeed, anyone else, was simply to choose no affiliation at all, by maintaining the appearance of supporting anyone who was politically well-disposed towards them. In this, then, the solution of the Naṣrids, whilst operationally distinct from that of their Jafnid rivals, produced much the same set of results; by creating an indistinct and flexible picture of institutional religious affiliation, they protected themselves from the dangers inherent in openly identifying their interests.

[144] Ibid. (*PO* 13, 468–9); Evag. *HE* 6.22 (on al-Nuʿmān); Allen, *Evagrius*, 68; commentary provided by Whitby, *Evagrius*, 314, n. 82.

[145] For the conditions surrounding the end of the Naṣrid dynasty, see Ch. 5.

[146] M. J. Kister, 'Al-Hīra. Some notes on its relations with Arabia', *Arabica*, 15 (1968), 143–69; Bosworth, 'Iran and the Arabs before Islam', 600–2.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have sought to examine one small aspect of the Christianisation of the leaders of groups of people peripheral to the Roman Empire. As an acculturative and assimilative process, identification with Christianity through the patronage of, or association with, its outward symbols and forms offered new opportunities for Arab groups and allowed their elite, in particular, to increase their power and prestige through closer associations with a Christian empire; in the case of the Naṣrids, an open ambiguity with an emphasis on disaffiliation provided the desired effect in an empire where Christianity was not the state religion. Over time, acculturation through Christianisation could have adverse consequences—the advancement of 'converts' such as Aspebetos to high office, or the prestige accorded to individuals such as al-Mundhir through association with religious politics, held the very real potential for causing social fragmentation. In the evidence for the Jafnids and the Naṣrids discussed here it is possible to see, hypothetically, ways in which these elite ruling families could mitigate these social processes and retain their influence over the peoples on whom at least some of their power depended. The presentation of a very particular image of the Jafnids through the al-Mundhir building at Reṣāfa is an example of this, and efforts of this kind were assisted by the mode of Christianity's historic presentation on the steppe, which itself often failed to encourage a strong association with the imperial, settled world. These responses to the growing importance of openly identifying religious affiliations in both the Roman and Sasanian empires were integral to the delicate balancing act, central to the way that Arab groups like the Jafnids approached their relationship with the Roman Empire.

3

Empires, Clients, and Politics

INTRODUCTION

In 572, apparently furious over a request from the Jafnid leader al-Mundhir for gold to hire soldiers, the Roman Emperor Justin II sent an order to the patrician Marcian to have him executed.[1] In the account given by John of Ephesus, al-Mundhir received the wrong letter by mistake, and managed to evade the looming attempt on his life. John's intense dislike of Justin raises the possibility that the details of the story may be exaggerated. Yet the growing distrust between the Jafnids and Constantinople could not be halted, and events quickly progressed which led to definitive Roman action against the Jafnid leadership and the deposition and exile of al-Mundhir.[2]

The subject of this chapter is the political relationship between the Romans and the Jafnids, as well as that between the Sasanians and the Naṣrids. Its development to the point of punitive action is assessed from the perspective of the historical processes by which groups peripheral to empires can be politically transformed into 'polities' which, while not necessarily states, could exhibit state-like features. Such transformations were very often by-products of a combination of strong indigenous leadership and the common imperial practice of indirect rule, which catalysed the development of sometimes politically weak, peripheral groups into more cohesive entities.

Tracing the political development of the Jafnids and the Naṣrids also demonstrates the extent to which the experience of the two was a continuation of the steady increase in the complexities, frequency,

[1] Joh. Eph. *HE* 281–2 (3.6.3). [2] Ibid. 175 (3.3.41).

and closeness of contact between empires and Arabs as settlement and influence expanded into the late antique steppe and desert. Behaving with increased autonomy of action, and becoming part of the local community, Arab elites could show by their actions that they were becoming full participants in imperial affairs. Nevertheless, they also faced the pressure, as middlemen in position between the state and the tribe, to balance their commitments to both.

ARABS AND EMPIRES

The relationship between empires and Arabs in the sixth century is, in its broadest sense, part of the wider context of imperial client management. For the Romans, the way in which they 'managed' the Jafnids was, unremarkably, a continuation of their historical approach to small states, kings, and local rulers, who typically came to arrangements with the Empire for the retention of their power. In this way, entities that lay too far beyond Roman control for convenient action could become subject to their influence, benefiting, in return, from imperial financial and political support. In the early Principate the gradual extension of Roman power had brought new clients into the Empire's orbit, but, as the objects of indirect rule policies, they were never realistically expected to last.[3] Over time, small states and kingdoms gradually succumbed to the 'provincialisation' of their territory and the deposition of their monarchies; their incorporation into the Empire was often simply the formal expression of a pre-existing state of affairs.[4] In the course of Roman expansion, the Empire encountered groups of people on its periphery who are commonly labelled using the term 'tribe'. The term, like many others discussed in this study, is problematic; it possesses certain connotations of political or cultural inferiority, particularly in opposition to

[3] e.g. Isaac, *Limits*, 119, on Trajan's annexation of Arabia: 'Rude behaviour or bad grammar may have been the reason for Trajan's decision. The Romans did not agonize about the annexation of a client kingdom.'

[4] Millar, *Roman Near East*, 44–5, on the provincialisation and incorporation of Judaea; Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* 79–80, on the Nabataean kingdom; Isaac, *Limits*, 39, on Commagene, attributing its annexation to Vespasian's concern over the vulnerability of Samosata to the Persians, from Joseph. *BJ* 7.7.1, and *Limits*, 119, on the accession of Osrhoene on a 'feeble excuse' of Caracalla.

the supposed dominance and power of the state. As the most recent volume to appear on this subject demonstrates, our understanding of terms such as 'tribe' and 'state' are constantly evolving, and there is no clear consensus among specialists in the field. Having said that, it is still useful, especially for our purposes here, to conceive of the tribe as a group of people who are sometimes organised into different kinds of segment, connected, for example, via mechanisms of family lineage. This definition is not without its many critics, but, as Szuchman points out, it is still a useful way to conceive of what a tribe 'is'.[5] While not necessarily the opposite of the tribe, and while the state and tribe might feasibly share certain political, cultural, religious, and social attributes, the state can be reasonably characterised with reference to some form of centralised political hierarchy which is not present in the organisation of the tribe.[6]

When they encountered tribes, therefore, the Romans followed similar policies, including those based on coercive diplomacy and often dictated from positions of military strength. The Roman attitude towards tribes also involved attempts to identify and support leaders against whom they could apply political leverage, backed up with punitive expeditions and gifts of money where it suited. Policies of indirect rule, these avoided the costly extension of fortifications into peripheral country where there was no guarantee of Roman success, and benefited from the resources which tribal groups could offer, such as manpower for use in Rome's wars.[7]

The Arabs whom Rome encountered in the east in the second, third and fourth centuries were subject to similar initiatives, which varied in their nature and the levels of coercion that were needed.

[5] J. Szuchman, 'Integrating approaches to nomads, tribes, and the state in the ancient Near East', in *Nomads, Tribes, and the State*, 1–14, esp. 4–5.

[6] For further discussion see R. Tapper, 'Introduction', in *Conflict*, 1–82, esp. 66; also W. Lancaster and F. Lancaster, 'Tribal formations in the Arabian peninsula', *Arab. Arch. Epig.* 3 (1992), 145–72, at 154, 165; I. M. Lapidus, 'Tribes and state formation in Islamic history', in P. S. Khoury and J. Kostiner (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley, 1990), 25–47, at 25–6; in the same volume, R. Tapper, 'Anthropologists, historians, and tribespeople on tribe and state formation in the Middle East', 48–73, at 50.

[7] Heather, 'Late Roman art', 25–9, 32–3; on the use of manpower, for example, Amm. 17.13.3, describing a yearly tribute of picked and able men, promised by the Sarmatians as part of a treaty agreement, under Constantius (AD 358); J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom* (Oxford, 1990), 34–5.

That the Romans were able to extend their power well into the northern part of the Arabian peninsula is indicated by the second-century group of inscriptions recovered from Ruwwāfa in the Ḥijāz (see Map 4), to the north of Ḥegrā,[8] where a Latin inscription dating from the same time period was also found.[9] The inscriptions at Ruwwāfa are composed of different sections in Greek and Nabataean Aramaic, and include one composed in Greek and Nabataean, and relate the construction of a temple by a number of people connected with a larger group which may be Thamud, an Arab tribal group.[10] The inscriptions honour the primacy of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, and are an early indication, at the extremities of Roman power, of friendly relations between Romans and Arabs. The extent and nature of the relationship is unclear, although Macdonald's argument that the dedication of the temple in this remote site, far from Bostra, is far more intelligible if we consider the possibility that the Arabs involved were Roman military auxiliaries, is compelling.[11] If so, not only do the inscriptions at Ruwwāfa perhaps presage the incorporation of the *Thamudeni* into units referenced in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (n. 17, below),[12] they might also be viewed as the precursor of the much closer pattern of interaction between the Roman Empire and Arabs such as the Jafnids.

Further to the north, a similar indication of closer contacts during the same period is also found in a bilingual third-century inscription from Umm al-Jimāl in Jordan, describing a teacher (*τροφεύς*) of

[8] The inscriptions have received several publications and translations. The one used here is that of J. T. Milik, 'Inscriptions grecques et nabatéenes de Rawwafah', *University of London: Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology*, 10 (1971), 54–8. D. Graf, 'The Saracens and the defense of the Arabian frontier', *BASOR*, 229 (1978), 1–26, at 9–10, provides a comprehensive discussion of the text and the history of its various recensions.

[9] D. al-Talhi and M. al-Daire, 'Roman presence in the desert: a new inscription from Hegra', *Chiron*, 35 (2005), 205–17.

[10] Thamud is described as *Θαμουδηνῶν ἔ[θνος]* in the Greek section, although this reading is by no means certain; in the Nabataean section, Thamud appears as *TMWDW SRKTH*, 'federation of the Thamud', in the opinion of Milik.

[11] M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Quelques réflexions sur les Saracènes, l'inscription de Rawwāfa et l'armée romaine', in H. Lozachmeur (ed.), *Présence arabe dans le Croissant Fertile avant l'Hégire. Acte de la Table ronde internationale organisée par l'unit de recherche associé 1062 du CNRS, Études sémitiques, au Collège de France, le 13 novembre 1993* (Paris, 1995), 93–201, at 101. This article has been updated and republished as 'On Saracens, the Rawwāfah inscription, and the Roman army', in M. C. A. Macdonald, *Literacy and Identity in Pre-Islamic Arabia* (Farnham, 2009), 1–26.

[12] Macdonald, 'On Saracens', 14.

Gadimathos, king (*mlk*) of a group of people tentatively identified with an Arab tribal group known as Tanūkh, of which more is said below. It is possible that Tanūkh were involved during this period in a conflict with the Palmyrene queen Zenobia, and their apparently friendly relationship with Rome may have been related to this fact.[13]

From the third century, the expansion of Roman interests and settled agriculture into the steppe, combined with the realisation of the new threat posed by a resurgent Sasanian Empire, inevitably raised the profile of the Arabs whom Rome encountered on its south-eastern frontiers. At this time there is also a shift in the literary categorisation of Arabs, who now appear as *sarakēnoi* or, in Syriac, *ṭayyāyē*. The name was popularly connected to the biblical Sarah by some ancient authors, but although some refer to the change in the names used to describe some Arabs—for example, Ammianus, referring to 'the *scenitai* (tent-dwelling) Arabs, whom we now call Saracens'—it is difficult to find a coherent explanation for the change.[14] Modern efforts, usefully summarised by Graf, have revolved around the Arabic term for east (*sharq*), or thief (*sāriq*), or the Aramaic term *s'rāk*, 'empty', through which is implied an association with the desert, and therefore with ideas of nomadism or barbarism. The term *srkt*, 'federation', is also adduced as a possibility.[15] The fact remains that there is no clear explanation, although it seems plausible, if not probable, that it should be connected with the increased prominence or visibility of Arabs prompted by the expansion of Roman interests into marginal lands.[16] Some of these *sarakēnoi* appear to have been recruited into the army, suggested by the presence of units such as *Equites Saraceni indigenae* in the *Notitia Dignitatum*.[17] Apart from formal service, Arabs also appear in contexts that indicate unambiguous subordination to Rome and direct incorporation into the army as

[13] *PAES* 4.A, 37–40: *Ἡ στήλη αὕτη Φερου Σαλλεου τρόφευς Γαδιμαθου Βασιλεὺς Θανουηνῶν*. 'This is the tomb of Fihr, son of Shullai, the tutor of Gadhimat, the king of Tanūkh' (the translation of Littmann, *PAES* 4.A, 38). See as well on this, Sartre, *Trois études*, 134; Isaac, *Limits*, 239.

[14] Amm. 22.15.1–2. See the discussion in Millar, 'Theodosian empire', 301–4, and 311.

[15] Graf, 'The Saracens and the defense of the Arabian frontier', 14–15.

[16] Hoyland, *Arabia*, 235.

[17] *ND Or*. 32, under the *dux phoenicis*, Equites Saraceni indigenae; and *Or*. 28, under the *Comes limitis Aegypti*, Equites Saraceni Thamudeni.

militia.[18] No texts of treaties have survived to indicate if the Romans formed formal arrangements which stood between enrolment in the army or the use of Arabs as ad hoc campaign militia. However, the sporadic appearance of common terms such as σπονδή ('treaty') and ὑπόσπονδος ('under/bound by treaty') in descriptions of Arabs fighting for the Roman Empire, as well as the fact that Queen Mavia gave her daughter in marriage to the *magister militum* Victor,[19] following the cessation of hostilities with Rome in the late fourth century, suggest that such formal agreements might have existed.[20]

At the same time, evidence points to an emerging Arab political self-confidence. Appearing in connection with the implicit recognition of Roman power, the famous Arabic funerary inscription of 328 from the Roman outpost camp at Nemāra in southern Syria, written using the Nabataean script and commemorating Imruʾ l-Qays, presents a certain Arab self-awareness within the frontiers of the Roman Empire:

> This is the monument of Imruʾ l-Qays b. ʿAmr, king [*mlk*] of all the Arabs; who sent his troops to Thāj and ruled both sections of al-Azd, and Nizār, and their kings; and chastised Madhhig, so that he successfully smote, in the irrigated land of Najrān, the realm of Shammar; and ruled Maʿadd; and handed over to his sons the settled communities, when he had been given authority over the latter on behalf of Persia and of Rome. And no king had matched his achievements up to the time when he died, in prosperity, in the year 223, the 7th day of Kislul [tr. Beeston].[21]

[18] For example, Amm. 23.3.8, on Arabs offering their military services to Julian (AD 324–5).

[19] Soc. Schol. *HE* 4.36.

[20] e.g. Malchus fr. 1, discussing a treaty between Rome and Iran prior to the defection of Amorkesos (*c.*473) where each party resolves not to receive the Arab allies of the other, using the term ὑπόσπονδος to describe their status; Soc. Schol. *HE* 4.36 describes the Saracens of Mavia as ὑπόσπονδοι, and during the defence of Constantinople (5.1) as Σαρακηνοὶ ὑπόσπονδοι; Soz. *HE* 7.1 has an identical description, and elsewhere (6.38) describes the dissolution of the σπονδαί between Rome and Mavia's Arab group. The term also appears in Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth.* 10 in a description of Aspebetos, and interestingly Alaric the Goth features as ὑπόσπονδος . . . Ρωμαίοις in Soc. Schol. *HE* 7.10.

[21] The inscription was discovered by R. Dussaud and F. Macler in 1901. It has an extensive bibliography, and it must be emphasised that many points of grammar, translation, and interpretation are in dispute. On this particular matter see M. Kropp, 'Vassal—neither of Rome nor of Persia: Marʾ-al Qays the great king of the Arabs', *PSAS* 23 (1993), 63–94, especially 78–9. For a concise discussion see M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Old Arabic (Epigraphic)', in K. Versteegh and M. Eid (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, 4 vols (Leiden, 2006–2008), iii. 464–77, at 469, and for the most recent interpretation and facsimile, see P. Bordreuil, A. Desreumaux,

The precise meaning of the term *mlk*, 'king', is not clear, in common with the inscription from Umm al-Jimāl and the instances of *mlk* recorded with the Ḥujrid leaders of Maʿadd or the Jafnid al-Ḥārith, discussed below. Nor is the sense of *al-ʿarab*, which might refer either to a geographical[22] or an ethnic entity, a straightforward matter to discern;[23] the considerable debate around these possibilities is examined in greater detail in the following chapter. The inscription does show, however, that the activities of Imruʾ l-Qays were varied and wide-ranging, stating that he 'ruled' (or had influence) over peoples to the southern end of the Arabian peninsula. It is not entirely clear whether or not he was a Roman (or indeed a Sasanian) ally, although the inscription's reference to campaigns against Shammar, the leader of Ḥimyar at this time, who had opened negotiations with the Sasanians, suggests that the actions of Imruʾ l-Qays were not without benefit to the Romans.[24] This sense of a certain personal confidence and aggrandisement on the part of Imruʾ l-Qays—which was not incompatible with larger Roman imperial aims—is intriguing. It places him neither fully inside nor outside the Empire, and suggests that his links with the Romans and the Sasanians have, to some extent, played a role in his ability to boast about his achievements in a permanent, monumental inscription which itself implicitly acknowledges the existence of imperial power.[25]

The means by which Arabs could be established as regular allies are unclear, especially as evidence for formal treaty agreements is lacking. It does not seem, however, that the Romans pursued the legal

C. Robin, and J. Teixidor, '205. Linteau inscrit: AO 4083', in C. Robin and Y. Calvet, *Arabie heureuse, Arabie déserte. Les antiquités arabiques du Musée du Louvre* (Paris, 1997), 265–9. The translation here is the elegant version of A. F. L. Beeston, 'Nemāra and Faw', *BSOAS*, 42/1 (1979), 1–6, at 6.

[22] M. J. Zwettler, 'Imra' alqays, son of 'Amr, king of . . . ???' in M. Mir (ed.), *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam* (Princeton, 1993), 3–37.

[23] I. Shahid, 'Byzantium and the Arabs during the reign of Constantine: the Namāra inscription', *BF*, 26 (2000), 81–6. See too Hoyland, *Arabia*, 79; Hoyland, 'Arab kings, Arab tribes, Arabic texts'; 5; Isaac, *Limits*, 240; Sartre, *Trois études*, 136–7; and for a more sceptical approach, Millar, *Roman Near East*, 434–5.

[24] Al-Ṭabarī, i. 834, describes Imruʾ l-Qays as son of the Sasanian-allied king of Lakhm, ʿAmr. An ʿAmr is known from the Paikuli inscription, as noted, Ch. 1 n. 12. Al-Ṭabarī (i. 834) describes the 'conversion' of Imruʾ l-Qays to Christianity, and Hoyland, *Arabia*, 79, thinks that he may have 'gone over' to the Romans, while Isaac, *Limits*, 240, considers him 'a loyal ally of the Romans'.

[25] Cf. Sartre, *Trois études*, 136–9.

classifications or their equivalent of *laeti* or *dediticii* towards the Arabs, of the sort found in the west for surrendered barbarians.[26] Sartre and Shahid both suggest that Tanūkh and their 'successors', Salīḥ, were the main federate allies of the Romans in the fourth and fifth centuries, although the arguments for this depend on inconclusive evidence. The Umm al-Jimāl inscription shows that a leader of Tanūkh had some sort of beneficial relationship with the Romans, but it does not prove that Tanūkh were Roman allies. Sartre suggests that the Christianisation of Zokomos, described by Sozomen, reflects the establishment of Salīḥ as Roman allies, but this is not entirely convincing.[27] The most that can be said reliably is that despite the limited indications of Arab interaction with Rome, it is possible to identify a pattern of increased and more complex contact, especially with the arrival of Amorkesos and Aspebetos. The latter, for example, attended the Council of Ephesus. I would suggest that the growing intimacy of contacts prefigures, in some ways, that between the Roman Empire and the Jafnids in the sixth century.

Another clue to increased levels of contact and cooperation is provided by the prominence of the term *phylarch* in literary and epigraphic sources. First appearing as a neutral description of local tribal chiefs, its meaning evolved as frontier relationships grew in intricacy, eventually acquiring a level of administrative meaning with connotations of authority within the local Roman military hierarchy, over a specific provincial region or area.[28] Phylarchs were engaged in local protection work, guarding frontier areas,[29] putting down

[26] Cf. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops*, 12–14.

[27] Based on the equation of Zokomos with *dj'm*, the apparent regal name of the Salīḥid leaders; see Sartre, *Trois études*, 148; Shahid, *Fifth Century*, 465–76; Isaac, *Limits*, 240.

[28] For a comprehensive discussion, see A. G. Grouchevoy, 'Trois "niveaux" de phylarques. Étude terminologique sur les relations de Rome et de Byzance avec les Arabes avant l'Islam', *Syria*, 72 (1995), 105–131; see too M. Sartre, 'Deux phylarques arabes', 145–54; R. Paret, 'Note sur un passage de Malalas concernant les phylarques arabes', *Arabica*, 5 (1958), 251–62; P. Mayerson, 'The use of the term *phylarchos* in the Roman-Byzantine East', *ZPE*, 88 (1991), 291–5; Shahid, *Fourth Century*, 518, *Fifth Century*, 500–1; J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, 'Nomads, phylarchs and settlement in Syria and Palestine', in A. S. Lewin and P. Pellegrini (eds.), *Settlements and Demography in the Near East in Late Antiquity: Proceedings of the Colloquium, Matera 27–29 October 2005* (Pisa, 2007), 131–46, esp. 139–40; Isaac, *Limits*, 243–9.

[29] Proc. *BP* 1.19.8–13.

revolts,[30] and campaigning with the Roman army.[31] The 'defection' from Iran of Aspebetos, whose name is a corruption of *spāhbedh*, 'master of horse', suggests that similar agreements existed in the Sasanian Empire as well.[32] In the Roman Empire, the office may also have been a legal expression of pre-existing, less formal agreements.

For the most part, the Arabs who in connection with the Romans appear and disappear do so in relative anonymity, materializing in fleeting mentions as phylarchs on campaign or as unspecified groups located mysteriously somewhere in the 'desert'. But in the sixth century, the emergence of the Jafnid dynasty, overtly supported by the Roman Empire, appears as the natural conclusion to the increased complexity of frontier contacts in the preceding centuries. The increased participation of people such as the Jafnids in the cultural and political life of empire, revealed, in relation to Rome, through their relatively widespread appearance in inscriptions and literary narratives, raises the question of the reciprocal effect that the alliances between empires and Arabs had on both parties. While the Jafnids may not have been critical players in matters of imperial policy,[33] it is worthwhile to approach them as a developing political unit. Within the context of their alliance with Rome in the mid- to late sixth century, the Jafnids increasingly exhibit some of the characteristics usually associated with the leaders of politically centralised groups such as small states.

ARABS, THE WEST, AND THE EAST

The developing relationship between Rome and the Arabs shares similarities with two significant historical processes. In the western Roman Empire, the Romans had long sought alliances with strong barbarian leaders. A framework for assessing the dynamics of these

[30] Malalas, *Chron*. 445–7, with reference to the Samaritan revolt put down by the phylarch of Palestine.

[31] Proc. *BP* 1.17.46; Malalas, *Chron*. 435; also Soz. *HE* 6.38, on Zokomos as a phylarch, becoming an opponent to the Sasanians following his Christianisation and attainment of the title.

[32] Cf. Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 109, and Isaac, *Limits*, 246–7.

[33] As noted in Ch. 1, concerning the issues raised by Whittow and Whitby.

relationships is now well-established, as a result of the investigations of Pohl, Wood, Heather, Wolfram, and others.[34] There are some obvious differences between the formation of proto-states in the west and the growth of Arab leaders alongside the Roman and Sasanian empires, such as the absence of the Jafnid elite from high military or civilian posts, or the more aggressive actions of the Goths in comparison to the Arabs. Yet one of the most valuable contributions of the studies of Goths, Franks, and others has been to show how the long relationship with the Empire is understood to have engendered greater political cohesion, contributing in a significant way to the growth of powerful, centralised political leadership, as an indigenous response to the presence of Roman power structures. The growth of this leadership, in turn, helped to bind these groups further, producing political entities with an organisational structure analogous to that of a state.[35] This phenomenon is not confined to the Roman west. The Near East has produced similar examples throughout its history, often connected with policies of imperial indirect rule. In many situations, the organisational changes which occurred in tribes, such as the surfacing of powerful leaders, dependent on both the state and the tribe, can be traced to the need to deal more effectively with states.[36] In circumstances as diverse as the relationship between the Bronze Age kingdom of Mari and its nomadic periphery, the Ottoman Empire and the Rwala of Jordan, and the British, Rashīdīs, and Saʿudis in the twentieth century, state support given to tribal leaders characteristically encouraged the centralisation of power and the growth of coalitions of smaller units under a central

[34] For example, Pohl, Wood, and Reimitz (eds.), *The Transformation of Frontiers*; W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden, 1998); P. Heather, *Goths and Romans, 332–489* (Oxford, 1991); H. Wolfram, *Das Reich und die Germanen* (Berlin, 1990); J. Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool, 1991); P. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (Oxford, 1988); also Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops*; N. Lenski, *Failure of Empire: Valens and the Roman State in the Fourth Century* A.D. (Berkeley, 2002).

[35] Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 121, 192, esp. 309–11, emphasising the part played by royal dynasties in the growing cohesion of tribal groups and the formation of kingdoms, and 315–16, arguing that the 'extremely violent experience' of the Goths encouraged the crystallisation of support around leading military/political figures; on this too Lenski, *Failure of Empire*, 146–7; Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians*, 76; Geary, *Before France and Germany*, pp. vii–viii.

[36] Cf. Lee, *Information and Frontiers*, 27; see P. C. Salzman, 'Why tribes have chiefs: a case from Baluchistan', in Tapper, *Conflict*, 262–83, at 262.

dynastic leadership. Sometimes referred to as 'confederations', groups of different tribes under a single leader, these units and their leaders continued to draw a large measure of their strength from the financial and political backing of the state.[37] But as a result of state support, confederation leadership always remained vulnerable to external intrigue, and the position of tribal confederation leader was a balancing act: state titles and stipends arrived with numerous opportunities, but as leaders became more closely connected to the state, the ability of the people under their leadership to retain their autonomy could be slowly eroded. Successful leaders needed to find ways to balance the demands of the state alongside the requirements of the tribe or confederation, establishing their confederations as entities that were almost states-within-states, and which were typically neither entirely inside nor outside the polity which sponsored them.[38]

The political development seen at Mari, where tribal representatives emerged whose function was to act as negotiator between the state authorities and the tribe, indicates that shifts in the underlying political organisation of the Mari nomads were well under way.[39] During the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, as well, there is similar evidence that the north Arabian Midianites became organised as a confederation of tribal groups, although the specifics are vague.[40]

[37] Major studies are the collected articles in: Fabietti and Salzman (eds.), *The Anthropology of Tribal and Peasant Pastoral Societies*; R. Tapper, *Conflict*, esp. the editor's introduction (see n. 6, above); M. Mundy and B. Musallam (eds.), *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East* (Cambridge, 2000), esp. A. V. G. Betts and K. W. Russell, 'Prehistoric and historic pastoral strategies in the Syrian steppe', 24–32; Khoury and Kostiner, *Tribes and State Formation*, esp. L. Beck, 'Tribes and the state in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Iran', 185–225; also F. Barth, *Nomads of South Persia: The Basseri Tribe of the Khamseh Confederacy* (Oslo, 1961); V. H. Matthews, *Pastoral Nomadism in the Mari Kingdom (ca. 1830–1760 BC)* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), and J.-R. Kupper, 'Le rôle des nomades dans l'histoire de la Mésopotamie ancienne', *JESHO* 2/2 (1959), 113–27; also M. al-Rasheed, 'The process of chiefdom-formation as a function of nomadic/sedentary interaction: the case of the Shammar nomads of North Arabia', *Cambridge Anthropology*, 12/3 (1987), 32–40; also, by the same author, 'Durable and non-durable dynasties: The Rashidis and Sa'udis in Central Arabia', *BJMES*, 19/2 (1992), 144–58, esp. 145–6; P. C. Salzman, *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State* (Boulder, Colo., 2004).

[38] Beck, 'Tribes and the state', 216–18.

[39] Matthews, *Pastoral Nomadism*, 139–40.

[40] G. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore, 1973), 108, 163–73, discussed by Graf, 'The Saracens', 11.

The presence of the term *SRKT* (?'federation') on the Ruwwāfa inscriptions, discussed above, perhaps reflecting a sense of a coalition of tribal groups, also hints at the ongoing process of social change in the region which was probably linked to, but not entirely dependent on, external contacts. Furthermore, the evidence from both Ruwwāfa and Nemāra suggests not just greater political cohesion but highlights its very existence either at the periphery of the Empire or even directly within it, reinforcing its proximity to the state.

During the sixth century, increasingly sophisticated contact between Arab groups and Rome and the Sasanians favoured precisely the kind of social and political changes identified in other historical contexts, contributing to the crystallisation of political power around ruling families who derived much (but not all) of their standing from imperial support. Unfortunately, the lack of information at our disposal about the people under Jafnid or Naṣrid control makes it virtually impossible to ascertain if any type of 'confederation'—for example, the popular idea of the 'Ghassānid confederation', for which there is no contemporary evidence, and which may in fact be something of a historical chimera—was evolving. Yet the emerging power of the Jafnid leaders, in particular, is part of a recurring Near Eastern phenomenon as well as a part of the broad social and political changes taking place amongst 'barbarians' in other parts of the Empire. While the various anonymous Arab individuals as well as the names of phylarchs allied to Rome found in the source material for earlier periods appear here as well, for the first time dynastic rulers emerge, elevated and supported by the state, negotiating directly with it and creating tangible symbols of their power, by means of the apparatus of empire. As these dynasties became more powerful, they seem to have been encapsulated as allies who were neither wholly inside nor outside the territory or control of the states who supported them. The Jafnids, Naṣrids, and a third group, the Ḥujrids, all participated to some extent in this kind of relationship with the state. The processes that formed them are visible in the evidence for the ongoing support of single family groups, overt recognition by the state through consistent diplomatic contacts, and increasing involvement in state affairs.

THE ḤUJRIDS AND THE NAṢRIDS IN ARABIA AND MESOPOTAMIA

The Ḥujrids, Kinda, Maʿadd, Muḍar, and the Ḥimyarites

The relationship between Ḥimyar and the Ḥujrid dynasty of Kinda has attracted comparison with that between the Jafnids and Rome and the Naṣrids and the Sasanians, as a leadership group dependent on a certain degree of state sponsorship.[41] It is appropriate, however, to set some distance between the Ḥujrids and Kinda, just as the Jafnids and Naṣrids are to be set apart from Ghassān and Lakhm, as while the Ḥujrids seem to have originally come from Kinda, their subsequent relationship with the Kinda tribe is unclear.[42] Initially the expansion of the kingdom of Saba had affected Kinda, but after Saba was annexed in approximately 275 by Ḥimyar, the Ḥimyarites became the dominant power in southern Arabia and slowly began to extend their authority northwards. This was probably done to counteract Roman efforts to win influence in Arabia, and, on the basis of extant inscriptions, the Ḥimyarites were able to command the support of several Arab tribes from a relatively wide area, including Kinda.[43] Ry 509, an inscription from the fifth century from Maʾsal al-Jumḥ, west of Riyāḍ and very probably the centre of Ḥimyarite power in central Arabia,[44] celebrates an Ḥimyarite expedition to the 'land of Maʿadd' and can be read, with the support of a Muslim source, Ibn Ḥabīb, as reflecting the Ḥimyarite installation of Ḥujr of Kinda over the Maʿadd group of Arabs.[45] It seems that this action towards Maʿadd (whose territory may have spanned central Arabia, north of Riyāḍ[46]) was part of the wider attempt to gain influence in the deserts of Arabia (see Map 4). After the mid-fifth century, Ḥimyarite royal inscriptions include 'the Arabs of the highlands

[41] Olinder, *Kings of Kinda*, 37.
[42] Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 193.
[43] Ibid. 170; id., 'Royaume Ḥujride', 665–75.
[44] Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 187.
[45] Ry 509 = G. Ryckmans, 'Inscriptions sud-Arabes (dixième série)', *Le Muséon*, 66 (1953), 267–317, at 303–7; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-mūḥabbar*, 368; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 49; Robin, 'Royaume Ḥujride', 692; M. Zwettler, 'Maʿadd in late-ancient Arabian epigraphy and other pre-Islamic sources', *WZKM* 90 (2000), 223–309, at 244–5.
[46] Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 168.

Map 4. The Arabian peninsula, after C. Robin, 'Les Arabes de Himyar, des «Romains» et des Perses (IIIe–VIe siècles de l'ère chrétienne)', *Semitica et Classica* 1 (2008), 168, indicating major settlements and presumed areas of tribal activity. Note the proximity of Axum to Ḥimyar.

and the littoral' as part of their kingdom.[47] Kinda appears in such inscriptions, taking part in military operations in the Arabian desert. In Ry 510 (AD 521), for example, they are included in a military mission against the Naṣrid leader al-Mundhir in Mesopotamia, alongside other auxiliaries.[48]

While Kinda appear as an ally of Ḥimyar, the Ḥujrids seem to have been used by the rulers of Ḥimyar primarily to control not Kinda, but Maʿadd, an Arab group in northern and central Arabia with whom they

[47] Ibid. 171–3.
[48] Ibid. 173; Ry 510 = Ryckmans, 'Inscriptions', 307–10.

become associated. The precise nature and composition of Maʿadd are not clear. The name features in the Nemāra inscription as a group under the rule of Imruʾ l-Qays, but whether Maʿadd was based around a group of tribes,[49] or was a term to describe a 'kind' of Arab, referring more generally to an *ethnie*, a group with a shared social organisation or culture, is open to debate, although Zwettler's argument for the latter is convincing.[50] Yet whatever the precise nature of the people referred to by the name Maʿadd, they appear as the objects of the policies of Rome, the Naṣrids, and the kingdom of Ḥimyar. In Roman sources, Maʿadd is associated with Kinda, subject (κατήκοι) to the Ḥimyarites, a situation which might reflect the campaigns against them described in Ry 506.[51] Even so, the exact role and position of the Ḥujrid dynasty is elusive. They were not entirely divorced from Kinda, on the basis of an inscription where Ḥujr appears as *mlk kdt*, 'king of Kinda'.[52] The degree of Ḥujrid dependence on the rulers of Ḥimyar is also of considerable interest. They are not mentioned in Ḥimyarite royal inscriptions,[53] and, as with the Jafnids, it seems plausible that the basis of Ḥujrid power did not completely depend on Ḥimyarite patronage. Yet the role of Ḥujr as *mlk kdt*, given that Kinda was under the rule of Ḥimyar, does indeed suggest that the title was designed for internal consumption with the assent and tolerance of the Ḥimyarites who, like the Romans, may have provided or been allowed the use of a royal title to boost the power of their client rulers. Such an arrangement would clearly have been of benefit to both parties. Whatever the exact case, the Ḥujrid dynasty was apparently maintained, with the son of Ḥujr, ʿAmr, succeeding him,[54] before a certain al-Ḥārith followed in the sixth century. This individual appears in Roman sources negotiating a treaty with Anastasius.[55] The precise area controlled by Ḥujr and his successors is unknown. It does seem clear though that Ḥimyar exercised considerable influence over large

[49] Cf. Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 191.
[50] Zwettler, 'Maʿadd', 225–7, 258–9.
[51] Proc. *BP* 1.19.14; Phot. *Bib*. 3.
[52] G. Ryckmans, 'Graffites Sabéens relevés en Arabie Saʿaudite', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 32 (1957), 557–63, at 561; Robin, 'Royaume Ḥujride', 694; cf. Hoyland, *Arabia*, 49.
[53] Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 174–6.
[54] Al-Ṭabarī i. 880–1; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 49.
[55] Robin, 'Royaume Ḥujride', 692–3; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 49; on the treaty with Anastasius, Phot. *Bib*. 3; Theoph. *Chron*. 144.

areas of the Arabian desert, and Robin has suggested that the territory of Maʿadd extended as far as al-Ḥīrah.[56]

Alongside the Ḥujrids, the Ḥimyarites may have employed other dynastic leaders to control parts of their territory. Another group, Muḍar, also appears in Ry 510. A certain Nuʿmānān/ al-Nuʿmān seems to have been at the head of Muḍar, paying allegiance to the Ḥimyarites at Maʾsal al-Jumḥ, at some point in the fifth or early sixth century; this individual might represent a second dynastic lineage, used by the Ḥimyarites to rule on their behalf.[57]

While many of the exact details concerning these different individuals and groups are the subject of ongoing debate, the difficult position occupied by the Ḥujrids between the Romans, Sasanians, and the Ḥimyarites is of great interest and offers an intriguing parallel to the Jafnids. In Roman sources, the Ḥujrids appear in the narrative of Procopius and the accounts of the career of the diplomat Nonnosus, preserved by Photius, caught up in the sixth-century struggles for control of trade routes and influence in the north and central Arabian desert as competition with the Sasanians spread to the region.[58] Relations between Rome and Ḥimyar were rarely straightforward, and frequently tinged with highly politicised religious concerns due to the proximity of Rome's militant Christian ally, Axum. As part of Constantinople's attempt to bring Ḥimyar into an anti-Sasanian alliance, the Roman Empire initiated diplomatic contacts with the Ḥujrids, probably seeing an opportunity to create a continuous series of buffers by which it might extend its influence along the west coast of Arabia, countering Sasanian attempts to do the same on the east coast and securing the Empire's economic and political interests.[59] In this way the Romans might also influence the Ḥujrid leaders of Maʿadd to place pressure on the Sasanians, particularly through their enmity towards

[56] Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 174.

[57] Ibid. 177.

[58] They may also play a role in a difficult passage of Theophanes, mentioned in ch. 2 n. 68, where a certain 'Ogaros' (? Ḥujr) is a participant in a dispute with the Romans. The identification is favoured by Shahid, *Fifth Century*, 127, but is uncertain.

[59] Cf. Z. Rubin, 'Byzantium and Southern Arabia—The policy of Anastasius', in D. H. French and C. S. Lightfoot (eds.), *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire: Proceedings of a Colloquium Held at Ankara in September 1988*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1989), ii, 383–420, esp. 399; al-Ṭabarī i. 958, states that in *c.*531 the Lakhmid al-Mundhir III was given jurisdiction on behalf of the Iranians over Baḥrain and Yamāma; see Bosworth, 'Iran and the Arabs', 602; S. Smith, 'Events in Arabia in the 6th century A.D.', *BSOAS*, 16/3 (1954), 425–68, at 442; Greatrex, 'Byzantium and the East', 484.

the Naṣrids. The Ḥujrid al-Ḥārith is, indeed, thought to have threatened the city of al-Ḥīrah on a number of occasions, and perhaps even to have sacked it,[60] and the Ḥujrid rulers could apparently exercise power over a considerable distance.[61] In any event, it seems that al-Ḥārith concluded a peace with Anastasius in 502/3 after a period of unrest which saw the Romans impose their military strength in Arabia and Palestine over various undefined groups of Arab raiders.[62] Al-Ḥārith then reappears in 527/8 arguing with the *dux* of Palestine before being killed in the same year by the Naṣrid leader al-Mundhir.[63] Shortly afterwards, in approximately 530/1, Qays (Kaisos), 'leader of Kinda and Maʿadd', described as a descendant of al-Ḥārith, received an imperial embassy from Abraham, the father of Nonnosus, which ended with Qays visiting Byzantium, where he left his son as a hostage.[64] Nonnosus later visited Qays on his way to Axum.[65] At the same time, and from a slightly different perspective, Procopius describes a diplomatic mission by an ambassador of Justinian, Julianus, whose brief was to turn Axum and Ḥimyar against the Sasanians. During this excerpt, Procopius portrays Qays as the Roman favourite to be installed as leader of the 'Maddene Saracens'.[66] It is clear that both Rome and Ḥimyar sought to extend their influence in central and northern Arabia, and even further afield, through the control of the Ḥujrids.

It is also worth noting that the position of Kinda in the Ḥimyarite kingdom also raises questions about the degree of their dependence on Ḥimyar. The importance of Kinda in south-central Arabia, and its place in regional trade and the wealth and power it derived from it, has been highlighted by excavations at the city of Qaryat al-Fāw in

[60] Ry 510, discussed by Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 177; see too Olinder, *Kings of Kinda*, 61; cf. Josh. Styl. *Chron*. 57–9.

[61] Cf. Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 176: 'On peut s'interroger sur l'aide que Byzance attendait des Ḥujrides, qui exerçaient une autorité sur des tribus apparemment fort éloignées de l'Empire: Maʾsal al-Jumḥ, le centre du pouvoir ḥujride, se trouve à plus de 1 000 km. Ce devait être tout d'abord un moyen de pression sur les Sāsānides et leurs auxiliaires d'al-Ḥīra.'

[62] Theoph. *Chron*. 144; Evag. *HE* 3.36.

[63] Malalas, *Chron*. 434–5; Theoph. *Chron*. 179.

[64] Phot. *Bib*. 3.

[65] Ibid. 3.

[66] Proc. *BP* 1.20.9–10, who says (reflecting the importance of Christianity in politics and diplomacy) that Julianus, the ambassador of Justinian, was to appeal to a commonality of faith in his negotiations. Julianus' mission also exerted pressure on Ḥimyar to appoint Kaisos/Qays as phylarch of Maʿadd to fight the Iranians. See too Phot. *Bib*. 3.

south-central Arabia, some distance south-west of Riyāḍ. South Arabian inscriptions have identified it as the 'capital' of Kinda, located at a natural trade bottleneck from which position it may have drawn its wealth through the imposition of taxes or customs duties. At its height, Kinda minted its own coins, produced frescoes and statues, and imported fine goods.[67] For Constantinople, the prospect of exerting influence in any part of this region, either by opening diplomatic ties with the Ḥujrids and Maʿadd, or by attemping to absorb Ḥimyarite allies such as Kinda by opening relations with the leaders of Ḥimyar, was very appealing. Given the uneven relationship between the Roman Empire and Ḥimyar, and the latter's growing involvement in 'superpower politics', any of these individuals or groups were an attractive diplomatic target for both Rome, and, of course, the Sasanians.[68] Did the Romans also have contact with Muḍar? Possibly; Ry 510, describing the mission against al-Mundhir, records the participation of a tribe or group called 'Thaʿlabat', alongside Kinda and Muḍar.[69] Writing about a slightly earlier period, Joshua the Stylite recorded the appearance in central Arabia of the 'Thaʿlabite Arabs', allied to Rome and campaigning on its behalf.[70] The link between Muḍar and Thaʿlabat, and the apparent pro-Roman stance of the latter in the text of Joshua, certainly suggests contact between the two, especially if, as Robin suggests, the territory of Muḍar broadly corresponded to northern Arabia, close to or overlapping with the southern extremities of the Roman Empire.[71]

The 'fate' of the Ḥujrids is vague. That they were being integrated into the political and military framework of the Roman Empire is underscored by events which followed the demise of al-Ḥārith in 528, after which we know from Photius that Qays received a phylarchal regional command in Palestine, and then divided his phylarchate

[67] A. R. al-Ansary, *Qaryat al-Faw: A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilisation in Saʿudi Arabia* (Riyadh, 1982), esp. 15, 84.

[68] Hoyland, Arabia, 51; cf. Donner, 'The Background to Islam', 528 n. 11.; Bosworth, 'Iran and the Arabs', 602, and Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 272, report an Arab tradition whereby Ḥārith became a vassal of the Iranian king Kawad, ruling parts of the Gulf coast on his behalf. Certainly relations (either friendly or otherwise) between Kinda and the Lakhmids and Iranians would have highlighted the importance, for Rome, of maintaining favourable relations with Kinda. See as well Smith, 'Events in Arabia', 445–6.

[69] Ry 510; Robin, 'Royaume Ḥujride', 692, and 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 177.

[70] Josh. Styl. *Chron*. 57; Olinder, *Kings of Kinda*, 52; Rothstein, *Dynastie*, 91.

[71] Cf. Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 177–8, 189.

between his two brothers. Beyond this, there is little information.[72] The apparent 'disappearance' of the descendants of Ḥujr from Roman literary sources in conjunction with the rise in favour of the Jafnids as Roman allies raises the question of whether or not part of Maʿadd had fallen under further direct or indirect Roman influence, perhaps through the Jafnids; but the evidence suggests that it is the Naṣrids who should be preferred as the new powerbrokers in central Arabia, during a period when Ḥimyar was experiencing difficulty controlling its clients. In 548, according to the inscription at Marib, Abraha had received embassies from Axum, the Romans, Sasanians, al-Mundhir, and two Jafnids, al-Ḥārith and Abu-Kārib; but problems were emerging and in the same year Abraha was forced to deal with a revolt by the man he had posted to control Kinda, Yazīd ibn Kabasha.[73] Only four years later, on the basis of Ry 506, Abraha campaigned successfully against Maʿadd. The same inscription suggests that a son of the Naṣrid al-Mundhir, ʿAmr, had become leader of Maʿadd at about the same time, and that the Naṣrids provided hostages to Abraha after they were defeated.[74] The power of Ḥimyar was on the wane, though, and the poaching of the Ḥujrids by the Romans and the attempts by the Naṣrids to gain influence over Maʿadd should perhaps be seen as a symptom. Any decline of Maʿadd, or even Kinda, had more to do with the fortunes of the Ḥimyarites than with those of the Jafnids.

The Ḥujrids were a multi-generational family dynasty who seem to have owed a large part of their position to the Ḥimyarites. Alongside the Ḥujrids, there were also groups such as Muḍar and Maʿadd who were influenced by Ḥimyar and took part in its wars. We might include Kinda in this, as they also received a Ḥimyarite deputy. These different groups covered large areas in central Arabia, and allowed the Ḥimyarite state which influenced them to extend its power well beyond its main base of power in Yemen. Control of Muḍar via al-Nuʿmān, or Maʿadd, via Ḥujr, extended Ḥimyarite political authority over a vast area, bordering on both the Roman and the Sasanian empires. Yet we might wonder about the

[72] Phot. *Bib.* 3.

[73] *CIS* 4. 541; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 55; Smith, 'Events in Arabia', 440.

[74] See the extensive discussion of Ry 506 in Zwettler, 'Maʿadd', 246–57, particularly Zwettler's interpretation of the end of the inscription, which describes negotiations between al-Mundhir and Abraha over hostages, 'for (al-Mundhir) had invested (ʿAmr) with governorship over Maʿadd.'

consequences of Ḥimyarite policies in this regard, and also of the attempts made by the Romans to develop a diplomatic relationship with the Ḥujrid dynasty. The fact that the Ḥujrid leaders were open to Roman overtures and the apparent switch in leadership of Maʿadd to the Naṣrids suggests that Ḥimyarite control was not total. Did the efforts of the state, encapsulating smaller, less powerful groups or individuals, who were supported by the state but beyond its ability to rule directly, encourage them to develop greater political power? In Arabia, this question is difficult to answer with certainty, but the history of the Ḥujrids suggests that it was certainly possible, and these events are worth keeping in mind as we turn to examine the Naṣrids and the Jafnids.

The Naṣrids, Lakhm, and Tanūkh

The Naṣrids, the ruling dynasty at al-Ḥīrah, also derived some measure of their support and the ability to control local populations from their imperial patrons, the Sasanians. The genesis of this relationship and the ways in which the Naṣrids came to be associated with the Sasanians are somewhat unclear, especially if the Imruʾ l-Qays buried at Nemāra is to be considered part of this lineage.[75] The Paikuli inscription from Kurdistan shows that a king named ʿAmr was under Iranian patronage as early as the reign of Narseh, and the Arab Muslim tradition (reflected by al-Ṭabarī, for example) describes a rich heritage of Arab Naṣrid kings at al-Ḥīrah.[76] It is the Paikuli inscription which furnishes evidence for a connection between the successors of ʿAmr and the Lakhmid tribe, a link which is also evoked in a Manichean text, but to what extent this continued is highly debatable.[77] The situation thus recalls that discussed above for Ḥujr and Kinda, whereby the leaders may have come from a particular tribal group and even maintained some form of an association with it, while actually ruling or leading an entirely different group of people. For the Naṣrids, this new group might have been a mixed set of people, and may have included Tanūkh. On the basis of two Ḥimyarite inscriptions, it may be plausible to place Tanūkh in north-east

[75] So Sartre, *Trois études*, 137.
[76] Rothstein, *Dynastie*, esp. 41–125.
[77] M. Tardieu, 'L'arrivée des Manichéens à al-Ḥīra', in Canivet and Rey-Coquais, *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, 15–24; Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 182, 189.

Arabia in the fourth and fifth centuries, and Robin suggests that the term Tanūkh was used by the Ḥimyarites to describe al-Ḥīrah. There is a possible, but debatable, connection between the Gadimathos possibly connected with Tanūkh from the Umm al-Jimāl inscription, above, and a Jadhīma al-Abrash, connected to al-Ḥīrah and the Naṣrids in the later Muslim Arabic tradition. The confusion over exactly which tribe was under Naṣrid control at and around al-Ḥīrah—especially if Lakhm was based further west, if a link between Imruʾ l-Qays and Lakhm is to be preferred—warns us against making any judgement over the existence of a homogeneous 'Lakhmid' state. Like the terms Maʿadd, Muḍar, and Ghassān, it is impossible to know what number of other allied or subect peoples might be included within these broad designations.[78]

In common with the Jafnids, it is only in the late fifth and early sixth centuries that the Naṣrids appear in a significant way in contemporary literary sources, primarily through the problems caused by al-Nuʿmān at the turn of the century, the attacks of al-Mundhir, the role of his descendant, ʿAmr (Ambrus), in negotiations with the Roman Emperor Justin II, and the apparent Christianisation and death of another al-Nuʿmān, the final Naṣrid leader.[79] The likely reason for this is the emergence of the Jafnid leaders in the west at about the same time, and the ongoing state of competition and warfare between the Empire and the Sasanians which favoured an increased emphasis on the allies of the two.[80]

The degree of political and economic development among the Naṣrids and those over whom they ruled is suggested by a number of factors. Al-Ḥīrah's location favoured caravan traffic, with links to the lucrative Red Sea and Persian Gulf spice and silk markets. As mentioned above, al-Ṭabarī suggested that the Naṣrid al-Mundhir was in control of Baḥrain and Yamāma on behalf of the Sasanians, following the death of al-Ḥārith the Ḥujrid, placing him in nominal control of Persian Gulf trade routes. There is also the suggestion in Ry 506 that the Naṣrids were active with regard to Maʿadd, in central Arabia, and it is possible as well that they sought an alliance with

[78] Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 181–2, 190.

[79] Al-Nuʿmān: Theoph. *Chron.* 141; al-Mundhir: Malalas, *Chron.* 434–5, Proc. *BP* 2.16.17, 19.34, and 28.12–14; ʿAmr: Menander fr. 6.1; on al-Nuʿmān, *Chron. Seert* (*PO* 13, 468–9); Evag. *HE* 6.22.

[80] Cf. the increased reference to Ḥimyar and Axum during this period, most probably for the same reasons.

Yathrib (Medina). This is especially interesting, in that there is some speculation that the Jafnids may have tried to gain an economic foothold in Mecca.[81] It is plausible to see within this general picture the Naṣrid leadership attempting to enlarge their activities in Arabia, profiting from superpower competition in the region. Other revenues may have come from plunder and booty, and it is also thought that the Naṣrids were able to retain some of the tax from estates and regional populations under their control.[82]

Political development seems to have been connected to Sasanian policy, although at a certain point started to become detached from it. Through the Naṣrids, the Sasanians tried to extend their influence into Arabia; Arabs under Naṣrid control also accompanied Sasanian forces on operations in Syria and Mesopotamia. Yet in these instances, Arab allies of the Sasanids displayed a steadily increasing independence of action, and Naṣrid leaders could also be seen attempting to influence the Sasanian king himself, even if under the pretence of a common set of goals.[83] Naṣrid enmity towards the Ḥujrids and, later, the Jafnids, also began to take place more and more outside of imperial control. Whilst the supposed dynastic links between the Ḥujrids and Naṣrids seem to have originated from a position of Ḥujrid superiority, the accession of the vigorous and energetic leader al-Mundhir and the death of the Ḥujrid al-Ḥārith during the early years of al-Mundhir's leadership tipped the balance of power in favour of the Naṣrids, a factor, perhaps, in the apparent control over Maʿadd enjoyed by the Naṣrids during this period.[84] The growing political influence of the Naṣrids under al-Mundhir is apparent in his receipt of an embassy from Dhū Nuwās, looking for support in connection with anti-Christian activities at Najrān in Arabia.[85] The Marib dam inscription from Ḥimyar records an embassy of the Naṣrids to Abraha, and the presence of ʿAmr on

[81] Donner, 'The background to Islam', 516, discussing Kister, 'Al-Hira', 144–9, Bosworth, 'Iran and the Arabs', 600–1.

[82] F. M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, 1981), 47.

[83] Josh. Styl. *Chron*. 58; cf. Howard-Johnston, 'State and society', 123, discussing Sasanian attempts to 'suborn' tribes under Jafnid influence. It is very likely that any such attempts would have depended on the Lakhmids, hinting at the occasional alignment between Lakhmid 'policy' and Sasanian 'interests'.

[84] Robin, 'Royaume Ḥujride', 669; Olinder, *Kings of Kinda*, 58.

[85] Zach. Rhet. *HE*. 8. 3.

diplomatic missions to Justin II indicates a growing diplomatic role for the Naṣrid leaders, which is dicussed in more detail below.[86]

Despite the increasing independence of action which characterises later Naṣrid leaders, it is unlikely that the sources of revenue or the political and diplomatic opportunities taken by the Naṣrids would have been as accessible without the consistent support provided by the Sasanian leadership. Unlike the territory of Maʿadd, the Naṣrid base was located in close proximity to the seat of Sasanian power, yet comparisons with the Ḥujrids are illuminating. The Naṣrids took part in the wars of the Sasanians against Rome and seem to have acted as their agents in Arabia and the Gulf. The Naṣrid leadership was also a multi-generational dynasty maintained at least in part through the tolerance of the empire which patronised it. Sasanian support was probably a key component in the longevity of the Naṣrid dynasty and the source of many of its opportunities to extend its power.

Even whilst 'part' of the Sasanian Empire, the Naṣrids fostered a noticeable political identity, and this, alongside their maintenance of their stable base at al-Ḥīrah, contrives to make the Naṣrids the most state-like group of the Naṣrids, Jafnids, and Ḥujrids. Little is known of any stable Jafnid 'base', and there are conflicting reports of where exactly any descendants of Ḥujr exercised their power.[87] Unfortunately, as well, little is known of al-Ḥīrah, other than the sparse archaeological evidence, but its celebrated place in Muslim tradition as a centre for pre-Islamic poetry,[88] and the traditional attribution of the construction of al-Khawarnak—a desert castle or retreat[89]—to the Naṣrids, held in awe by Muslims at the time of the seventh-century invasions, points towards a flowering and distinctive culture inside the borders of a late antique superpower state which supported and protected its leading dynastic family.[90] Traditions concerning its army, court, and other familiar aspects of state-like entities, whilst provided by much later sources, also suggest that the Naṣrids should be placed apart from the Jafnids and the Ḥujrids. Certainly their relationship with the Sasanians was far longer-lived than that between

[86] *CIS* 4. 541; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 55; Smith, 'Events in Arabia', 440.
[87] Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 187, 193.
[88] Poetry, language, and culture will be discussed in more detail in Ch. 4.
[89] On al-Khawarnak, see further Ch. 6.
[90] D. Talbot Rice, 'The Oxford excavations at Hira, 1931', *Antiquity*, 6 (1932), 276–91, at 277; also 'Hira', 257.

the Romans and the Jafnids or Ḥujrids,[91] and it was this ongong support which probably helped to develop the Naṣrid principality at al-Ḥīrah into a state-like entity capable of acting within a large, centralised, and well-organised empire.

THE JAFNIDS AND GHASSĀN

For the Jafnids, we can take advantage of the greater evidence for their activities in the sixth century, such as their involvement in the economic and political life of the Empire, as well as their involvement in ecclesiastical matters, to examine the ways in which they produced an identifiable and developing political 'entity' within the Roman Empire but, at the same time, managed to remain somewhat detached from it.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the manner in which the Jafnids came into contact with the Roman Empire is not well understood. Muslim Arab sources suggest that Ghassān moved into Syria, displacing those who were already there and who already enjoyed some sort of treaty relationship with Rome.[92] In the *Kitāb al-mūḥabbar* of Ibn Ḥabīb and the *Taʾrīkh* of Yaʿqubi, for example, a power struggle between Ghassān and another tribal group, Salīḥ, following a movement of Ghassān northwards into Syria, resulted in the Romans choosing Ghassān as their preferred allies and concluding a treaty of mutual support.[93] Interestingly, these passages suggest that Salīḥ were in a 'management' position over a number of other Arab tribes on behalf of the Romans, including Muḍar, a duty which included the collection of taxes. There is no contemporary evidence for this, but the sense of these passages is consistent with the general picture of an increased level of contact between the Romans and the Arabs in Syria and northern Arabia and

[91] Cf. Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 191–3.

[92] It is tempting to connect this disturbance in southern Syria with that reported by Theophanes for the turn of the sixth century: Theoph. *Chron.* 141; cf. Evag. *HE* 3.36; Shahid, *Fifth Century*, 120–33.

[93] Ibn Ḥabīb, 370–71; Yaʿqubi, 233–5, translated by Hoyland, *Arabia*, 239–40. This episode also features in Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, *Taʾrīkh*, 98–9, discussed by Shahid, *Fifth Century*, 285. The presence of Salīḥ within or on the edges of the Roman Empire is inferred by Sartre, *Trois études*, 148, a connection also made by Shahid, *Fifth Century*, 243.

their incorporation into formal or semi-formal administrative arrangements.

While the exact details of the first contacts between Rome and the Jafnids are not precisely known, the Jafnids would eventually become the principal allies of the Roman Empire in the sixth century. Al-Ḥārith would be the first to receive a significant level of imperial recognition in 528/9, but he was probably not the first member of the Jafnids to become involved with the Empire and was not the only one to be employed by it. Abu Karīb, probably his brother,[94] appears accompanying al-Ḥārith to Marib in 548, and well before that al-Ḥārith's father, Jabala, appears as a participant in the same military disturbance at the turn of the sixth century reported by Theophanes. Apparently the first Jafnid to make an agreement with the Romans, Jabala also appears in a letter from Simeon[95] as 'king of the *sny*' (possibly Ghassān),[96] in connection with a place called Gabītā, probably Jābiya, which would go on to enjoy a long association with the Jafnids.[97]

After these early contacts, the critical boost for the development of Jafnid power was the elevation of al-Ḥārith to a position of direct imperial patronage under Justinian. Procopius relates that Justinian was frustrated by the inability of his commanders as well as local phylarchs to curb the troublesome raids of the Naṣrid leader al-Mundhir, and saw an opportunity to tackle the problem through an extension of his support to al-Ḥārith (*c.*530).[98] Justinian probably did not have the ability or will to either rule or influence Arab tribal groups directly, and it made sense to follow standard Roman practice and pick an individual who was already well respected locally with the potential to maintain or further build up his position. Here, Justinian chose someone who seems to have already been a phylarch and gave him what Procopius enigmatically calls the 'dignity of king' (*ἀξίωμα βασιλέως*), presumably an honorific of some kind, and probably some funding, to enable him to build up his position.[99] Such arrangements would have allowed al-Ḥārith to stand out from other potential Arab

[94] Ch. 2 n. 71, above.
[95] Of Bēth Arshām; see Ch. 2 n. 138.
[96] This identification is favoured by Hoyland, 'Late Roman Provincia Arabia', 118.
[97] I. Shahid, *The Martyrs of Najrân*, 63.
[98] Proc. *BP* 1.17.46.
[99] Ibid. 1.17.47.

leaders, placing him extremely close to the power of the Roman state, as represented by the figure of the Emperor.[100]

It seems as if the Jafnids were emerging as powerful individuals at the beginning of the sixth century, and certainly this view is supported by the course of events which followed.[101] The presence of a pre-existing family lineage in good standing is consistent with indications that al-Ḥārith was already a local figure of some significance,[102] a fact which is equally consistent with Roman policy, which sought to develop relationships with powerful individuals. This is underscored by the report of Justinian's actions in Procopius, as well as by an Arabic graffito from Jebel Seis, a site in the desert south-east of Damascus. Dating to 528/9, just before al-Ḥārith was elevated, its honorific *'l-Hrth 'l-mlk*, 'al-Ḥārith the king', stands as a testament to the respect accorded to al-Ḥārith locally, and bears comparison with the use of *mlk* at Nemāra and Ruwwāfa and in the reference to Ḥujr as *mlk kdt*. Here it is similarly unclear how much weight should be accorded to the term *mlk* beyond its value for internal consumption.[103] In any case, it seems certain that the rise of the Jafnids as a state-allied political dynasty was built on pre-existing local leadership as well as a pre-existing family agreement with Rome.[104]

From Justinian's perspective, the Naṣrid al-Mundhir had demonstrated that his unpredictable and swift incursions could cause serious and occasionally embarrassing problems; in 524, he had managed to capture two Roman generals, who were only recovered through a

[100] Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 184.

[101] Theoph. *Chron*. 141, 144; cf. the report in Evag. *HE* 3.36; Sartre, *Trois études*, 158–60; most recently, Haarer, *Anastasius*, 33–7, suggesting that both Kinda and Ghassān were involved.

[102] Precisely how he obtained this standing is unknown, although we can point to the actions of his father, Jabala, and the possibility that the disturbances of *c*.500 helped the Jafnid family gain prominence. Hypothetical parallels might be drawn with other barbarian groups in the Empire, whereby the emergence of powerful dynasties probably involved the defeat and suppression of other ambitious ruling families. Like the Amals, al-Ḥārith and Jabala were just one of several possibilities; cf. P. Heather, 'Cassiodorus and the rise of the Amals: genealogy and the Goths under Hun domination', *JRS*, 79 (1989), 103–28, at 126–7, esp. 127: 'Amal preeminence was created by [Valamir's] victories and those of his nephew . . . and never in practice rested on anything other than practical success.' The same might be suggested of the Jafnids prior to the events of 527/8.

[103] The Jebel Seis inscription is discussed in some detail in the following chapter, with complete references.

[104] Cf. Beck, 'Iran and the Qashqai', 298, noting that the central government's recognition of Qashqai khans 'almost always coincided with internal recognition of a paramount leader'.

diplomatic mission.[105] Beyond the risk presented by al-Mundhir, Justinian probably also saw a useful opportunity, alongside his initiatives with Axum, Ḥimyar, and the Ḥujrids, to frustrate Sasanian ambitions through a calculated interference in Naṣrid activities on the fringes of Roman territory. In this respect, the Jafnids presented an opportunity to turn Arab allies against Sasanian interests in a different, eastwards sphere in conjunction with efforts towards the south, which were conducted using the Ḥujrids or perhaps the leaders of Muḍar.[106] Whatever the precise motivation, the recognition accorded to the Jafnids by Constantinople provided them with a consistent degree of extremely influential political backing. This probably helped to raise their stature with relation to other Arab groups in the region, although it is not at all clear how many or whom the Jafnids controlled or how far, beyond the frontiers of the Empire, their influence carried weight.[107] Over time, the Jafnids grew in prominence, power, and influence, visiting the capital and receiving Roman titles. In line with standard Roman policy, they also received subsidies with which to maintain their power through the redistribution of wealth and the ability to finance various projects to maintain their status and position.[108] It is likely that some of this money was also used to hire troops, enlarging their capabilities further and indicating, perhaps, that they had grown beyond their immediate power base.[109] At the same time, they were able to take advantage of other opportunities to pursue more independent initiatives which might further enhance their personal position, and that of the other peoples who made up the Arab allies of the Romans who fought under Jafnid leadership.

Whether or not such peoples included Ghassān, commonly associated with the Jafnids, is very much open to debate: clearly there were people who fought in campaigns such as that at Callinicum under Jafnid leadership, or who mobbed the city of Bostra after al-Mundhir was arrested. It is not known precisely who these people were or

[105] Zach. Rhet. *HE*. 8.3; Mundhir launched an attack as far as Syria Prima in 528, recorded by Malalas, *Chron*. 445.

[106] Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 181.

[107] Cf. ibid. 180.

[108] Joh. Eph. *HE* 176 (3.3.42) with reference to the 'revolt' of 581, and describing the withdrawal of such subsidies; also, *Nov. Theod*. xxiv, 2 (12 Sept. 443), one of the few pieces of direct evidence for subsidies paid to Saracen allied troops. The law cautions *duces* against skimming off the *annona* given to the Saracen soldiers. See Isaac, *Limits*, 245.

[109] Cf. Hoyland, 'Arab kings, Arab tribes, Arabic texts', 394–5; Joh. Eph. *HE* 282 (3.6.3) once again, on al-Mundhir's efforts to hire troops with gold.

where they came from, although there are several possibilities.[110] Whoever those under Jafnid leadership were, however, comparative evidence from the barbarians in the west as well as the history of state–tribe relationships in the Near East points to the distinct possibility that major changes in the society and politics of the Jafnids, as well as their 'people', would have occurred as a result of the close interface between the Jafnids and the Roman Empire. In the absence of any evidence for the wider population, it is worth examining the activities of the Jafnids since, by the time that al-Mundhir came under imperial suspicion in the 570s, he had become a successful leader who managed to bridge the two disparate but connected worlds of steppe and desert, and the settled Empire. The Jafnids did not produce a state, yet the emergence of some state-like features related to the Jafnids demand an explanation; and the most likely reason is, in my view, the encapsulation of the Jafnids by the Roman Empire which positioned them 'in-between' the state, and the tribe.[111]

DAMASCUS AND ḤAURĀN

Evidence from the Ḥaurān and the area around Damascus provides a number of clues to the evolving regional power of the Jafnids. Muslim sources such as Hamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. after 349/961) and Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) typically identified numerous sites within and around the Ḥaurān, south of Damascus, as 'Ghassānid', including the putative base of the Jafnids at Jabiya. Attempts to match the majority of these sites with verifiable locations on the ground have proved both contestable and inconclusive.[112] Contemporary literary and epigraphic evidence, however, provides some means of assessing the Jafnid presence in an agricultural and economic heartland of significant cultural diversity,

[110] Cf. the analogy with Shammar, ch. 1 n. 10. Cf. Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 191: 'Quant aux Jafnides, ce n'est pas sur une tribu (et certainement pas sur Ghassān) qu'ils ont autorité, mais sur une partie des Arabes du territoire byzantin, apparemment fragmentés en une multitude de groupes tribaux de tailles diverses.'

[111] Cf. Salzman, 'Why tribes have chiefs', 282.

[112] These authors are discussed by Shahid, *Sixth Century*, ii/1, 306–46, esp. 312–41, and Sartre, *Trois études*, 178–88, where attempts are made (particularly in the latter) to identify the sites. For a secure rebuttal, see Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 78; also Foss, 'Syria in transition', 251.

showing how participation in the affairs of the Empire underlined the development of an identity based around imperial encapsulation.

The geography and topography of the Ḥaurān favoured a combination of agriculture, the pasturage of animals, and intensive settlement. In common with the Belus massif region of northern Syria, the Ḥaurān participated in the economic prosperity of the fifth and sixth centuries.[113] Alongside the appearance of closely packed villages lay a parallel growth in agriculture, where the expansion of settled farming tested the limits of what the land could support in an effort to provide for the local population.[114] The region and its environs show wide variability in the size and type of settlements, with larger houses found in the west, and those with cruder ornamentation and decoration typically found in the east.[115] One of the more interesting variations, in the villages of Batanea, will be considered below; the sites discussed here are shown in Map 5.

At al-Ḥayyat, just north of the town of Shaqqā, east of the Lejā in the heart of the Ḥaurān and at the north end of Jebel Druze, a building inscription was found in situ at a substantial two-floored house, dating to 578 and offering an explicit acknowledgement of al-Mundhir's regional authority. The inscription states that the house was built by one Flavius Seos, *ἐπίτρ*[*οπος*], 'administrator' or 'trustee', and that he and his son (Olbanos) constructed the house 'in the time of al-Mundhir', *ἐπὶ τοῦ πανευφ*[*ήμου*] *Ἀλαμουνδάρου πατρ*[*ικίου*]. Note too al-Mundhir's designation as *patrikios*.[116]

The house was organised around a central courtyard leading off to numerous rooms, and was the largest in the town visited by Butler in 1904–5.[117] Al-Mundhir's appearance on an inscription of this type, at

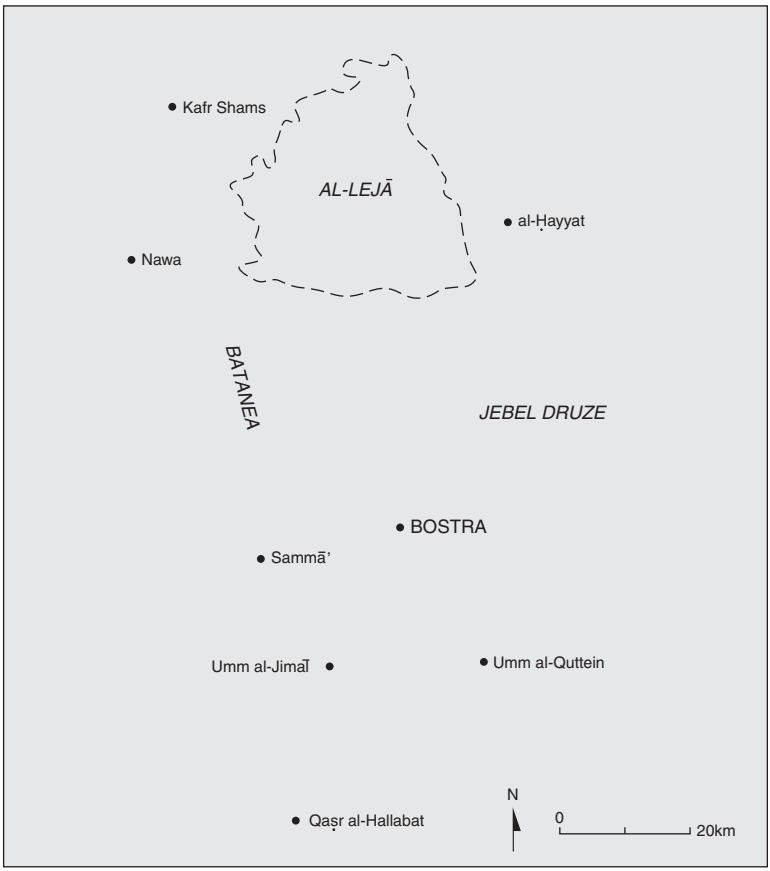
[113] The classic work on the Belus massif was produced by Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du nord*, but his conclusions have been comprehensively re-evaluated and updated by Tate, *Les campagnes de la Syrie du nord*, and the excavations at Déhès carried out by Sodini and Tate. For the geography and topography of the Ḥaurān, see the thorough treatment by F. Villeneuve, 'L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans le Hauran antique (I^{er} siècle av. J.-C.–VII^{e} siècle ap. J.-C.): Une approche', in J. M. Dentzer (ed.), *Hauran I: recherches archéologiques sur la Syrie du Sud à l'époque hellénistique et romaine*, 2 vols (Paris, 1985), i, 63–136, at 67–71; also by the same author, 'L'économie et les villages, de la fin de l'époque hellénistique à la fin de l'époque byzantine', in J. M. Dentzer and J. Dentzer-Feydy (eds.), *Le djebel al-'Arab* (Paris, 1991), 37–43; Foss, 'Syria in transition', 245–6, 248.

[114] Villeneuve, 'L'économie', 64.

[115] Foss, 'Syria in transition', 247–8.

[116] Wadd. 2110.

[117] *PAES* 2A, 362–3.



Map 5. The Ḥaurān and surrounding areas, indicating sites discussed in the text.

a wealthy dwelling in one of the most important agricultural regions of Roman Syria, is a strong argument for the integration of the Jafnid elite into the local community. The house is also quite interesting in that the ground floor court does not seem to be suitable for the stabling of animals, a typical feature of domestic structures in the region. This suggests that the owners' wealth may have been derived from other sources, perhaps trade or landownership. It is not possible to be sure, but the divergence of the house plan from the normal pattern found in the region (Foss describes it as resembling 'the inner

courts of an urban house'[118]) marks al-Ḥayyat as different. Further, the method of dating to the establishment of the province of Arabia in 106 is not unusual, but the recognition of al-Mundhir in the dating formula is a remarkable acceptance and acknowledgement of the Jafnid leader's prominence in the area. It is also not an isolated case. To the north, approximately 20 kilometres east of Damascus, an inscription was found in the vicinity of a structure at al-Burj and close to the site of Ḍumayr, originally thought by Brünnow and Domaszewski to be a second-century Roman camp but which was recently shown by Lenoir to date to the late antique period.[119] The inscription, published by Waddington states that a tower was built by Mundhir. He is described as πατρίκ[ιος] and also takes the name Flavius in the inscription.[120] Here, again, there is evidence for the presence of the Jafnids in a settled area, close to Damascus, and the inscription is also a rare attestation of direct Jafnid involvement in building activity.[121]

What can we make of this clear evidence for the presence of the Jafnids and the people linked with them in both the Ḥaurān and the area around Damascus? In the first instance, it seems to lend some support to the Muslim tradition, which places the Jafnids throughout this region. A further indication of their presence here comes from John of Ephesus, who tells of how Bostra became a convenient and local target for disgruntled supporters of al-Mundhir after his arrest in 581.[122] This, again, suggests a certain number of Jafnid supporters in the region, roughly contemporary with the completion of the house at al-Ḥayyat. It is certainly logical to expect the leadership and at least some of the people who presumably made up the group to be found in the same region, and we should not imagine that the Jafnids could command any degree of local recognition without the consent and support of the population on whom they were dependent for manpower and political leverage. However, in the absence of archaeological evidence from Jabiya, or the identification of other sites linked to the Jafnids in the Ḥaurān, the specifics for the presence

[118] Foss, 'Syria in transition', 251.

[119] M. Lenoir, 'Dumayr, faux camp romain, vraie résidence palatiale', *Syria*, 76 (1996), 227–36, correcting Brünnow and Domaszewski, *DPA*, iii. 200; Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 79.

[120] Wadd. 2562c.

[121] Cf. Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 79.

[122] Joh. Eph. *HE* 177 (3.3.42).

and distribution of the wider group of people connected to the Jafnids remains unclear.

It is also tempting from these two inscriptions to draw links between the Jafnid presence and the expansion of settlement and the economy in the region. It is obvious that the Jafnids cannot have been the only factor, but their military and administrative role as phylarchs, the health of the local sixth-century economy, and the relative calm experienced by the Ḥaurān during this period suggest that they may have played some part.[123] Using archaeological data showing the well-attested abandonment of Roman fortification systems throughout Jordan and southern Syria in the sixth century, as well as data from regional archaeological surveys, J. Johns argued that the 'withdrawal' of the Byzantine administration from the area, and its administrative transfer to the Arab allies of the Empire, may have relieved the local tax burden, allowing the community to retain its agricultural surpluses and increasing the availability of disposable wealth.[124] Johns' argument is concerned with showing the problematic nature of traditional reasoning which finds a linear relationship between the strength of the state, rural prosperity, and population increase. His argument is thus designed to show that any 'withdrawal' of the state from southern Syria in fact boosted prosperity and population, not the reverse.[125] The archaeological evidence for the withdrawal of troops from the region is strong, and it is well understood that phylarchs played, in general, some kind of administrative role.[126] The place of the Jafnids in this is less clear, however, and it is also hard to imagine that the government in Constantinople would be willing to forgo tax revenue. The question remains open.

At the same time, however, the relative peace in the region (especially compared to the districts around Apamea and Antioch, further north, which suffered repeatedly and more harshly from Sasanian expeditions and natural disasters) favoured economic growth and prosperity. The Ḥaurān is also conspicuous for its lack of fortifications, specifically in the absence of fortified farmsteads or towers

[123] Liebeschuetz, 'Nomads, phylarchs and settlement', 144.

[124] J. Johns, 'The *longue durée:* state and settlement strategies in southern Transjordan across the Islamic centuries' in E. L. Rogan and T. Tell (eds.), *Village, Steppe and State: The Social Origins of Modern Jordan* (London, 1994), 1–31 at 7–10.

[125] Ibid. 7–8, 30. Cf. Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids', 223–4.

[126] For a recent survey of the evidence for troop withdrawal and the abandonment of fortifications, see Fisher, 'A new perspective on Rome's desert frontier'.

which are far more common further north.[127] Whether this peace can be associated with the presence of the Jafnids will also remain open to debate, and it may actually have more to do with the level of threat in the south versus the north where natural invasion routes followed the Euphrates, but not the road across the desert via Palmyra. It is, however (as Liebeschuetz indeed suggests), reasonable to see some kind of link between regional security and the extensions of settlement, as well as the lengthy and predominantly stable relationship between the Jafnids and the Empire.

In my opinion, the most likely link between prosperity and the Jafnids is a financial one.[128] The presence of the al-Burj inscription and reports of the tower (long-since demolished) clearly show that the Jafnids were spending money in the region.[129] Construction and the installation of inscriptions required funds, presumably derived either from subsidy or from other sources of income. Ancient writers describe the lucrative results of raiding, and it is likely that some of this money found its way into local prestige projects as well as private coffers and the broader economy.[130] It is possible that the Jafnids also collected some form of local taxation to their benefit; as we saw above, the Naṣrids were reported to have received the right to do so from the Sasanians, and the tradition of tax from pasture land appears as a factor in the 'strata' argument between al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir the Naṣrid in 537.[131] It is possible, then, that involvement with the local economy in the Ḥaurān or its environs may have revolved around the influx of cash from stipendiary or tax sources which then found material expression.[132] The presence of such wealth was also likely to have not only stimulated the local economy, but also to have provided increased prosperity in a cyclical fashion to those who participated in it. The tower at al-Burj, for example, was therefore not simply a monument to the activity of an elite member of society,

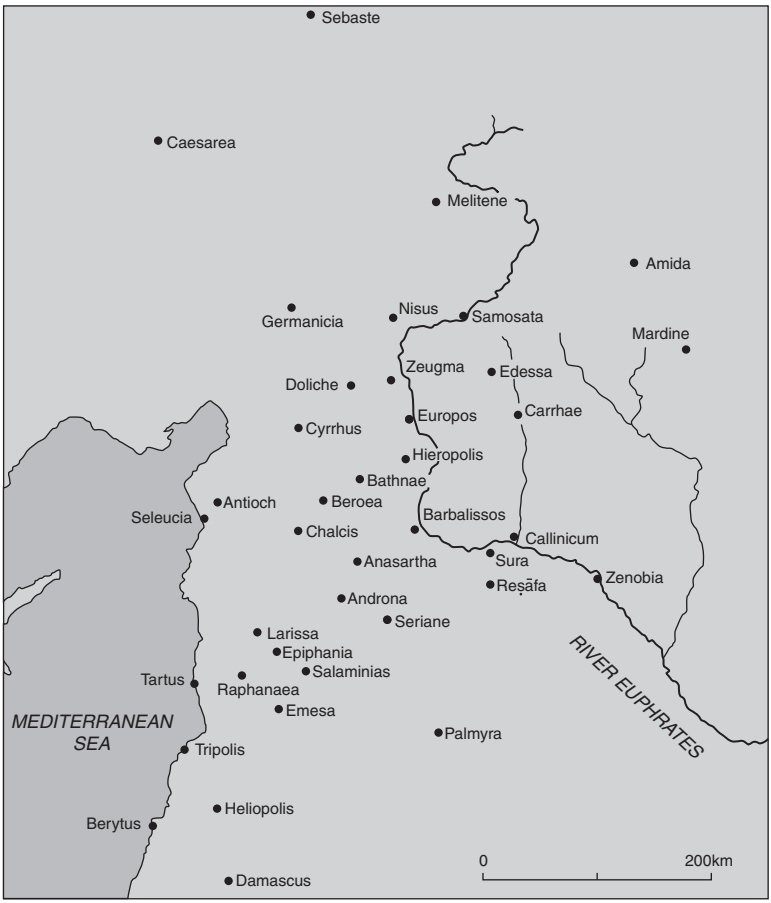
[127] Foss, 'Syria in transition', 252; Tate, *Campagnes*, 48–51.
[128] Cf. Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids', 224.
[129] Liebeschuetz, 'Nomads, phylarchs and settlement', 145.
[130] e.g. Malalas, *Chron*. 447, on 20,000 slaves taken as booty in the Samaritan revolt, and then sold in 'Persia and India' (*c*.528); cf. Josh. Styl. *Chron*. 52, on 18,500 prisoners taken by the Naṣrid al-Nuʿmān in a raiding expedition in *c*.502.
[131] Proc. *BP* 2.1.8.
[132] Liebeschuetz, 'Nomads, phylarchs and settlement', 143; Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids', 224.

but also represented the public disposition of money and the hiring of workmen and artisans. At al-Ḥayyat, the house was not built by al-Mundhir, but it is particularly interesting that Seos insists on the fact that he and his son Olbanos paid for the construction themselves.[133] The affiliation of Seos is unknown, but this conspicuous, public display of local wealth is what we might expect to see from wealthy members of society under the prosperous economic conditions of the time, and the presence of al-Mundhir's name on the inscription again connects him to precisely that.

The construction of the al-Burj tower is a rare example of a so-called Ghassānid building, in actuality a Jafnid building, but its inscription, ostentatiously demonstrating the name of its founder, shows it to be the type of project that was the traditional preserve of local wealthy individuals. Al-Mundhir was engaging in normal elite activity, suggesting that he was (or wished to give the impression that he was) very much part of the local community landscape. This activity also built on earlier acclamations, such as that from Nemāra. In its essence, the Nemāra inscription was a celebration of the high-profile position of Imruʾ l-Qays, and the heart of this message is preserved elsewhere, not only at al-Burj and al-Ḥayyat but also in the sixth-century inscription commemorating Abū-Karib, from Sammāʾ (Ch. 2 n. 71), the mosaics at Nitl (Ch. 2 n. 65), the acclamation to al-Ḥārith at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr (Ch. 2 n. 97) and the al-Mundhir building at Reṣāfa (Ch. 2 n. 74). Nemāra was 'inside' the Roman periphery, but it was a self-declared monument whose genesis laid claim less to local involvement and more to the wide-ranging abilities of Imruʾ l-Qays away from the settled lands of the Roman Empire. Two hundred years later, the inscriptions of Sammāʾ, Nitl, Ḥayyat, and al-Burj, in particular, contain an additional element: a greater level of integration, specifically in terms of their imitation of the ways in which Roman elites were typically celebrated on inscriptions.

In this context, it is worth mentioning here three additional and well-known inscriptions. At Anasartha, near Chalcis in the north of Syria (see Map 6), inscriptions on two martyria dating to the fifth century raise the question of non-Jafnid Arab involvement in building in areas of significant Roman settlement. The first is a martyrion to St Thomas, dated

[133] Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 79.



Map 6. Northern Syria.

to 425/6 and dedicated by a certain Mabia/Mavia.[134] Fanciful notions of a link between this individual and the famous queen of the same name have been suggested on numerous occasions.[135] The placement of the

[134] The text is published by R. Mouterde, *Le limes de Chalcis: organisation de la steppe en haute Syrie romaine: documents aériens et épigraphiques*, 2 vols (Paris, 1945), i. 194–5.

[135] Mouterde, *Limes*, raised the possibility of a descendant of Mavia; Shahid, *Fourth Century*, 222–4, believes it to be the queen herself. See the discussion in D. Feissel, 'Les martyria d'Anasartha', in V. Déroche (ed.), *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron*, *T&M* 14 (Paris, 2002), 201–20, at 205–9.

martyrion outside the walls of the city raises parallels with other extra-mural constructions, such as the al-Mundhir building at Reṣāfa, and their potential place in regulating the relationship between nomads and settlers.[136] However, there is no indication that Mavia was a phylarch and any argument in favour of 'nomads' rests insecurely on the fact that the name is Arabic in origin; all that can be safely said is that a person with an Arabic name was the dedicator of this martyrion.[137]

The second martyrion is more interesting. Built during the same period, it celebrates a *clarissimus* ([λα]μπρότατος) Silvanus as its dedicator, enigmatically described as having power ἐν Ἐρεμβοῖς.[138] The text, which presents numerous significant difficulties of interpretation, contains a variety of Homeric 'echoes' and ἐν Ερεμβοῖς is taken by Feissel, through analogy to the *Odyssey*, as a reference to the Arabs.[139] The martyrion is also apparently dedicated to Silvanus' recently deceased daughter, described as a young wife of a phylarch. From this, Silvanus has been variously described as a Roman officer or even a phylarch himself, but there is no evidence to support such a claim.[140] What the inscription does show, in the link between the family of a *clarissimus* and a phylarch, is a different level of the connections between phylarchs and the local elite of the sort which finds a parallel at al-Ḥayyat.

Finally, the third inscription, from a martyrion of St John erected at Ḥarrān, is dedicated in its inscription in Greek and Arabic by an unknown phylarch named Sharaḥīl (Ἀσαράηλος), who is commemorated as the one who paid (ἔκτισεν) for it (Ἀσαράηλος Ταλέμου φύλαρχ[ος] ἔκτισεν τὸ μαρτ[ύριον] τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου).[141] Like the other inscriptions with an Arabic component referred to here, this example will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Here I wish simply to point out that, in contrast to the example above

[136] Mouterde, *Limes*, 195.

[137] Cf. Liebeschuetz, 'Nomads, phylarchs and settlement', 144.

[138] *IGLS* 297.

[139] Feissel, 'Les martyria d'Anasartha', 213–14.

[140] Mouterde, *Limes*, 193; Jalabert and Mouterde in *IGLS* ii. 168–70, consider him to be a *dux Arabiae*; Feissel, 'Les martyria d'Anasartha', 213: 'Titulaire d'une dignité romaine, Silvanos n'était cependant pas un fonctionnaire impérial: son autorité sur les Arabes (appelés en style homérique . . .), qui plus est une autorité perpétuelle, ne peut être que celle d'un chef indigène, autrement dit un phylarque arabe.'

[141] Wadd. 2464. See too Sartre, *Trois études*, 177; Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 80; E. Littmann, 'Osservazioni sulle iscrizioni di Harran e di Zebed', *Revista degli studi orientali*, 4 (1911), 193–98, and the discussion of this inscription in Ch. 4.

where the provenance of the phylarch was unknown, both the name and language on the Ḥarrān inscription clearly favour identification with an Arab phylarch, demonstrating unambiguously an engagement in an elite Roman activity by an Arab close to the main recognised sphere of Jafnid activity.

Of these three inscriptions, the latter two provide the best evidence for additional links between 'Roman' elites, phylarchs, and commemorative or acclamative inscriptions, and suggest that the presence of the Jafnids on inscriptions in the Ḥaurān should be placed within the context of a wider pattern of integration which had been going on for some time. Either as benefactors of inscriptions or appearing as third parties, late antique Arab potentates, characterised in the majority by the Jafnids, were in essence taking the role of late antique Roman elites. With the construction of a tower at al-Burj, celebrated by a dedicatory Greek building inscription, al-Mundhir was firmly linking himself, as he had at Reṣāfa, with the practices of a specific and highly visible sector of society.

SETTLEMENT AND SEDENTARISATION?

A key question is the extent to which the Jafnids were connected to settlement patterns in the regions where they were active. Of particular interest is their possible connection to the processes of settlement for any nomads and semi-nomads who may have fallen under their control in the steppe and desert regions of Syria and Jordan. Sedentarisation is an ancient and ongoing process, but it is difficult to detect in ancient sources; the close relationship between nomads, semi-nomads, and settlers obscures its specifics, especially since the literary evidence prefers to emphasise extremes by highlighting raids, brigandage, and other minor disruptions.[142] Nevertheless, the ongoing debate continues to demonstrate that settlers (those who chose to spend the majority of their time in a single domicile in either urban or rural settings) and nomads were closely connected, even during episodes of animosity and even while they both occupied 'settled' and 'nomadic' regions.[143] It is also now well understood

[142] E. B. Banning, '*De Bello Paceque*: A Reply to Parker', *BASOR*, 265 (1987), 52–4, at 53.

[143] For which (with specific reference to this period) see Donner, 'The role of nomads', 73–4; also, the lengthy debate in the *Bulletin of the American Schools of*

that nomads did not follow pastoralism exclusively, but had distinct ties to economic activities which are normally associated with settled populations. A small number of ancient graffiti from the desert, for example, discuss opportunistic crop-sowing carried out by nomads, and this activity is also known from other sources.[144]

Despite such promising information, attempts to demonstrate the integration of settled and nomadic groups in the Ḥaurān have been largely inconclusive. For example, Macdonald has convincingly shown that Villeneuve's argument for a connection between the increase in the settled population of the Ḥaurān in the early Roman period, and the sedentarisation of nomads, was based on tenuous evidence, since it depended on accepting the very contestable premise that the evidence for tribal names in the region reflected the presence of nomads.[145] Macdonald has, in fact, shown that the opposite case might be true, arguing convincingly that the authors of the 'Safaitic' graffiti in question were neither sedentary nor lived in the settled areas south of Damascus, as has sometimes been claimed, and, in fact, probably had much more to

Oriental Research, esp. E. B. Banning, 'Peasants, pastoralists, and the *pax romana*', *BASOR*, 261 (1986), 25–50, and the reply from S. T. Parker, 'Peasants, pastoralists and *pax romana*: a different view', *BASOR*, 265 (1987), 35–51, and Banning, '*De Bello Paceque*' (n. 114); also P. Mayerson, 'Saracens and Romans, 71–9; D. Graf, 'Rome and the Saracens: reassessing the nomadic menace', in T. Fahd (ed.), *L'Arabie préislamique et son environnement historique et culturel. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 24–27 juin 1987* (Leiden, 1989), 341–400; and B. Shaw, 'Fear and loathing: the nomadic menace in Roman Africa', in C. M. Wells (ed.), *Roman Africa: The Vanier Lectures, 1980* (Ottawa, 1982), 29–50; G. Tate, 'Le problème de la défense et du peuplement de la steppe et du désert, dans le nord de la Syrie, entre la chute de Palmyre et la règne de Justinien', *Ann. Arch. Syr.*, 42 (1996), 331–5, at 334; Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, 1–4.

[144] M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Nomads and the Ḥawrān in the late Hellenistic and Roman periods: a reassessment of the epigraphic evidence', *Syria*, 70 (1993), 303–413, at 316–17; also, A. M. Khazanov, 'Nomads in the history of the sedentary world', in A. M. Khazanov and A. Wink (eds.), *Nomads in the Sedentary World* (Richmond, Surrey, 2001), 1–24, at 1–2; S. A. Rosen and G. Avni, 'The edge of empire: the archaeology of pastoral nomads in the southern Negev highlands in Late Antiquity', *BA*, 56 (1993), 189–99, at 196–7.

[145] F. Villeneuve, 'Citadins, villageois, nomades: le cas de la *Provincia Arabia* (II^{e}–IV^{e} siècles ap. J.-C.)', *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*, 15/1 (1989), 119–140, at 134–5; Macdonald, 'Nomads and the Ḥawrān', 315–16; cf. M. Sartre, 'Tribus et clans dans le Hawran antique', *Syria*, 59 (1982), 77–97, at 88–9. Cf. too also problematically H. I. Macadam, 'Epigraphy and village life in southern Syria during the Roman and early Byzantine periods', *Berytus*, 31 (1983), 103–15, esp. 111: 'these [areas where tribal inscriptions are found] are the upland areas on the fringes of the desert, and the areas which would be a natural choice of Bedouin in the transitory stage from nomadism to urbanization.'

do with the desert than the fertile agricultural lands of the Ḥaurān even while they interacted with the population of the region.[146]

Challenges remain in identifying processes of nomadic settlement in Late Antiquity, as they do for the earlier periods discussed by Macdonald, and it is very unclear to what degree any of the Arab groups who were probably at the fringes of the Roman Empire 'settled'. Shahid is a vocal proponent of the position that the Jafnids and Ghassān completely sedentarised in Late Antiquity, but there is absolutely no evidence for such a claim, and it is also necessary to point out that sedentarisation can be a long-term process, and neither irreversible, nor fixed, nor quick.[147] The simple opposite—that the Jafnids and their 'group' remained wholly nomads—is also unlikely. In fact, the most reasonable demographic description is that any group of people at the edges of Rome's desert frontier would have included a mix of settled, nomadic, and semi-nomadic strata, with the Jafnids working to extend their power and influence over the pastoralists of the steppe and desert regions.[148] There was of course clear

[146] Macdonald, 'Nomads and the Ḥawrān', 311, esp. 322: 'the content and distribution of the Safaitic inscriptions point inescapably to the conclusion that their authors were nomads. I can find no evidence to support the view that they lived among the sedentaries on Jabal Ḥawrān, even for part of the year, indeed all the information these texts provide suggests the opposite.' This is a strong rejection of both J. T. Milik, 'La tribu des Bani 'Amrat en Jordanie de l'époque grecque et romaine', *ADAJ*, 24 (1980), 41–54, and M. Sartre, *L'Orient romain: provinces et sociétés provinciales Méditerranée orientale d'Auguste aux Sévères (31 avant J.-C.–235 après J.-C.)* (Paris, 1991), esp. 333; see as well id., 'Transhumance, économie et société de montagne en Syrie du sud', *Ann. Arch. Syr.*, 41 (1997), 75–86.

[147] Cf. once more Shahid, *Sixth Century*, ii/1, esp. 1–20, who considers Ghassān to be completely sedentarised following (1) 'the time [that] they crossed the Byzantine frontier'. Shahid writes (1): 'when the Arab poets of pre-Islamic times and later authors identified the Ghassānid lifestyle as sedentary and not nomadic, they gave a truthful description of it.' Also *Sixth Century* ii/1, 136–40, where he criticises Fowden's *Barbarian Plain* for suggesting that some of Ghassān may have been nomads. For processes of sedentarisation, see, generally, Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World*, 199–201; also, P. C. Salzman, 'Introduction: processes of sedentarisation as adaptation and response' in *When Nomads Settle*, 1–20, at 11–14; in the same volume, R. Bulliet, 'Sedentarisation of nomads in the seventh century: the Arabs of Basra and Kufa', 35–47; W. G. Dalton, 'Some considerations in the sedentarisation of nomads: the Libyan case', in Salzman and Galaty (eds.), *Nomads in a Changing World*, 139–64, esp. 144–61. These articles provide valuable perspectives on sedentarisation as a long-term process.

[148] Cf. Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 78: 'It is important to remember that all the territory under Jafnid control was not only settled by people . . . whether they were sedentary, semi-nomads or nomads, but also by other tribes . . . these independent tribes were simply members of the confederation under a general Jafnid leadership.'

motivation for the Jafnids to ensure that whatever manpower existed in the desert came under their control, and not under that of the Naṣrids. One particular problem in Shahid's position ('there is no doubt about their sedentary nature'[149]) is that he does not mention the possibility that different sections of the population of the peoples led by the Jafnids would have had very different motivations for either sedentarising or choosing an alternative path. In this scenario, the most likely section to settle would be the Jafnids themselves, and those most closely connected to them, as a result of their close relationship with the Empire. Certainly the epigraphic evidence from al-Ḥayyat and al-Burj leads naturally to an argument for the sedentarisation of the elite, derived from several logical propositions. First, that nomads do not tend to build structures of relative permanence, favouring more ephemeral structures better suited to their specific and seasonal, temporary needs; secondly, that an acknowledgement of a nomadic leader in the Ḥaurān makes less sense than to posit one who identified more clearly with a settled lifestyle; thirdly, that the use of Greek inscriptions suggests a desire to be associated with the local settled population; and fourthly, that the location of the two inscriptions favours an argument for activity within a settled area.

Of course, there is no proof of Jafnid settlement; all that can be said is that the incentive to settle would be felt more keenly by the elites, who stood to gain from closer association with the villages, cities, and towns of the Empire. Furthermore, if it can be said that the Jafnid elite were the most likely to settle, the situation for the balance of the people under their control is very murky indeed. The indications from John of Ephesus that they were present in some number in the general region of the Ḥaurān does not provide any clues as to their mode of life, and details of the large number of settlements connected to the Jafnids by later authors such as Hamza are very much open to debate. In a different article, Villeneuve once again suggested that population increase in the Ḥaurān may be linked to the settlement of nomads in Late Antiquity, as elements of Arab groups moving north from Arabia chose to remain in the area.[150] The objection to his argument based on the existence of tribal names

[149] Shahid, *Sixth Century*, ii/1, 140.

[150] Villeneuve, 'L'économie rurale', 117, who asks: 'comment les villageois ont-ils pu s'accommoder de cette poussée des nomades à l'époque byzantine?'; see too Macdonald, 'Nomads and the Ḥawrān', 315.

remains, but while the Safaitic evidence is largely confined to the steppe and desert, in Late Antiquity the epigraphic evidence for the Jafnids is found in both areas, at places as diverse as Jebel Seis, al-Burj, al-Ḥayyat, and Reṣāfa.[151] I would suggest here that, given the wider distribution of this small number of inscriptions related to the Jafnids, it is plausible that if they settled, they probably encouraged others to do so at the same time. These people would have benefited from the different selection of continued benefits that settlement within the Roman Empire offered.

There are other tenuous factors which favour the settlement of nomads or semi-nomads which are worth exploring here. During the late antique period, the line between steppe, desert, and agricultural land was very unclear precisely owing to the expansion of settlement and the closer integration of groups on the periphery. Thus the kind of distinction Macdonald drew for the Roman-period Ḥaurān is more ambiguous for the fifth and sixth centuries. In this context it is worth recalling the evidence for the settlement of Arabs linked to Christianity, discussed in the previous chapter, which is characterised by just such lack of clarity. These instances typically demonstrated a closer involvement with settled areas, while simultaneously retaining a strong connection to the idea or physical reality of the 'nomadic'. So it was that the followers of Aspebetos were 'settled' around a church, but in tents, while the Arabs evangelised by Aḥūdemmeh were drawn into the controlling orbits of regional churches, without any obvious cessation of movement.

Interestingly, this kind of ambiguity is reflected in the architectural peculiarities of some buildings in or around the Ḥaurān. Near one of the supposed locations of the Jafnid camp at Jabiya, remains of houses show striking differences when compared to the architecture typical for both the Ḥaurān and some of the houses of the Belus massif in northern Syria. In the Ḥaurān, windows and doorways are usually small, with the houses themselves oriented inwards with little engagement towards the exterior.[152] At al-Ḥayyat, for example, Butler described the ground floor windows as simple 'loop-holes'.[153] The

[151] Macdonald, 'Nomads and the Ḥawrān', 304, on the distribution of the Safaitic graffiti.

[152] Foss, 'Syria in transition', 247: 'In this they resemble the houses of northern Syria and reflect a mentality in which privacy and private property were fundamental.'

[153] *PAES* 2A, 362–3; Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 306–7.

entrances to the houses of the Ḥaurān are smaller than their contemporaries of the Belus massif, but, in both regions, houses typically used the ground floor for livestock, and the upper for living, organised around a central courtyard.[154] Despite regional differences, the house was a private space.[155] In Batanea, however, particularly at Nawa and Kafr Shams, this pattern is disrupted: at Nawa, by larger and apparently more prosperous dwellings with 'reception' rooms alongside the stabling on the ground floor, and, at Kafr Shams, by houses with no stabling and large windows and doors, and spaces open to the countryside.[156] The size of these houses, and the lack of evidence for stables at Kafr Shams, has led to the plausible suggestion that their owners were unusually wealthy, and did not raise livestock.[157] This may well be the case, as it may be for al-Ḥayyat. Focusing on the open nature of the architecture, however, Foss has suggested that the inferred difference in outlook, and increased inclination to engage with the space outside the house, reflected the regional 'dominance' of 'Ghassān', who had 'nothing to fear', since they 'essentially ruled the countryside'. The lack of stabling and livestock space could then be linked to the fact that the horses and camels 'that gave these fighters their mobility shared a common military pasture'.[158] The rich decoration of the houses, another generalised anomaly for the region in Late Antiquity, where such ornamentation is often muted, is explained, by Foss, as a result of 'Ghassānid'

[154] Foss, 'Syria in transition', 198–9; for the houses of the Belus massif, see Tate, *Campagnes*, 13–84, esp. 42; by the same author, 'La maison rurale en Syrie du nord', in C. Castel, M. al-Maqdissi, and F. Villeneuve (eds.), *Les maisons dans la Syrie antique du III^e millénaire aux débuts de l'Islam* (Beirut, 1997), 95–101, at 95–8, 99, on similarities to houses in southern Syria. See too J.-P. Sodini and G. Tate, 'Maisons d'époque romaine et byzantine (II^e–VI^e siècle) du massif calcaire de Syrie du nord: étude typologique', in J. Balty (ed.), *Apamée de Syrie: bilan des recherches archéologiques 1973–1979* (Brussels, 1987), 377–429, at 385–92.

[155] Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 307; cf. Villeneuve, 'L'économie', 99: 'elle [la maison] est conçue pour offrir à la famille ou à l'ensemble des travailleurs de l'exploitation un espace clos, protégé.'

[156] Foss, 'Syria in transition', 249–50; Villeneuve, 'L'économie', 104–13, esp. 106, discussing a house at Kafr Shams: 'remarquable . . . par ses dimensions par ses accès: une porte large . . . surmontée de trois grandes fenêtres . . . ', and 107, '[to be noted] l'absence apparente d'étables; le nombre et la taille des accès et fenêtres'; and 113, again on the absence of stabling.

[157] Villeneuve, 'L'économie', 113; Foss, 'Syria in transition', 250.

[158] Foss, 'Syria in transition', 245; cf. F. E. Peters, 'Byzantium and the Arabs of Syria', *Ann. Arch. Syr.*, 27/28 (1977–8), 97–114, at 103.

wealth.[159] Again, these suggestions are not implausible, and neither is the postulation that the large and unusual audience hall at Nawa reflects the 'much grander parallel' at Reṣāfa, even if the existence of such audience halls is not by any means exclusive to the Jafnids.[160] Nevertheless, there is another possibility: one might see in these buildings, for example, the architectural expression of the type of ambiguity witnessed in the accounts concerning the settlement efforts of Aspebetos and of Aḥūdemmeh, where newly settled pastoralists, or those connected to a pastoral economic past, living in proximity to or well within settled areas, continued to favour the maintenance of a connection to the space immediately outside the house. Such an 'open concept' is characteristic of nomadic buildings.[161] The presence of the Jafnids may, indeed, be the explanation for the irregularities in the architecture of Nawa and Kafr Shams, and at other sites in the region, like Nitl, but in a way more closely related to a confusion or conflation of 'nomadic' and 'sedentary' spaces.[162]

The specifics remain very obscure, but the presence of the Jafnids in areas of intensive settlement and the peculiarities of building construction in the same areas suggest that sedentarisation may have been occurring. The rate and degree to which it took place remains unknown. Pressure to settle was likely to have come from a variety of angles, such as Christianisation, enrolment in institutions of the state such as the army, and participation in the agricultural

[159] Foss, 'Syria in transition', 251. Note that Foss is claiming not that the *designs* are 'Ghassānid', but rather that the material wealth that supported them was derived from the activities of the confederation. See J. Dentzer-Feydy, 'Décor architectural et développement du Hawran dans l'antiquité' in Dentzer, *Hauran I*, ii. 261–309, esp. 299–300, and 307, where Dentzer-Feydy would like to connect the opulence of the architecture to the prosperity of nearby Galilee; cf. Liebeschuetz, 'Nomads, phylarchs and settlement', 143–4; H. Gaube, 'Arabs in sixth century Syria: some archaeological observations', *BSMESB*, 8/2 (1981), 93–8, esp. 96, suggesting (albeit in an unlikely way) that the characteristic ornamentation found on buildings in the region near Hama should be connected with the Ghassānids. This idea is rejected by Peters, 'Byzantium and the Arabs of Syria', 103, and, in a more general fashion, and more recently, by Genequand, 'Some thoughts', 80–1.

[160] Foss, 'Syria in transition', 251.

[161] Cf. Ch. 2, nn. 64, 81; Rosen, 'Case for seasonal movement', 154–7.

[162] Foss, 'Syria in transition', 250–2; cf. B. Harmaneh, 'Settlement patterns in Provincia Arabia from Diocletian to the Arab conquest. Archaeological evidence', in Lewin and Pellegrini, *Settlements and Demography*, 89–105, at 101, arguing that the plan of the church at Nitl had more in common with the churches of the Ḥaurān than its immediate neighbours near Madaba, and that this might be connected with the Ghassānids in the region.

economy of the Empire. Certainly there is no real reason to doubt that some people involved with the Jafnids, or indeed any other group, were engaged in such matters.[163] At the same time, however, the ambiguities surrounding settlement persist. Literary evidence often emphasises the mobile or nomadic 'desert' character of the Arabs, with John of Ephesus, for example, describing them or the Jafnids on a number of occasions as retreating to a desert encampment, or as the Arabs 'of the desert'.[164] Similar categorisations are found in other authors.[165] To some extent, these examples follow stereotyped views which saw all Arabs as nomads, or reflected what appears to have been a common and valued fighting skill, namely, exceptional mobility. They also follow generalised views of barbarians.[166] However, in combination with the ambiguities of the ecclesiastical texts on Aspebetos and the Arabs of Aḥūdemmeh, they also seem to reflect a predominant confusion about where exactly these Arabs were based and how they lived. It is noteworthy too that the Naṣrids and their allies, who were far more clearly identified with a single settled location, al-Ḥīrah, receive similar treatment.[167] The diversity of evidence suggests the likelihood of a comparable diversity on the ground, with late antique Arab groups consisting of a mix of modes of living, as suggested above. Reṣāfa and al-Burj may have been similar types of project—constructions linked to al-Mundhir—yet their differences are telling. Reṣāfa fostered a sense of 'connected separation', maintaining a distinct link to the world outside the heartland of empire, while remaining firmly associated with it. At al-Burj, al-Mundhir was firmly within Roman territory. Both areas—steppe or desert, and the settled lands of the Ḥaurān—could equally have been the focus of different groups of peoples who shared Jafnid leadership.

Arguments for and against the sedentarisation and settlement of Arabs in Late Antiquity will always be hampered by insufficient evidence. However, sedentarisation is ultimately a part of the larger

[163] Cf. Mayerson, 'Saracens and Romans', 72–5; by the same author, 'The Saracens and the *limes*', *BASOR*, 262 (1986), 35–47, at 35–6, on the involvement of Arabs in 'settled' activities.

[164] Joh. Eph. *HE* 178 (3.3.42) and 216 (3.4.36).

[165] For example, Evag. *HE* 5.20, describing the speed, mobility and elusiveness of Arab soldiers; Proc. *BP* 1.17.45–6, on al-Mundhir III.

[166] E.g. Proc. *BP* 1.15. 23–5, on the Tzani prior to their subjugation to the Empire, who also made lightning raids and then disappeared rapidly from Roman territory.

[167] Joh. Eph. *HE* 280 (3.6.3).

process of integration into the Empire. In the broader indications for the participation of the Jafnids in aspects of the community and social life of the Empire, as well as in its religious affairs, it is apparent that significant changes were under way in the sixth century. By behaving more and more like late antique elites, the Jafnids were building on a three-century history of increasingly intimate relationships with the Roman Empire which went back to Nemāra and beyond, but in a way which contained a subtle but crucial shift from the position of an Imruʾ l-Qays or an Amorkesos. No longer simply celebrating a position of leadership and prominence outside the Empire or on its periphery, whilst implicitly acknowledging the Empire's suzerainty and power, they were now very much inside it. At the same time, they still managed to retain a distinct connection to the periphery itself. This represented a departure from the events of the fourth and fifth centuries. And the Jafnids, expressing themselves on monumental inscriptions within the territory of their sponsor, were not simply late antique elites; they had become high-profile leaders who linked together the settled lands and the steppe, and who would begin to act, in the second half of the sixth century, with a distinct measure of political independence.

CLIENTS AND ALLIES

The Jafnids and the Naṣrids took part in the military campaigns of Rome and the Sasanians, operating (at least theoretically) under the orders and control of Roman or Sasanian commanders. This was almost certainly an imperial expectation and part of the arrangement, in exchange for imperial support and subsidy. The Jafnids and their supporters appear in some of the major engagements of the time fighting with the Roman army. At the battle of Callinicum in 531, for example, al-Ḥārith, together with his forces, are presented as a subordinate element of the Roman army defeated by the Sasanians.[168] The quarrel between al-Ḥārith and the Naṣrid al-Mundhir in 537, which worsened relations between the two empires, indicates the secondary position of both of these individuals. This event does not

[168] Proc. *BP* 1.1.26, describing the Roman order of battle.

seem to have been a private dispute between the two leaders; rather, it is clear from Procopius that Khusrau directed al-Mundhir to find a way to break the treaty with Justinian. Possibly motivated by jealousy of Justinian's success in Italy, or keen to take advantage of the absence of a significant portion of the Roman forces, Khusrau could not be seen to launch an open assault on Roman territory, but could easily be seen to blame his unruly and hot-headed vassal, al-Mundhir. The Naṣrid leader had already acquired a reputation for spontaneous and bloody violence, and, conveniently, was not included in the recent treaty between the two empires.[169]

Yet there are also indications that both the Jafnids and the Naṣrids were starting to separate themselves from their imperial patrons, both on the battlefield and in terms of diplomatic contacts. It was not unusual for clients to send embassies directly to their sponsors, and it does not seem as if either group attained the ability to develop truly independent foreign relations. The addition of third-party negotiations to imperial missions, however, alongside the added pomp provided for official state visits, highlights the fact that the Arab leaders were acting in an increasingly independent fashion.[170] For example, the Naṣrid al-Mundhir had treated directly with the Romans in 530, using a deacon named Sergius,[171] while the Romans had found it necessary to deal directly with al-Mundhir in 523/4, bypassing the Sasanians, to recover hostages.[172] That the problem needed to be solved in this fashion might indicate that the Sasanid leadership had neither the means nor the will to intervene, or, conversely, considered al-Mundhir's capture of the Roman *dux Mesopotamiae* Timostratus and the general John a private matter for al-Mundhir to solve. Either way, the Naṣrid leader's status was elevated, as his position as an individual with the power to grant or deny the wishes of ambassadors of the Roman Empire was confirmed. After al-Mundhir's death, envoys of his son ʿAmr appear alongside Iranian diplomats in the Roman court, whilst at other times their interests were represented through the Sasanian ambassador, the Zikh, or his successor, Mebod.[173] It is significant that Naṣrid interests were

[169] Ibid. 2.1.1–6.
[170] Cf. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy*, 41.
[171] Malalas, *Chron.* 466.
[172] Zach. Rhet. *HE.* 8.3; Evag. *HE* 4.12, excerpting Proc. *BP* 1.17.43–5.
[173] Menander fr. 6.1., via the Zikh, and 9.3, direct, and also noting that Arab envoys had come before Justinian on occasion.

sometimes represented by their own envoys, and not always packaged together with those of the Sasanians, even if the Arab envoys embarassed themselves on occasion through their ignorance of protocol, giving the Roman Emperor a convenient excuse to blame the failure of negotiations with Iran on tactless barbarians.[174]

It seems that the Jafnids, too, were nurturing a nascent diplomatic and political individualism of their own. In 547/8, a generation before al-Mundhir visited the Emperor in Constantinople, the Jafnids sent a delegation to Abraha of Ḥimyar alongside the Naṣrids, Romans, Sasanians, and Axumites. Precisely why Abraha arranged this meeting is unknown, but it is significant that the Jafnids and Naṣrids were represented alongside the imperial powers.[175] During the same period, the Jafnids demonstrated increasing confidence in acting outside of imperial supervision and control in matters which not only placed them beyond the territorial and presumed legal restraints of the position of phylarch, but which also threatened the occasional and delicate peace agreements between Rome and the Sasanians. Scarcely a decade after the events of Callinicum, al-Ḥārith, on campaign with Belisarius, is reported by Procopius to have provided the accompanying Roman officers with a false intelligence report which allowed him to escape with plunder and booty that should have fallen to the Romans.[176] In 546 the supporters of the Jafnid and Naṣrid leaders fought each other without the participation of the Romans or the Sasanians.[177] Four years later, al-Ḥārith was accused of an unprovoked attack on al-Mundhir.[178] The rivalry between the two finally came to an end in 554 with the death of al-Mundhir in battle in a private feud with his Jafnid enemy.[179] Al-Mundhir the Jafnid continued in the same vein, sacking a significant Naṣrid camp (possibly al-Ḥīrah, although this is

[174] Menander, 9.3.

[175] *CIS* 4.541, above, nn.73, 86; see the full text in Smith, 'Events in Arabia', 437–41; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 55–6; the most recent discussion of this diplomatic mission is in Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 180–1.

[176] Proc. *BP* 2.19.26; Callinicum: Ch. 1, n. 43.

[177] Ibid. 2.28.12–13.

[178] Ibid. 8.11.10; Shahid, *Sixth Century*, i, 239–40. The accusation was perhaps a Sasanian mechanism to get around the existing treaty arrangements; certainly, according to Procopius (*BP* 8.15.1–7) they were able to extract continued financial concessions from the Roman leadership, who were pressed hard by Yazdgushnasp, the envoy of Khusrau. See n. 183, below, on the earlier 'strata' dispute (*c.*540), which follows a similar theme.

[179] Ibid. 2.28.12–14.

not entirely clear) in 581.[180] Furthermore, the response of ʿAmr, denied a favourable response from an embassy to Constantinople, was not to attack Roman territory, but to have one of his subordinates attack the Jafnids. Menander's language is interesting; he describes the attack as proceeding against 'the land of al-Mundhir', even specifying its approximate location on the edge of Arabia.[181] This statement should not perhaps be taken literally, but the perception that he was affiliated with a particular place which could be located, identified, and attacked is a change from the literary norm and again an indication that, on occasion, the Romans perhaps understood the Jafnids to be in an identifiable territory, as opposed to simply 'the desert'. Both of these groups were acting with increased measures of independence, outside the supervision or authority of their ostensible patrons, and acquiring the means to treat with state entities with a certain amount of diplomatic autonomy. Certainly this is a stark change from 504, when, according to Joshua the Stylite, both Roman- and Sasanian-allied Arab leaders were rapidly executed after regional commanders in northern Mesopotamia found their 'allies' invading and terrorising frontier districts without their permission.[182]

In 561/2 Rome and Iran signed another peace treaty. The text, preserved in the version given by Menander, makes a distinct effort to legally categorise the place of the Arab allies, suggesting that both empires recognised that changes were under way and that the actions of their allies needed to be curbed. This seems to have been a particular need following the 'strata' dispute (*c.*540) where the Naṣrid al-Mundhir had brazenly argued that his actions could not possibly constitute a treaty violation, as neither he nor his Jafnid enemies were included in any formal imperial treaty.[183] The new treaty thus included a prohibition against the Arab allies of either side attacking the two empires and bound them to the agreements made between Rome and the Sasanians. The clause in question is somewhat vague, but may also contain the sense that they should not fight each other.[184] Particularly interesting is

[180] Joh. Eph. *HE* 314 (3.6.18–19).
[181] Menander, fr. 9.3.
[182] Josh. Styl. *Chron.* 88.
[183] Proc. *BP.* 2.1.4–5; cf. Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia at War*, 171.
[184] Menander, fr. 6.1: 'The Saracen allies of each state shall follow the agreements, and neither those of the Persians shall attack the Romans, nor those of the Romans the Persians.' Blockley, 256 n.50, and I. Kawar (Shahid) 'The Arabs in the peace treaty of A.D. 561', *Arabica*, 3 (1956), 180–213, at 198, consider the clause to additionally

the categorisation of the Arab allies as σύμμαχοι, 'allies', because the most common general term for subordinate allies, and the Greek equivalent of *foederati*, was ὑπόσπονδοι.[185] Treaties which followed battle were typically σπόνδαι, and the term could also be used in a formal context as simply 'treaty' to denote inter-empire agreements.[186] However, those seeking a more equal status outside of inter-imperial contexts are described quite differently. Avars negotiating from a threatening position, attempting to pressure the Empire into accepting their military protection, are referred to as wishing to join in a defensive alliance or league. Menander's language, based around the verb ἑταιρίσασθαι (to become comrades in arms to one another), is empty of terms of submission.[187] The diplomatic language used by the imperial envoy Valentinus, when the Romans finally decide to turn to the Avars for an alliance to fight their common enemies, is again based around similar terminology,[188] and Goths seeking common Frankish support to fight the Romans appeal to the spirit of a joint military venture.[189] Roman efforts to woo the Ḥimyarites appeal to a similar type of partnership, again based around the verb ἑταιρίσασθαι.[190]

To some extent, the difference between the two types of terminology may reflect a wider shift in the status of dependent allies, with *foederati* or ὑπόσπονδοι now understood to hold a position of greater equality, even if they were not yet on the same level as the Empire itself.[191] Be that as it may, one of the most significant indications of the importance

prohibit independent warfare between the two, which is entirely plausible given the circumstances. See too Haarer, *Anastasius*, 33, on Ibn Ḥabib's report, *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*, 371–2, that Anastasius had made a peace with the Ghassān on the condition that they would not interfere with Roman–Sasanian relations, perhaps by causing trouble with the Naṣrids. If true, this might indicate that this was a normal condition in this type of agreement, and lend credibility to Blockley's point.

[185] Cf. Malchus, fr. 15, describing allied Goths, where he equates the two terms: πρέσβεις ἦλθον ἐκ Θρᾴκης τῶν ὑπόσπονδων Γόθων, οὕς δὴ καὶ φοιδεράτους οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι καλοῦσιν: 'envoys came from Thrace of the allied Goths, whom the Romans call *foederati*.'

[186] e.g. Agath. *Hist*. 1.1.6., describing the settlement between Rome and the Goths after the battle of Mons Lactantius in 552; Menander, fr. 6.1 on imperial agreements.

[187] Menander, fr. 5.1.

[188] Ibid. fr. 5.2.

[189] Agath. *Hist*. 1.1.7.

[190] Proc. *BP* 1.19.1.

[191] P. Heather, '*Foedera* and *foederati* of the fourth century', in W. Pohl (ed.), *Kingdoms of the Empire: The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1997), 57–74, at 59, who considers sixth-century *foederati* to have been on a more equal footing than their fourth-century counterparts.

of the choice of words in the treaty of 562 is context. In passages designed to show imperial superiority, mollify the Sasanian king, or put down the Arabs more generally (especially as barbarian nomads) the language of submission is dominant. So they can appear very much as subordinates and subjects, in clauses with prepositions such as *κατά* or *ὑπό*.[192] Menander also has the Sasanian king describe ʿAmr in this way, while the Roman envoy Peter refers to al-Mundhir in the harsh language of servitude, using the noun *δοῦλος*, slave, to describe the Naṣrid leader.[193]

In stark contrast to this are the occasions elsewhere in the text where Menander tries to demonstrate the opposite, and here we find terms denoting equal status and alliance.[194] Similar contemporary instances elsewhere also show the importance of the language. Procopius, detailing his version of a speech by pro-Sasanian Lazican elders, tells of how they appealed in secret to Khusrau for a bygone golden age, where they enjoyed alliance with Iran. They yearned to be treated on an equal footing according to the time when they were 'allies to the Persians' (*σύμμαχοι*),[195] and explicitly contrasted this position to their current undesirable state as subjects *(κατήκοοι)* and in subordinate alliance to the Romans.[196] Agathias provides a parallel example, with his pro-Sasanian Lazican elders arguing for a state of alliance with Iran, where the empire will fight for or on behalf of the Lazicans (*ὑπερμαχόμαι*) in the spirit of equal partnership.[197] The differences in perspective between the language of subordinate and subject status and that of a more equal agreement, characterised by a recurring choice of terms whose consistency of meaning is borne out by their usage in contemporary texts, is illuminating. As *σύμμαχοι*, Arab allies were not necessarily equals of the state, but the treaty of 562 is couched in the sympathetic language of relations with 'valued' clients, suggesting that this shift in terminology constituted a recognition that the status of the Arab 'allies' had changed by the second half of the sixth century.

John of Ephesus relates that in 580 al-Mundhir visited Constantinople, where he was received as if he were a client king of a substantial

[192] Menander, fr. 9.1, 9.3.
[193] Ibid. fr. 6.1.
[194] Ibid. fr. 8.
[195] Proc. *BP* 2.15.15.
[196] Ibid. 2. 15.15–17.
[197] Agath. *Hist.* 3.10.11.

and valued polity. John described the honours accorded to al-Mundhir and his retinue, the most interesting of which was the right for the Jafnid to wear a royal diadem.[198] The nature of the 'crown' is unclear, as are the exact reasons for the Emperor's decision, although plausible justifications include al-Mundhir's military service, or his involvement with religious affairs.[199] These may be so, but the Emperor's gesture seems to fall equally in line with the typical treatment of client kings and leaders. Following the events of 572 and the assassination attempt on al-Mundhir by Justin II, Tiberius II may also have been attempting to soothe a broken relationship by providing a public acknowledgement of the prominence of the Jafnids in the imperial capital, appealing to the likely wide support base which the Jafnids enjoyed; and John, who knew Tiberius personally and saw him in a far better light than his predecessor, Justin, was probably keen to emphasise the good relationship between Tiberius and an individual whom John favoured as a key player in miaphysite affairs. The harmony suggested by John is probably not altogether accurate, and suspicions probably remained, but certainly the position of the Jafnids had changed considerably since al-Ḥārith received his commission from Justinian, and the position of Arab allies vis-à-vis the Empire had also undergone something of a transformation. As his father had done, al-Mundhir had visited Constantinople as a confirmed ally, in contrast to Amorkesos, who had been feasted by Leo and then dispatched with a phylarchate to a distant part of the Empire in which to exercise it, but who had initially arrived as an outsider negotiating a settlement. Recalling other public identifications of distinction and standing, the significance of the events of 580 lies not in the type or nature of the crown, but in the very public recognition given to a Jafnid leader, standing as an acknowledgement of the nature of the changes which had occurred.

Alongside recognition came more subversive action which lends further confirmation to the idea that the Roman Empire was aware of the growing power of its allies. The Empire's curious activities directly or indirectly undermined its Jafnid allies, checking their power through the financial support of their Naṣrid rivals with whom it also enjoyed direct diplomatic contact. It is not easy to say whether such attempts were part of a deliberate or coherent policy, but it is also difficult to imagine not simply how diplomatic contact with and

[198] Joh. Eph. *HE* 220 (3.4.39).
[199] Shahid, *Sixth century*, i/1, 404–6.

subsidy of the Naṣrid allies could possibly have impressed the Jafnids, but also that the Empire would not have been aware of the impact of such actions.[200] Roman Emperors treated with the Naṣrids on numerous occasions: Procopius writes that Justinian attempted to woo al-Mundhir, but admits himself that he is unsure of the veracity of the information.[201] However, Menander records that al-Mundhir had received intermittent gifts in gold, while Malalas records that following the negotiations through the deacon Sergius, the Naṣrid leader received 'imperial gifts'.[202] Following al-Mundhir's death, the lack of these gifts spurred ʿAmr to raise the issue through the Zikh, the Sasanian envoy.[203] The nature of the moneys paid is unclear; they were not isolated incidents, and were presented by Menander's text, in the words of the Emperor, as a 'free gift', either reciprocal or more spontaneous; clearly a 'subsidy' could only ever be shown, from a Roman perspective, as given by the goodwill of the Emperor.[204] Comparisons with descriptions and perceptions of the problematic Caspian Gates funding are appropriate, especially given Menander's assertion elsewhere that the money was given to keep the peace and prevent attacks on the Empire, and Justin II's comment that the Emperor should not pay tribute to Arabs.[205] Such an emphasis on agreements based on 'protection money' was presumably designed, from a Lakhmid perspective, to ensure the continuity of such funding, guaranteed by a constant threat of attack, while ʿAmr's attempts to have the subsidy reinstated no doubt rested on the prowess of his ancestor, al-Mundhir III, as well as his own forays against the Jafnids. Whatever the precise nature of the moneys paid to the Naṣrids, it is highly unlikely that the arrangement found favour amongst the Jafnid leadership, and probably introduced additional elements of suspicion into their relationship with Constantinople; and by 572, of course, any feelings of distrust were out in the open. These continued to fester, and it comes as no surprise that the event which seems to have finally tipped the hands of the Roman Emperor Tiberius was the feud between al-Mundhir and the *comes excubitorum* Maurice, of which more will be said in Chapter 5.[206] By providing occasional support to the Naṣrids, the

[200] Cf. Shahid, *Sixth Century*, ii/1, 312. [201] Proc. *BP* 2.1.12–15.
[202] Malalas, *Chron*. 466. [203] Menander, fr. 6.1.
[204] Ibid. fr. 6.1, 9.1. [205] Ibid. fr. 9.1, 9.3.
[206] Evag. *HE* 5.20; Joh. Eph. *HE* 312–13 (3.6.16–17), who describes what he calls a 'false accusation' made by Maurice against al-Mundhir, that the Jafnid had alerted the Iranian forces to the plans of Maurice to cross a bridge into Sasanian territory.

Romans, perhaps inadvertently, followed a well-tested policy of sustaining the enemies of one's allies to keep the latter in check. By 580, however, when al-Mundhir was received in Constantinople, imperial efforts in this regard had failed. Yet it was ultimately this palpable increase in the status and power of the Jafnids, and the quarrels between Maurice and the Jafnid leadership, which led to more drastic action by the Roman authorities. The forced dissolution of the Jafnids, followed shortly afterwards by Iranian action against the Naṣrids, was in the end simply a matter of time.

CONCLUSION: BETWEEN STATE AND TRIBE

Writing about the relationship between state and tribe in twentieth-century Iran, the anthropologist Philip Salzman noted:

> As the tribe was encapsulated by the state of Iran, the agents of the Iranian Government dealt with the Sardar [leader] as representative of the tribe. They thus made use of the indigenous centralized authority structure of the tribe, in effect connecting the tribe to the administration of the State at the point of the Sardarship . . . the Sardar continued to represent the tribe as a corporate body, and he was treated by agencies of the Government as the legitimate representative of the tribe.[207]

The local prominence of the Jafnids, suggested by the Jebel Seis inscription, made them and their supporters susceptible to encapsulation in a very similar fashion, and favoured the creation of the Jafnids as an identifiable late antique Roman elite.[208] The Romans, who had a tradition of dealing directly with client kings on a personal level, treated al-Ḥārith and his son al-Mundhir in this way to the point that, during al-Ḥārith's visit to the capital in 563, one of the items on the agenda was Roman approval for the Jafnid succession.[209]

Whatever the exaggerations in the text, it seems clear that the feud caused Justin a great deal of nuisance in Constantinople.

[207] P. C. Salzman, 'Tribal chiefs as middlemen: the politics of encapsulation in the Middle East', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 47/2 (1974), 203–10, at 205; cf. Beck on the Qashqai, Ch. 1 n. 7.

[208] See W. Lancaster and F. Lancaster, 'Concepts of leadership in bedouin society', in Haldon and Conrad (eds.), *Elites Old and New*, 29–61, at 59.

[209] Theoph. *Chron*. 240.

The Romans joined the Jafnid leadership to the apparatus of the state, accessing the military resource of the Arabs and others under Jafnid leadership, and providing access to the Empire and its resources, culture, and political influences at the same time. Since the Jafnids were apparently the main and only point of contact between the two entities, we might surmise that those under Jafnid leadership, as well as the Jafnids themselves, retained some distance from the Empire. The Roman method of treating with barbarians ensured that they remained at arm's length for the majority of the time, and the strong leadership represented by three generations of Jafnid leaders ensured the overall stability of the arrangement. The lack of any Roman attempts at direct rule or absorption of people or territory provided the environment for the Jafnids to become integrated into the apparatus of the state, while gaining the confidence, throughout the sixth century, to act independently.

There were other factors on the political development of the Jafnids. Imperial competition provided the opportunities for the Jafnids and the Naṣrids to gain wealth, prestige, and power, and act in ways which we might usually associate with the leaders of states or polities; participation in diplomatic missions, and 'state' visits to the imperial capital, in the case of the Jafnids. The emergence of such attributes had its genesis in over three centuries of continuous contact between Arabs and empires, which, through the establishment of formal or informal client relationships, nurtured the growth of Arab political identity, within the territory of the very empires which sponsored them.

The efforts of the Jafnids to come in line with the activities of late antique elites are noteworthy, because they reflect their interstitial nature. The inscriptions relating to the Jafnids serve to identify their participation in the life of the Roman Empire, but the frontier location of the majority of these also reinforces the Jafnids' connection to the more remote areas from where, we might presume, they derived some measure of their support. Spanning the two linked worlds of the settled regions, such as the Ḥaurān, and more remote frontier areas, the Jafnids bridged a significant conceptual divide. Becoming allies of two powerful states did not, therefore, necessarily entail total subordination. On the contrary, the sponsorship of empires seems to have catalysed existing political leadership, prompting the development of a degree of diplomatic and political autonomy. A peculiar characteristic of such autonomy was that it could only truly exist in

the form in which it did because of the support provided by the state. The dissolution of the Jafnid leadership, discussed in Chapter 5, demonstrates very clearly the fundamental implications of imperial supremacy for the limits of client power.[210]

Both al-Ḥārith and his successor, al-Mundhir, worked to enhance their political position. As middlemen, they channelled state-derived resources such as subsidies into enhancing their prestige, strengthening their own position in the process. But they also appealed to both empire and the people whom they ruled, manipulating the very Roman policy which sought to identify men of position whom they could use to control tribal groups on the edge of the Empire. As visitors to Constantinople, the Jafnids acted as imperial allies, and were treated as such by the Romans, and the Greek inscriptions in which they appear support their image as leaders of late antique elites, closely identified with the Roman Empire.[211] They campaigned alongside Roman armies and became involved in the ecclesiastical affairs of the Empire. As Arab political leaders, they had a different set of priorities, making off with imperial booty and attacking the Naṣrids without imperial permission or supervision, and presumably distributing wealth to enhance their local support. These two apparently opposite sides of the Jafnids were intimately connected. Their power was recognised on inscriptions in the areas under their purview, yet all but one of these extant examples were in Greek, presented in typical fashion as building inscriptions, mosaic acclamations, and honorifics. They were also found in a variety of topographical settings which were conceptually 'inside' the Empire, such as at al-Ḥayyat, and 'outside' or in remote contexts, such as at Jebel Seis and Reṣāfa, indicating the level to which the two arenas of action were connected.

The political development of the Jafnids, the Naṣrids, and the Ḥujrids was realistically capped by the relative power of their patrons.[212] In the west, the collapse of Roman power had provided unprecedented opportunities for Goths, Franks, and Vandals to transform themselves from similar state-like entities into young

[210] Grouchevoy, 'Trois "niveaux"', 130.

[211] Hoyland, 'Epigraphy and the emergence of Arab identity', 230.

[212] Cf. Grouchevoy, 'Trois "niveaux"', 131: 'Les Ghassanides disposaient d'un pouvoir assez grand sur leurs compatriotes, mais ils ne pouvaient l'exercer d'une manière légitime que dans le cadre de l'Empire byzantine, état au service de l'Empire. La vitesse de dissolution du phylarcat après 580 . . . en fournit la preuve.'

states. In the east, however, the ease with which the Jafnids and Naṣrids were undercut provides a realistic indication of their dependency on imperial patronage. Nevertheless, it was very much within the context of the late antique Roman and Sasanian world that Arabs began to gain political power within the Fertile Crescent, and took advantage of the opportunities offered with the competition between the Romans and Sasanians to make an impact on the settled lands of the two dominant empires in Late Antiquity.

4

Arabic, Culture, and Ethnicity

INTRODUCTION

Al-Ṭabarī's record of the last days of al-Nuʿmān describes the difficult relations between the final Naṣrid leader at al-Ḥīrah and ʿAdi ibn Zayd, court scribe and poet of some apparent local and regional repute.[1] The later traditions concerning ʿAdi, as well as the other poets who were said to have flocked to the Naṣrid court and other centres of patronage, have encouraged speculation about a possible vibrant 'Arab' cultural milieu in the last century before Islam, where poetry was declaimed in Arabic, and Arabic court documents recorded the history of Sasanian Iran's Naṣrid clients.[2] Alongside the Naṣrids, it was said that the Jafnids, too, lent their patronage to poets and poetry,[3] as well as Kinda, whose celebrated poet and exile Imruʾ l-Qays was said to have had dealings with the Emperor Justinian himself.[4] Such speculation raises the problematic question of whether or not, in the fifth and sixth centuries, Arabic was a conscious marker of difference which could be a significant contributing factor in the development of a distinctive Arab identity. This is a particularly

[1] Al-Ṭabarī, i. 1018–28.

[2] For example, J. Horovitz, ''Adi ibn Zayd, the poet of Hira', *IC*, 4/1 (1930), 31–69; R. Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe des origines à la fin du XV^e siècle ap. J.-C.*, 3 vols (Paris, 1952–64), ii. 261–347; I. Shahid, 'The composition of Arabic poetry in the fourth century', in A. Adballa, A. al-Sakkar, R. Mortel, and A. al-Ansary (eds.), *Studies in the History of of Arabia: Proceedings of the Second International Symposium on Studies in the History of Arabia, Jumādā I, 1399 A.H./April, 1979*, 2 vols (Riyadh, 1984), ii. 87–93, at 90.

[3] e.g. al-Nābighah, said to have spent part of his career at the court of Jabiya. See *EI*[2] 840–2.

[4] C. G. Tuetey, *Imrualkais of Kinda, Poet, circa A.D. 500–535: The Poems—the Life—the Background* (London, 1977), 70–1.

important problem, given the powerful ways in which the connection between Arabic and Arab identity developed in the centuries after the advent of Islam and the Arab military conquests of the Near East.

This chapter explores the problem of whether or not Arabic can be tied to any discrete and well-differentiated 'group' before Islam. It does so by situating the question within the broader context of modern and ancient perceptions of the role of language in the creation of identities, as well as through examining aspects of the evidence for Old Arabic. It suggests that, while the nature of the evidence prevents us from finding a definitive solution, the parallels between certain characteristics of the evidence for Arabic in the fifth and sixth centuries, and that for the contemporary increase in power and standing of the late antique Arab leaders, such as the Jafnids, offer a productive way to approach this very complex problem.

LANGUAGE, COMMUNAL MEMBERSHIP, AND IDENTITY: THE PROBLEM

Clearly, a shared language helps to foster a sense of commonality and community, if only because of the most basic fact that it helps people to understand one another. Nevertheless, the degree to which language is applied as a conscious ethnic marker, deliberately used to define difference, has varied greatly throughout history, and it is frequently difficult to tell when a language is being used in this way.[5] In the post-Romantic world, ethnic identities are almost always bound together with the idea of a common language:[6] as products of the emergence of European nationalisms and sovereign states, national groups such as the 'French', for example, are described by

[5] Cf. J. M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1997), 177: the 'difficulty is how to determine when linguistic forms are being used *actively* to mark ethnic boundaries, and when they are simply the passive consequence of non-ethnic factors' (emphasis in original).

[6] By ethnicity or ethnic identity I mean group identity or the sense of belonging to a group, whose boundaries (permeable or otherwise) can be delineated by language, material culture, birth, a sense of shared history, mythology, or any number of markers. Ethnic groups can define themselves against others close by, and so a self-conscious sense of difference is often a part of the identity of a group.

robust linguistic boundary markers.[7] The essential artificiality of these groups is often obscured by the fact that, to contemporary observers, they typically seem like natural and unremarkable phenomena. Even with a greater awareness of the way ethnic groups are constructed, the connection between national group or community identities and language remains strong and continues to manifest itself in regional conflicts and disputes.[8]

Language was an essential component in the creation of artificially bounded communities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Linguistic standardisation, carried out through the study of grammar and the publication of dictionaries, lay close to the heart of academic attempts to build communities and define difference, and language became a definitive factor for ideas of nationalism and sovereignty.[9] An increased or 'awakened' curiosity about the past paralleled this process, and was also a critical part of the construction of communities, retaining a connection to language through the production and revival of poetry, literature, and music, all of which could be used to create bounded communities and shape ethnic and national identities promoting a sense of belonging.[10]

I wish to draw attention to the modern context, because the legacy of modern nationalisms and modern ideas about linguistic identity

[7] Perhaps the most influential study on the connection between national or group identity and language is Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (rev. edn, New York, 2000). See also A. D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford, 1999), esp. 97–123; P. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, 2002), esp. 30–4, and the work of J. E. Joseph, *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious* (New York, 2004); E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983); for modern perceptions on Middle Eastern identity and language, see Y. Suleiman (ed.), *Language and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa* (Richmond, Surrey, 1996); A. Ayalon, *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East: The Evolution of Modern Political Discourse* (Oxford, 1987); more generally, L. Thomas, S. Wareing, I. Singh, J. S. Peccei, J. Thornbarrow, and J. Jones, (eds.), *Language, Society, and Power* (New York, 2003); S. Lucy, 'Ethnic and cultural identities', in M. Díaz-Andreu, S. Lucy, S. Babic, and D. Edwards (eds.), *The Archaeology of Identity. Approaches to Gender, Age, Status, Ethnicity and Religion* (London, 2005), 86–109.

[8] Joseph, *Language and Identity*, 13.

[9] See for specific examples of the delineation of ethnic boundaries through language for the French, Finns, and others, Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 30–1; Joseph, *Language and Identity*, 225; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 73–5; H. Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (London, 1977), 72; Y. Suleiman, 'Language and identity in Egyptian nationalism', in *Language and Identity*, 25–37, at 25–6.

[10] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 75.

can colour our understanding of how other, older or different, cultures perceived themselves.[11] In particular, it can affect our perception of the often neutral ways in which ancient authors used language as a criterion to categorise difference.[12] One possible exception in the ancient world appears to be the Jews, for whom Hebrew constituted, to some extent, a language with a discrete religious connection. Although the link between Hebrew and community in the ancient world 'does not correspond to post-Romantic expectations', it seems to have been a stronger boundary marker than most.[13] Even so, it seems to have occupied a minority position, since the balance of our evidence from ancient authors suggests that while language was indeed often used to define broad concepts of identity, and was sometimes used in more sophisticated ways, for example, by Tacitus, it was not generally or unequivocally used to understand specific concepts of ethnicity, or divine individual group membership, in the way that it might be used today.[14] Even in the most powerful of contexts, such as Herodotus' famous comments on 'Greekness', language was just one marker alongside customs, culture, rituals, and other markers of difference, and was not the universal defining characteristic which linked the Greeks together.[15] For the writers who followed Herodotus, customs, laws, ways of dress, and other criteria were often of more interest in defining who was who.[16] For Procopius, the Lazi and Tzani were understood not from linguistic

[11] For a useful modern example on how such 'modern ideas' affected perceptions, consider the experience of Napoleon with the Egyptians, described by Ayalon, *Language and Change in the Arab Middle East*, 22–3: 'When Bonaparte first ventured to approach the Egyptians, he addressed them in his famous introductory proclamation as *al-umma al-Miṣriyya*. The 'Egyptian *umma*' was, of course, an unwitting concoction of the French oriental experts, who superimposed their newly refurbished concept of nation upon a society accustomed to thinking in quite different terms.'

[12] Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 41, and W. Pohl, 'Telling the difference: signs of ethnic identity', in Pohl and Reimitz, *Strategies of Distinction*, 17–70, at 23–7.

[13] S. Schwartz, 'Language, power and identity in ancient Palestine', *Past and Present*, 148 (1995), 3–47, at 3; see also for useful perspectives F. Millar, 'Ethnic identity in the Roman Near East, AD 325–450: language, religion and culture', in Clarke and Harrison (eds.), *Identities in the Eastern Mediterranean in Antiquity*, 159–76.

[14] Pohl, 'Telling the difference', 27.

[15] Herod. 8.144; F. Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, trans. J. Lloyd (Berkeley, 1988), 212–13; see too the useful discussion of Herodotus in Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 42–6, describing, at 45, language as 'important but not absolutely defining'.

[16] Geary, *Myth of Nations*, 49–50; Pohl, 'Telling the difference', 17; e.g. as well Verg. *Aen*. 8.722–3; Amm. 31.2.17–25, 14.4.1–7.

perspectives, but from those of religious culture and their ability to produce food and cultivate the land. The Tzani stole their food and were uncivilised, because they were not Christians. When, as Procopius tells us, they became more 'civilised' through contact with Rome, it was because they became Christians, and joined the Roman army.[17] Numerous criteria could shape and help to categorise various groups and communities, but there is little indication that language, as a single criterion, played a major role in defining ethnic difference in the ancient world in the way it does today.[18]

Despite the variations in the ways that modern and ancient communities could be constructed, emotive connections between language, culture, and identity persist and can sometimes be projected backwards onto concepts of the past. In this way a 'ghost' community of 'Safaitic' people was created in the ancient Near East from the 'Safaitic' graffiti from southern Syria and northern Arabia.[19] 'Thamudic', a linguistic label classified as a 'pending file' for largely unidentified texts, inspired an attempt to write the history of *le Thamoud*, as if only one group wrote the 'Thamudic' inscriptions and it could be bounded, identified and analysed as a result.[20] These examples should be contrasted against carefully considered analyses such as that provided by Hall for the Eteokretans, who, in the sixth century BC, not only developed a system to represent the Eteokretan dialect, but also incised their legal documents in public in an environment regarded as largely illiterate. Hall considers this illiteracy to be crucial, since it shows that the development of the writing system and the decision to erect public documents must be considered 'a

[17] Proc. *BP* 1.15.22–5; cf. 2.28.25–30, on the Lazi.

[18] Pohl, 'Telling the difference', 20, 27, but esp. 21–2: 'to make ethnicity happen, it is not enough just to be different. Strategies of distinction have to convince both insiders and outsiders that it is significant to be different.' cf. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, 177, 179, who remarks on Solon's repatriation of Athenians who had 'lost' their language during their travels. Hall points out that 'had the expatriates retained their native speech the fact would have been a good deal more significant!' On the general instability of language as a marker of difference: Millar, 'Ethnic identity in the Roman Near East', 160; J. M. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago, 2002), 12–13.

[19] Discussed by M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Some reflections on epigraphy and ethnicity in the Roman Near East', in Clarke and Harrison (eds.), *Identities in the Eastern Mediterranean in Antiquity*, 177–90, at 184–5.

[20] A. van den Branden, *Histoire de Thamoud* (Beirut, 1960), on which see the discussion in Macdonald, 'Some reflections on epigraphy and ethnicity in the Roman Near East', 184.

conscious and active choice'.[21] Such important public inscriptions were unlikely to have been read by all, or even at all, and were probably never intended to be so, but fulfilled a wider purpose of advertising how some among the Eteokretans perceived themselves in relation to their neighbours.

Evaluating the place of Arabic within this general framework poses a series of challenges. In the present day, the connection between the Arabic language and 'the Arabs' is a powerful idea. For nationalists as well as in the popular consciousness, speakers of Arabic belong to a broader community with certain well-defined boundaries.[22] The Revelation occurred in Arabic, and over time the language has become intimately linked to Islam.[23] As this link developed in the centuries after the Muslim conquest of the Near East, commentators involved in attempts to prove the 'pure' Arabic of the Qurʾānic text, even for those entries which were clearly loanwords or which had Hebrew, Syriac, or Greek roots, strengthened the link between a single language and the new religious community.[24] At the same time, Arabic became the language of a new Arab elite, who were defined against the conquered peoples of the Near East. Arabic thus became the language of a new political order, as well as of a new religion, and the ongoing work of grammarians, philologists, and historians continued to reinforce this developing relationship.

Within the complex and ongoing debate about the role and development of Arabic in the pre-Islamic period, both Islamic and Western scholars have focused their interest on the role of al-Ḥīrah, with the Naṣrid court identified as a sponsor or the Arabic language. Abbott, in her work *The Rise of the North Arabian Script*, suggested, following authors such as Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) and Abu-l Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 357/967 to be distinguished from Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī, who wrote, among other things, about 'Ghassānid' buildings) that al-Ḥīrah played a central role in the development of Arabic writing.[25] Shahid has

[21] Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, 178–9.

[22] References in n. 7, above, as well as B. Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: A Critical Enquiry*, trans. M. Farouk-Sluglett and P. Sluglett (2nd edn, New York, 1990).

[23] Cf. Joseph, *Language and Identity*, 173; E. Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge, 1981), 1.

[24] Joseph, *Language and Identity*, 200–3, commenting on A. Jeffrey, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qu'rān* (Baroda, 1938).

[25] N. Abbott, *The Rise of the North Arabian Script and its Ḳurʾānic Development, with a Full Description of the Ḳurʾān Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute* (Chicago, 1939), 5, 8.

speculated that the Naṣrids recorded their deeds in Arabic, because they 'were very conscious and proud of their achievements', making an explicit link between identity and language use.[26] C. Rabin suggested in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* that, through the repeated declamation of verse, the Arabic language was practised and, as a result, standardised at al-Ḥīrah, an act which linked Arabic speakers together into a wider discrete community which was largely based around language.[27] This question of the role which language played in identity-formation is also raised by Hoyland, who suggests that it was the 'distinctive Arabic diction' of the pre-Islamic oral poetry which helped to bring together the speakers of different dialects, uniting 'those who understood it in a broad linguistic community.'[28] While any or all of these arguments present plausible outcomes, they are dependent on contested evidence and, in common with the wider debate about the Arabic language and identity in Late Antiquity, there are no definitive answers.

The question of the relationship between Arabic and identity is thus one of significant complexity. It is made more challenging by the lack of contemporary source material which might help us to understand how those who used Arabic in the fifth and sixth centuries regarded themselves. The historical sources which provide the bulk of our information about this topic present numerous difficulties, as the writing of history amongst early Muslim authors was frequently influenced by theological and political concerns which affected the way they perceived and explained the events and peoples of the *Jāhiliyya*. The material contained in the poetry, or the invented or embellished battle stories known as the *ayyām al-ʿarab*, played a part in the construction of early ideas about the past. In some respects, this type of creative means of exploring the 'past' as a place which could provide answers about the present was not dissimilar to those actions which underpinned the creation of modern ethnic communities.[29]

[26] Shahid, 'The composition of Arabic poetry in the fourth century', 90; cf. the more muted comment by Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe*, ii. 347: 'À Hīra s'est ébauchée la personnalité du poète telle qu'elle s'épanouira à Bassora ou à Coufa quand l'Iraq deviendra le cerveau de la civilisation araboislamique'; see also A. J. Arberry, *The Seven Odes; The First Chapter in Arabic Literature* (London, 1957), 67.

[27] *EI*[2] s.v. 'ʿArabiyya', 565: 'The court of Ḥīra remained a centre of bedouin poets: this helped in developing and unifying the language of poetry; its written use at al-Ḥīra also furthered its standardisation.'

[28] Hoyland, *Arabia*, 242–3.

[29] Cf. the discussion on Arabic sources in Ch. 1.

This discussion explores an alternative, and hopefully productive, way of addressing the difficult question of the role of Arabic in Late Antiquity. Through a consideration of several interrelated topics, it will attempt to negotiate the problems posed by the lack of contemporary evidence and situate the role of the Arabic language, such as it can be established, within the broader cultural and political landscape of the sixth-century Near East.

OLD ARABIC AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

There is very little evidence for Old Arabic,[30] and the small group of inscriptions and the sparse collection of literary references which comprise the information available offer numerous problems of interpretation. Experts consider that Arabic, which was not normally associated with a particular script until approximately AD 500 or after, remained a spoken language for the majority of the pre-Islamic period.[31] Thus we have no way of measuring how widespread its use was relative to other languages, although it has been suggested by Contini, in an article highlighting the complexity of the linguistic background in Roman Syria, that it eventually came to assume a prominent position in the Ḥaurān before the advent of Islam.[32] Additional evidence for the use of Arabic in antiquity is usually inferred from a number of papyrological and literary sources, including a possible mention of the Arabic definite article in Herodotus,[33]

[30] Old Arabic ('vieil arabe', 'Altarabisch') is the term commonly used to refer to the oldest stages of Arabic. For a comprehensive definition of the term, with bibliography, see M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Reflections on the linguistic map of pre-Islamic Arabia', *Arab. Arch. Epig.*, 11 (2000), 28–79, at 30.

[31] See most recently, Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 464–77, and id., 'Linguistic map'. Also, articles in C. Robin (ed.), *L'Arabie antique de Karaʾil à Mahomet: nouvelles données sur l'histoire des Arabes grâce aux inscriptions* (Aix-en-Provence, 1991); id., 'Les inscriptions de l'Arabie antique et les études arabes', *Arabica*, 48 (2001), 509–77, at 559; also, the overview provided by Hoyland, *Arabia*, ch. 8, esp. 198–204.

[32] R. Contini, 'Il Ḥaurān preislamico, ipotesi di storia linguistica', *Felix Ravenna*, 4th ser., 133–4 (1987), 25–79, esp. 77: 'mi pare più probabile che l'aramaico nel Ḥaurān abbia dovuto progressivamente soccombere alla pressione dell'arabo secondo un processo più complesso e articulato.'

[33] Herod. 1.131, 3.8, mentioning *Al-ilat*, preserving the distinctive Arabic definite article. See Macdonald, 'Linguistic map', 30; as well, A. Livingstone, 'An early attestation of the Arabic definite article', *JSS*, 42/2 (1997), 259–61. The reading of *Al-ilat* has

Jerome's well-known reference to the '*arabicus sermo*',[34] a fragment of Uranius mentioning ἡ Ἀραβών φώνη, 'the language of the Arabs',[35] Epiphanius of Salamis on a goddess in Petra worshipped in the 'Arabic language'[36], and the presence of Arabic toponyms in the Greek sixth-century Petra papyri.[37] On the infrequent occasions where Arabic was written, it was, before the sixth century, commonly written in scripts normally associated with other languages. These were usually scripts of local prominence such as Dadanitic,[38] Sabaic,[39] Nabataean,[40] and

been questioned in J. Hämeen-Anttila, and R. Rollinger, 'Herodot und die arabische Göttin 'Alilat', *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*, 1 (2002), 84–99.

[34] Jer. *Praef. in Com. in Iob* (*PL* 28, col. 1081): 'Arabicoque sermone'; see Millar, 'Ethnic identity in the Roman Near East', 175.

[35] Uranius, fr. 25 (= Jacoby, *Fragmente* 3C: 1 338–44). On the dating of the Uranius fragments, see Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity*, 491, who plausibly suggests a mid-fourth century date; G. Bowersock, 'Jacoby's fragments and two Greek historians of pre-Islamic Arabia', in G. Most (ed.), *Collecting Fragments/Fragmente Sammeln* (Göttingen 1997) 173–85.

[36] Epiph. *Panarion. haer*. 51.22.11: Ἀραβικῇ διαλέκτῳ ἐξυμνοῦσι τὴν παρθένον, καλοῦντες ἀυτὴν Ἀραβιστὶ Χααμοῦ τουτέστιν Κόρην: 'they sing hymns to the virgin in the Arabic language, calling her in Arabic Chaamou, the maiden.' Millar, 'Ethnic identity in the Roman Near East', 175.

[37] On the use of Arabic toponyms in the Petra papyri see: R. W. Daniel, 'P. Petra Inv. 10 and its Arabic', in I. Andorlini, G. Bastianini, M. Manfredi, and G. Menci (eds)., *Atti del XXII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia. Firenze, 23–29 agosto 1998*, 2 vols (Florence, 2001), i. 331–41, esp. 332–3, 340; in the same vol., J. Frösén, 'The first five years of the Petra Papyri', 487–93; in vol. ii, M. Kaimio, 'P. Petra inv. 83: a settlement of dispute', 719–24. See too R. G. Hoyland, 'Language and identity: the twin histories of Arabic and Aramaic (and: why did Aramaic succeed where Greek failed?)', *SCI*, 23 (2004), 183–99, at 190. For the appearance of Arabic phraseology and grammatical elements in Nabataean papyri of the first and second centuries, see R. G. Hoyland, 'Epigraphy and the linguistic background to the Qurʾān', in G. S. Reynolds (ed.), *The Qurʾān in its Historical Context* (London, 2008), 51–70, at 57, discussing L. H. Schiffman, E. Tov, and J. C. Vanderkam (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years after Their Discovery* (Jerusalem, 2000).

[38] e.g. JS Lih384, published by A. J. Jaussen and R. Savignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie, mars–mai 1907. De Jérusalem au Hedjaz Médain-Saleh*, 4 vols (Paris, 1909–22), iia. 532–4. See Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 468; id., 'Linguistic map', 50; Hoyland, 'Language and identity', 184.

[39] The epitaph from Qaryat al-Fāw. See A. al-Ansary, 'New light on the state of Kinda from the antiquities and inscriptions of Qaryat al-Fau', in A. Adballa et al. (eds.), *Studies in the History of Arabia*, i. 3–11, at 7, pl. 1 (Arabic); recently, Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 467; id., 'Linguistic map', 50–3; C. Robin, 'Les plus anciens monuments de la langue Arabe', in *L'Arabie antique de Karabʿil à Mahomet*, 113–25, at 115–16; see too Beeston, 'Nemāra and Faw', 1, 6.

[40] e.g. JSNab17, from Ḥegrā/Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ, in north-western Saʿudi Arabia and published by Jaussen and Savignac, *Mission archéologique en Arabie*, i. 172–6. See Macdonald, 'Linguistic map', 53, responding convincingly to arguments on the nature

possibly Hismaic (also known as Thamudic 'E').[41] Two of the examples recorded using the Nabataean script are of particular interest. The first is from ʿĒn ʿAvdat in the Negev. It was dated speculatively to between AD 89 and 126 by its editors, although this is disputed by Macdonald, who prefers it as 'undated'. It is an Aramaic inscription recording a dedication to the god Obodas; two of the six lines are in Arabic, possibly in verse.[42] As a result, they are sometimes included in discussions for the antiquity of the Arabic oral poetic tradition, which is discussed in detail below.[43] The second is the epitaph of Imruʾ l-Qays from Nemāra, discussed briefly in the previous chapter, where it was noted that the famous term 'king of all . . . ' is sometimes argued to refer to either a place or a people.[44] Its 'ethnic' content is therefore also hotly debated.

After approximately 500, developments in the Nabataean script resulted in the appearance of a recognisably Arabic script which was used for the three datable inscriptions found so far. These are the martyrion inscriptions at Zebed (512—with Greek and Syriac) and Ḥarrān (568—with Greek), and the Jebel Seis graffito (528/9). These inscriptions will be discussed in greater detail in connection with questions concerned with script development, oral poetry, and identities in the sixth century.

Within the general framework of the problematic connection between Arabic and concepts of identity covered earlier, there are three

of the text made by J. F. Healy and G. R. Smith, 'Jaussen-Savignac 17—The earliest dated Arabic document (A.D. 267)', *Atlal*, 12 (1989), 77–84.

[41] D. Graf and M. J. Zwettler, 'The North Arabian "Thamudic E" inscriptions from Uraynibah West', *BASOR* 335 (2004) 53–89. The identification of these texts as Arabic is disputed. See Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 468.

[42] A. Negev, 'Obodas the God', *IEJ*, 36 (1986), 56–60, suggested the date of between AD 89 and 126. Macdonald, 'Linguistic map', 76 n. 170, id., 'Old Arabic', 469, and G. Lacarenza, 'Appunti sull'inscrizione nabateo-araba di Ayn Avdat', *Studi epigrafici e linguistici sul vicino oriente antico*, 17 (2000), 105–14, at 105, have all cast doubt on the veracity of the date assigned by Negev. For a comprehensive bibliography see Lacarenza.

[43] S. Noja, 'Über die älteste arabische Inschrift, die vor kurzem entdeckt wurde', in M. Macuch, C. Müller-Kessler, and B. G. Fragner (eds.), *Studia Semitica necnon Iranica Rudolpho Macuch septuagenario ab amicis et discipulis dedicata* (Wiesbaden, 1989), 187–94, at 192–3; Bellamy, 'Arabic verses from the first/second century', 78–9; see as well Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 468–9, and A. F. L. Beeston, 'Antecedents of Classical Arabic verse?', in W. Heinrichs and G. Schoeler (eds.), *Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag. I. Semitische Studien unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Südsemitistik* (Stuttgart, 1994), 234–43.

[44] See Ch. 3 n. 22.

specific problems related to this epigraphic evidence which I wish to discuss in the sections which follow. The first concerns the role of Arabic both in the Nabataean kingdom and as it appears in the Nemāra inscription of *c.* AD 328. The debate over the place of Arabic in the Nabataean kingdom demonstrates the difficulty of trying to find out how Arabic was used, or what its use can tell us about a particular group of people, whilst the contested 'ethnic' content of the Nemāra inscription, based partly around the difficult term *ʿarab*, is perhaps best understood in terms of what it can tell us about the growing status and self-confidence of those who erected it.

The second problem concerns the development of the Arabic script towards the end of the fifth or in the early sixth century. Hoyland and Robin have recently speculated that the development of the script might be associated with the interaction between the sixth-century Arabs such as the Jafnids and the Roman or Sasanian empires, through either the spread of Christianity or the adoption of some form of imperial bureaucracy.[45]

The third and final point for discussion concerns the oral tradition, encompassing both the substantial corpus of pre-Islamic poetry and the *ayyām al-ʿarab*, the stories of the wars between the various tribal groups of the Peninsula. The corpus of poetry in particular is frequently identified as a key factor for the development of a self-conscious 'Arab' identity during the fifth and sixth centuries. All three of these points are part of the wider problem of the connection between Arabic and identity in Late Antiquity.

THE NABATAEAN KINGDOM AND NEMĀRA

Was Arabic a marker of ethnic identity in the Nabataean kingdom, annexed by the Roman Empire in AD 106? The ongoing debate over the role of Arabic in the Nabataean kingdom often turns around whether or not the Nabataeans spoke Arabic, perhaps at the expense of reserving Aramaic for use only on inscriptions.[46] Arguments for

[45] Hoyland, 'Epigraphy and the linguistic background to the Qur'ān', 51–70; C. Robin, 'La réforme de l'écriture arabe à l'époque du califat médinois', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 56 (2006), 319–64, at 327–30.

[46] J. F. Healey, 'Were the Nabataeans Arabs?', *Aram*, 1/1 (1989), 38–44, at 43.

the dominance of Arabic in this way call for support on the 'prominence' of Arabic personal names,[47] as well as the description of Nabataeans as 'Arabs' by a number of ancient authors.[48] Macdonald has, however, comprehensively demonstrated the limitations of using Arabic personal names as evidence, and he has also shown that the restricted geographical distribution of the Arabic loanwords in Nabataean Aramaic inscriptions, which are confined in all but four examples to places in north-western Arabia such as Ḥegrā and Ruwwāfa, offers an important caveat for any argument which aims to show that Arabic was the common language of the Nabataeans.[49] While there is no reason to suppose that Arabic was not used in the kingdom, it may, in consequence, have been the commonly used language of only some of the population. This is especially likely to have been the case in a region where it is probable that numerous languages were spoken and written,[50] and it would be dangerous, perhaps, to suggest that the range of any Arabic use was coterminous with Nabataean political authority.

Recently, new analyses of Nabataean papyri have given fresh life to this debate, raising again the additional question over whether or not Arabic might have had a specific cultural role for the Nabataeans—a question long suggested by the use of Arabic in the ʿĒn ʿAvdat inscription, which has religious connotations. Among other things, Levine has

[47] J. Cantineau, *Le Nabatéen*, 2 vols (Paris, 1930–2); A. Negev, *Personal Names in the Nabataean Realm* (Jerusalem, 1991). Also, Healey, 'Were the Nabateans Arabs?', 44, linking personal names to 'Arab populations'. See too H. P. Roschinksi, 'Sprachen, Schriften und Inschriften in Nordwestarabien', in G. Hellenkemper Salies (ed.), *Die Nabatäer: Erträge einer Ausstellung im Rheinischen Landesmuseum Bonn, 24. Mai–9. Juli 1978* (Bonn, 1981), 27–60, at 31.

[48] e.g. Nabataeans as 'Arabs', Joseph. *Ant*. 13.1.2; Diod. Sic. 2.48, 3.43; Strabo 16.4.18. Cf. Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs*, 9: 'Influenced as the Nabataeans were by the Hellenistic culture of their Macedonian neighbors, Ptolemies and Seleucids, and philhellenes as some of their kings were, they remained Arab in ethos and in mores and above all in their use of the Arabic language.'

[49] M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Personal names in the Nabataean realm: a review article', *JSS*, 44/2 (1999), 251–89, at 256. See id., 'Some reflections on epigraphy and ethnicity in the Roman Near East', 187: 'Thus, the "Nabataean" language as a whole, and one should be very careful how one defines that, is not permeated with loan-words from Arabic; they are confined to the dialect used in North Arabia, which is what one would expect'; also, striking a similarly cautious note, M. O'Connor, 'The Arabic loanwords in Nabatean Aramaic', *JNES*, 45/3 (1986), 213–29. See too M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Languages, scripts, and the uses of writing among the Nabataeans', in G. Markoe, *Petra Rediscovered: Lost City of the Nabataeans* (London, 2003), 37–56, at 50.

[50] Macdonald, 'Languages, scripts, and the uses of writing', 49.

shown in analyses of the papyri that Nabataean legal documents sometimes deploy 'Arabic equivalents of the Aramaic terms of reference' in legal formulas, a process paralleled by the use of Hebrew equivalents or synonyms, in Jewish Aramaic documents.[51] Levine's analyses suggest to Macdonald the existence of a possible parallel between the way Arabic might have been used for the Nabataeans and the more sophisticated role played by Hebrew in some sectors of Jewish society, with clear implications for our understanding of the role of Arabic in Nabataea. Macdonald has signalled that he will explore this problem in more detail in the future, and for now, the possibility that Arabic played a greater role in Nabataea than conventionally recognised must remain open.[52] As yet, then, no clear evidence has emerged which might answer the question of what language the Nabataeans spoke, or how they might have used Arabic. The debate demonstrates the difficulty of categorically attaching a particular language to a specific group of people, and trying to find out their ethnicity, especially since the meaning of the word 'Arab', sometimes applied by ancient authors to the Nabataeans, is itself so fluid in its meaning.

Can the Nemāra inscription make a contribution to this wider debate about how Arabic was used? The content of this inscription is unique from a historical perspective, as it is the only one of the tiny clutch of Arabic inscriptions in other scripts which seems to offer any self-representative insight into the broader political and community activities of its author or authors.[53] The combination of the use of Arabic and the most celebrated element of the inscription, sometimes translated as 'king of all the Arabs', immediately suggests, in this form, a decidedly *Arab* ethnicity, allied to a decision to express the achievements of Imruʾ l-Qays in the Arabic language, and not, for example, in Greek.[54] Yet we should not jump too quickly to the conclusion that the decision to use Arabic was a result of a decision

[51] B. A. Levine, 'The various workings of the Aramaic legal tradition: Jews and Nabataeans in the Naḥal Ḥever archive', in Schiffman et al. (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 836–51, at 844–5. See too Y. Yadin, J. C. Greenfield, A. Yardeni, and B. A. Levine (eds.), *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Hebrew, Aramaic and Nabataean-Aramaic Papyri* (Jerusalem, 2002), 170–276. See the discussion by Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 466–7.

[52] Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 466–7.

[53] Cf. Millar, 'Ethnic identity in the Roman Near East', 174.

[54] Cf. the comments by Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, 138–9, and who provocatively gives the title 'King of all the Arabs' to ch. 10, as well as Sartre, *Trois études*, 136; cf. Isaac, *Limits*, 74, 'lord of the Arabs'.

to express a certain identity. The creator of the ʿĒn ʿAvdat dedication, for example, may simply not have wished to express something which he knew in Arabic in any other way, without having it in mind to use the opportunity to make a statement about his identity.[55]

Much of the import attached to the phrase 'king of all the Arabs' turns on the term *ʿarab*. For the meaning of this term, sometimes written in Greek as *araps*, there are few clues, and a large number of possibilities. It is sometimes connected to a single primary meaning. Gawlikowski, for example, suggested that the term reflected the nomadic way of life, and to call an individual an Arab was thus a comment on how he lived, not his culture, language, or political views.[56] Yet the major objection to this point of view is found in the fact that at many points in history, *ʿarab* could have a large number of other connotations and like many other terms and markers in antiquity it was available for interpretation or appropriation on a variety of levels.[57] Ancient authors might use the term to describe people living in a variety of ways, as well as a number of regions. They used it to describe a geographical region, Arabia, whether alone or in its tripartite sense.[58] Later, it was used to describe the Roman province of Arabia, for which the term acquired a level of administrative meaning. It also held a wide range of other connotations,[59] and, as the debate over its appearance on the Nemāra inscription demonstrates, it might refer to a geographical area.[60]

[55] Cf. M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Literacy in an oral environment', in P. Bienkowski, C. B. Mee, and E. A. Slater (eds.), *Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supp. Series. 423 (Harrisburg, Pa., 2005), 45–118, at 94.

[56] M. Gawlikowski, 'Les arabes de Syrie dans l'antiquité', in K. van Lerberghe and A. Schoors (eds.), *Immigration and Emigration within The Ancient Near East. Festschrift E. Lipinski* (Leuven, 1995), 83–92; challenged by M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Arabs, Arabias, and Arabic before Late Antiquity', *Topoi*, 16/1 (2009), 277–332, at 295–7.

[57] Cf. K. Dijkstra, 'State and steppe. The socio-political implications of Hatra inscription 79', *JSS*, 35/1 (1990), 81–98, at 95: 'it [the term *ʿarab*] is nevertheless a general concept, the meaning of which depends on one's standpoint.'

[58] i.e. Arabia Petraea, Deserta and Felix, Ptol. *Geog.* 5. 16.

[59] For comprehensive discussion see Macdonald, 'Arabs, Arabias, and Arabic', 298–304. Administrative: *Nov.* 102 = *CIC* iii. 492–5: 'Araborum provincia'; Arabia as a place: Amm. 14.8.13, Arabs as people: Amm. 22.15.1; as a place in Epiph. *Panarion. haer*. 66.1.7, also Herod. 1.198; *Periplus* 20; as camel nomads, 2nd cent.: Clement, *Paedagogus* 3.25.1, and Strabo, *Geog.* 16.1.27; Segal, 'Arabs in Syriac literature', 93, on Hatrene conceptions of Arabs, both settled and nomadic; in Syriac, as a place, in Josh. Styl. *Chron*. 50, 90; as a people or an area: Zach. Rhet. *Chron*. 2. 35.

[60] Zwettler, 'Imraʾ alqays, son of ʿAmr: King of . . . ???', 18, noting the territory of *ʿarab* being commonly defined as an area in 'central and southern Iraq and the eastern

Self-representative texts, which might offer a more useful perspective, are very rare. Macdonald has identified a small number of examples, mostly from Egypt, along with a number of possible other cases where individuals are identified as *ʿarab/araps*. These include the well-known third-century BC papyrus receipt from Egypt, where a barber, Parates, describes himself as such,[61] as well as a third-century AD epitaph from Thasos where Rufinus, son of Germanus, also refers to himself in the same way (Ἄραψ).[62] Rufinus may, perhaps, be taking pride in the supposed positive connection between bird-augury and Arabs which is described by Cicero in *On Divination*, reflected in Rufinus' statement that he was an augurer (οἰνοσκόπος).[63] Yet he also tells us about his origin, saying that he is from the city of Κάνωθα, Qanawat, in southern Syria. If the administrative transfer of Qanawat from Syria to the province of Arabia had already taken place, there is a plausible motive, as Macdonald suggests, for Rufinus' self-designation as an Arab, 'far-away' on the island of Thasos.[64] This is then an identification with an administrative basis; certainly, its appearance in the inscription need not imply anything more dramatic than identifying, in a distant place, the common name applied to his geographical or administrative place of origin.

The large number of Egyptian examples of *ʿarab* suggested to Honigman that the term may have had a special meaning in that region. Honigman argues that, in Egypt, *ʿarab* became a generic term for nomad, and also suggests that these 'Arabs' acquired a 'professional' or corporate group identity based around their expertise in working in the desert.[65] Yet this argument again shows how difficult it is to harness this problematic term to a single definition. The Egyptian papyri, including those where individuals describe

Syro-Arabian desert'; Dijkstra, 'State and steppe', 95–7, on the geographical meaning of *ʿarab* in Hatrene inscriptions.

[61] *P. Magdola 15*, in J. Lesquier, *Papyrus de Magdola*, (2nd edn, Paris, 1912), 120–1: Παράτης Ἄραψ κουρεὺς.

[62] *IG* 12.8, no. 528; see discussion in Macdonald, 'Arabs, Arabias and Arabic.', 302–3.

[63] The connection with Cicero (Cic. *Div*. 1.92–4) is made by L. Robert, 'L'épitaphe d'un arabe à Thasos', *Hellenica*, 2 (1948), 43–50, at 44–5.

[64] Macdonald, 'Arabs, Arabias and Arabic', 302–3.

[65] S. Honigman, 'Les divers sens de l'ethnique *Araps* dans les documentaires grecques d'Égypte', *AncSoc* 32 (2002), 43–72, at 56–61.

themselves as *araps*, do not all fit this professional ethnic designation and, furthermore, evidence from other parts of the Empire demonstrates once more that the term does not exclusively equate to bedouins or nomads. Instead, this difficult term continued to offer a variety of meanings, some of which became powerful 'fossilised' topoi which were used to provide information for later ethnographies of the type offered by Ammianus, Jerome, Sozomen, and others.[66]

The multitude of unstable meanings attached to the term *ʿarab* obliges us to recognise that its appearance on the Nemāra inscription does not necessarily reflect a self-consciously discrete 'Arab' group or polity during the time in which the epitaph was created.[67] Even if we understood *ʿarab* to denote a community, it is necessary to challenge views such as that put forward by Trombley, who suggests that the Nemāra inscription 'was addressed only to Arabs'. Such a view requires us to accept a sense of linguistic difference allied to a discrete sense of community, the depth of which at the time is entirely unknown.[68]

Shifting the focus away from the word *ʿarab*, as well as its connection or otherwise to the Arabic language used in the inscription, allows for a different possibility. The Nemāra inscription, like other permanent, monumental records, may never have been intended to communicate primarily through the text. One aspect of the wider significance of the inscription for our understanding of political change along the frontiers of the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity, discussed in the previous chapter, is its appearance during a time when the relationship between the Empire and the Arabs was slowly inceasing in complexity. From this perspective we might see this first extant monumental inscription in Arabic as a reflection of the growing confidence of a group of people who thought it appropriate to proclaim publicly, in their own language and in a manner far more

[66] Macdonald, 'Arabs, Arabias and Arabic', 319.

[67] If we are to adopt a particular position on the role of *ʿarab* in the inscription, then of all the possibilities of intepretation, *king of all (of) ʿarab*, i.e. of the geographical area in Mesopotamia known as such, is vastly preferable to *king of all the arabs*. This is the best from a grammatical perspective. I am grateful to Michael Macdonald for this observation.

[68] F. R. Trombley, 'Epigraphic data on village culture and social institutions: An interregional comparison (Syria, Phoenice Libanensis, and Arabia)', in W. Bowden, L. Lavan, and C. Machado (eds.), *Recent Research on the Late Antique Countryside* (Leiden, 2004), 73–104, at 91.

permanent than a desert graffito, the position and deeds of Imruʾ l-Qays. There are numerous possible reasons for such self-confidence, but the greater sense of political aggrandisement discussed in Chapter 3 is certainly a likely candidate. This would also help to provide a rationale for the monumental form of the inscription itself, for which many avatars were available in the wider vicinity as well as further south in the realms where Imruʾ l-Qays was said to have had influence. From this perspective, it is not the creation of the inscription in Arabic that is necessarily the point of importance—at least, not from a perspective of trying to prove that it was put up in Arabic to make a statement about linguistic identity. Rather, an Arabic-speaking group of people erected a monumental inscription to the greatness of one of their leaders, on the fringes of Roman territory. This, surely, reflects a very significant development and is entirely compatible with the political changes examined in detail in the previous chapter. I would suggest then that it seems appropriate to view, however cautiously, the use of Arabic on the Nemāra inscription as an additional aspect of what was an important early stage in the evolution of late antique Arab identity, and one which, in retrospect, stands as an ancestor of the much later events of the seventh century and afterwards where Arabic-speakers would assume positions of far greater political importance.

THE SIXTH CENTURY

Approximately two centuries after the Nemāra inscription was erected, the first datable examples of inscriptions in an early form of the Arabic script appear. It is possible that the script developed earlier, or that different versions coexisted during the same period. Two texts of uncertain date suggest that Arabic may have been written in the Arabic script earlier than AD 500,[69] whilst conversely recent discoveries by archaeologists at Jabal Umm Jadhayidh have

[69] Debates on the dates of these two inscriptions continue. The first text is the graffito from Jebel Ramm, southern Jordan, on which see J. A. Bellamy, 'Two pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions revised: Jabal Ramm and Umm al-Jimal', *JAOS*, 108/3 (1988), 369–78. For arguments on the date see A. Grohmann, *Arabische Paläographie*, 2 vols (Vienna, 1967–71), ii. 16; see as well B. Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Scripts: From the Nabataean Era to the First Islamic Century according to Dated Texts* (Atlanta, 1993), 13. Most recently, Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 469; Robin,

revealed the existence of some interesting graffiti dated to the fifth century. Some were written in a script which is transitional between Nabataean and Arabic, and some include Old Arabic elements. Yet the number which exhibit these features is small, and what these graffiti also suggest is that the Nabataean script continued to be used during approximately the same period as a recognisably Arabic script was developing.[70]

The earliest of the datable examples is from the year 512. A lintel inscription in Greek, Arabic, and Syriac from Zebed in northern Syria (see Map 7), near Aleppo, it is from a martyrion dedicated to St Sergius. The Arabic is not a direct translation of the text, but is a prayer for a group of people.[71] The second dated example is the graffito from Jebel Seis in southern Syria, discussed very briefly in Chapter 3. Scratched onto a rock on the inside of the volcanic cone, it was first published in 1964.[72] Dated to 423 of the Bostra era (AD 528/9), it is the only sixth-century Arabic text with identifiable historical content, mentioning a certain Raqīm or Ruqaym, sent to Seis to be part of the garrison, by *ʾl-Hrth ʾl-mlk*, ʿal-Ḥārith the

ʿLa réforme de l'écriture arabe', 330. The second inscription, from Umm al-Jimal, is published in *PAES*, 4D, 1–3. See E. Littman, 'Die vorislamisch-arabische Inschrift aus Umm iğ-Ğimal', *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete*, 7 (1929), 197–204; Grohmann, *Arabische Paläographie*, ii. 17; Bellamy, 'Two pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions revised', 373; Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Scripts*, 14. Most recently again, Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 470.

[70] The inscriptions were found by Dr A. al-Ghabbān. See now L. Nehmé, 'A glimpse of the development of the Nabataean script into Arabic based on new and old material' in M. C. A. Macdonald (ed.), *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language* (Oxford, forthcoming); in detail, A. al-Ghabban, L. Nehmé, and M. C. A. Macdonald, *Publication of the archaeological and epigraphic material collected during the Darb al-Bakra survey in northwest Saudi Arabia* (forthcoming); see too M. C. A. Macdonald, 'The decline of the "epigraphic habit"' in late antique Arabia: some questions', in C. Robin and J. Schiettecatte (eds.), *L'Arabie à la veille de l'Islam. Bilan clinique* (Paris, 2009), 17–27, at 24–5, and Hoyland, 'Epigraphy and the emergence of Arab identity', 234–6.

[71] Discovered in 1879 by Wetzstein and later published by E. C. Sachau, 'Eine dreisprachige Inschrift aus Zebed', *Monatsberichte der Königlichen Preussische Akadamie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (1881)*, 169–90; also, id., 'Zur trilinguis Zebedea', *ZDMG*, 36 (1882), 345–52; Littmann, 'Osservazioni sulle iscrizioni di Ḥarrān e di Zebed', 193–8; F. Cumont, *Catalogue des sculptures et inscriptions antiques (monuments lapidaries) des musées royaux du cinquantenaire*, (2nd edn, Brussels, 1913), 175. Most recently, see Hoyland, 'Epigraphy and the emergence of Arab identity', 232; Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 470; Robin, 'La réforme de l'écriture arabe', 336–8.

[72] M. A. el-Faraj al-ʿUsh, 'Unpublished Arabic texts in Jabal Usais', *Al-Abhath*, 17/3 (1964), 227–316, at 320 (Arabic).

Map 7. Western Syria. Note in particular Zebed, Ḥarrān, and Jebel Seis.

king'.[73] The third of the sixth-century examples is the Ḥarrān inscription from the Lejā, north-west of the Ḥaurān.[74] Dated to 463 of

[73] For the name Raqīm/Ruqaym, see M. C. A. Macdonald, 'A note on new readings in line 1 of the Old Arabic graffito at Jabal Says', *Semitica et Classica*, 2 (2009), 223–5; for the inscription, C. Robin and M. Gorea, 'Un réexamen de l'inscription arabe préislamique du Ǧabal Usays (528–529 É. Chr.)', *Arabica*, 49 (2002), 503–10; Robin, 'La réforme de l'écriture arabe', 331; Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 470; also discussed by Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Scripts*, 14; Grohmann, *Arabische Paläographie*, ii. 15–17.

[74] R. Dussaud and F. Macler, 'Rapport sur une mission scientifique dans les régions désertiques de la Syrie moyenne', *Nouvelles archives des missions scientifiques et*

the Bostra era (AD 568/9), it is another martyrion inscription and is inscribed in both Greek and Arabic. It records a dedication by Sharaḥīl, son of Ẓālim, who is identified in the Greek text as a phylarch. It is worth mentioning as well what was thought to be an example of sixth-century Arabic, from Nebo, close to Madaba in Jordan. Here, a church dating to approximately 531/2 contains a dedicatory mosaic to a certain Sawla. Opposite the name is what has been argued to be the Arabic word *bi-salām*,'[rest] in peace',[75] but which, Miik has shown, is in fact Christian Palestinian Aramaic.[76] In the same vein, four sides of parchment containing part of a Greek Septuagint text with an Arabic gloss, found in the Umayyad mosque during cleaning in Damascus in the nineteenth century, and once thought to be of a pre-Islamic date, are now thought to belong to the ninth century or later.[77]

It is generally accepted that the Arabic script developed from the repeated writing of the Nabataean script, using soft materials and ink.[78] We do not know who was doing this writing, or why, but a number of theories have emerged which focus on aspects of the cultural or political environment of the Roman and Sasanian empires. In an interesting discussion Hoyland raised the question of whether or not interactions with these empires might have played a role in the growth of administration or bureaucracy amongst their Arab allies.[79] The inscriptions at Ḥarrān and Jebel Seis were produced by Arabs involved with the Roman Empire in some fashion, whilst the range of

littéraires, 10 (1902), 411–744, at 726. Most recently discussed by Robin, 'La réforme de l'écriture arabe', 332–6; Macdonald, 'Old Arabic', 470.

[75] E. A. Knauf, 'Bermerkungen zur frühen Geschichte der arabischen Orthographie', *Orientalia*, 53 (1984), 456–8.

[76] J. T. Milik, 'Notes d'épigraphie et de topographie jordaniennes', *Liber Annuus* 10 (1959–1960), 147–84, at 159.

[77] B. Violet, 'Ein zweisprachiges Psalmfragment aus Damaskus', *Orientalistische LiteraturZeitung*, 4 (1901), cols. 384–403, 425–41, 475–88. The possibility of a pre-Islamic date was raised by Macdonald, 'Linguistic map', 50, and id., 'Literacy in an oral environment', 96–9, discussing. Maria Mavroudi has recently argued for a much later date in 'Arabic words in Greek letters: the Violet fragment and more', in J. Lentin and J. Grand'Henry (eds.), *Moyen arabe et variétés mixtes de l'arabe à travers l'histoire. Actes du Premier Colloque International (Louvain-la-Neuve, 10–14 mai 2004)* (Louvain, 2008), 321–54, at 327–8.

[78] Macdonald, 'The decline of the "epigraphic habit"', 24; Hoyland, 'Epigraphy and the emergence of Arab identity', 236; see too Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Scripts*, 12–15.

[79] Hoyland, 'Epigraphy and the linguistic background to the Qur'ān', 57–8.

the sixth-century inscriptions is consistent with the area associated with the Jafnids. It is tempting therefore to speculate about the existence of an administrative or bureaucratic tradition, whereby documents, letters, or contracts were kept and retained, the writing of which perhaps helped to develop the Arabic script. In comments on the Lakhmids in the writing of al-Ṭabarī, as well, we find the report that ʿAdi ibn Zayd, court scribe of al-Ḥīrah, able to function in both Persian and Arabic, oversaw royal correspondence with 'the Arabs'. The inference is that this was written correspondence.[80] Others wrote of seeing the 'books' and 'records' of the city.[81] Furthermore, Chabot included what purports to be a letter from al-Ḥārith to Jacob Baradaeus in his edition of anti-Chalcedonian church documents,[82] and another tradition talks of a letter from Philoxenus of Mabboug to a Naṣrid phylarch; but the authenticity of these texts is debatable.[83] Letter, or document, writing and record-keeping are, however, common and perfectly natural reasons for writing. The (Jafnid) phylarch Abū Karib appears in *P. Petra inv. 83* as an arbitrator, solving a dispute; might he have retained a record of the proceedings in Arabic for himself? Perhaps; but there is no evidence.[84] At present we do not possess an understanding of how the system of diacritical marks (which served to differentiate letters from each other) was developing during the fifth and sixth centuries. Nevertheless, the appearance of diacritical marks on what is the first dated papyrus in Arabic, in 22/644, shows that the system had necessarily developed during this period.[85] At any rate, even though widespread writing in soft materials must be assumed for this period, there is no conclusive evidence

[80] Al-Ṭabarī, i. 1024.

[81] Olinder, *Kings of Kinda*, 16–17, on Ibn al-Kalbī's claims to have used inscriptions and annals from al-Ḥīrah; Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe*, ii. 300; Kister, 'Al-Ḥīra', 151–2.

[82] *Documenta* 143–4 (= Chabot, 100).

[83] P. Harb, 'Lettre de Philoxène de Mabbùg au Phylarque Abū Yafir de Ḥīrta de Bētnaʿmān (selon le manuscrit N° 115 du fonds patriarcal de Šarfet), *Melto*, 3 (1967), 183–222, on which see too Robin, 'La réforme de l'écriture arabe', 328.

[84] Kaimio, 'P. Petra inv. 83', 719–20.

[85] N. 161, below; M. C. A. Macdonald, 'Ancient Arabia and the written word', in *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language* (Oxford, 2010); see too Robin, 'Les inscriptions de l'Arabie antique et les études arabes', 564, on the developing graphical system. The relative lack of sophistication of the graphical system, and other elements, Robin hypothesises, 'ne permettaient donc pas la composition et la diffusion d'œuvres librement rédigées (littéraires, techniques, religieuses, etc.) originales ou en traduction, encore moins l'innovation lexicale'.

either way that the Jafnids or those connected with them played a role in the development of the script.

A second possibility is that the spread of Christianity was connected with the development of the Arabic script.[86] The Zebed and Ḥarrān inscriptions belong to unambiguously Christian contexts, while later Muslim traditions represented by Balādhurī and others record that a Christian tribal grouping, Tayyiʾ, played some part in the evolution of the Arabic script.[87] Both the Jafnids and the Naṣrids are associated with monastic activity, and it might be reasonably assumed that monasteries stimulated writing in general. Monasteries are also historically connected to the production of literature, and the central role of reading and writing in monastic life in the late Empire is well known. Yet the inscriptions at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, the most prominent monastic site in the Roman Empire linked to the Jafnids, are in Greek, not Arabic, as are the subscriptions of the 'bishops of the federate Saracens' who appeared at ecumenical councils. To some extent this may be due to the dominance of Greek in monastic circles during this period.[88] We do not know what language was used for the celebrated (but lost) inscription from the monastery of Hind at al-Ḥīrah.[89] Are there other possibilities? Missionaries and ecclesiastical authorities, like monasteries, are also sometimes associated with literacy. Most recently, both Robin and Hainthaler have suggested that the Syrian Christian 'milieu', within which the Christianisation of Arabs largely took place, provides a likely cultural catalyst for writing in Arabic. Robin speculates that:

> On peut supposer que l'effort missionaire des autorités ecclésiastiques d'Euphratésie et de Syrie I s'est accompagné d'une reconnaissance de l'identité culturelle des Arabes. En un mot, il est vraisemblable que

[86] Hoyland, 'Epigraphy and the linguistic background to the Qurʾān', 59. See too J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (2nd edn, Berlin, 1927), 232, suggesting that Classical Arabic was developed by Christians at al-Ḥīrah. For a more categorical position, Shahid, *Sixth Century*, ii/1, 403 n. 3: 'there is no doubt . . . that Christianity played a major role in the final stages of the development of the Arabic script in pre-Islamic times.'

[87] Discussed by Hoyland, 'Epigraphy and the linguistic background to the Qurʾān', 60.

[88] e.g. at the council of Chalcedon, 451, 'John of the Saracens' (*ACO*, II, i, pt. 2, p. 134), and 'Eustathius of the Saracens'(*ACO*, II, i, pt. 2, p. 138). See Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire*, 106–7, and Griffith, 'From Aramaic to Arabic', 11, 24.

[89] See Ch. 2 n. 143.

> l'alphabet arabe a été créé au début du VI[e] siècle en Euphratésie, à l'initiative ou avec l'aide des autorités ecclésiastiques.[90]

Is this hypothesis plausible? Missionary activity did not necessarily depend on the written word; we might recall the conversion of king Æthelbert by St Augustine, who, confronted with the 'illiterate' king and his subjects, deployed a wooden image of Christ to make his point![91] For the Arabs, there is simply no conclusive evidence either way to support or refute Robin's suggestion; however, clues in the conversion narratives dealing with Arabs, discussed in Chapter 2, suggest that any meaningful connection in this regard between Christianity and Arabic may have been minimal at best. The authors of these narratives were occupied with symbolic events such as the casting aside of false gods, the renunciation of the meat of camels, and the turning towards civilisation and order. Symbolic, stereotypical acts drove the accounts of conversion and evangelisation, and incorporation into the larger 'civilised' world turned on settlement and the adoption of the 'true' faith. Of course, this by no means excludes an association between becoming Christian and reading and writing, especially by AD 500, when the spread of Christianity amongst the Arabs had been occurring for over two centuries or more. One imagines that those Arab converts who achieved ecclesiastical office, like Aspebetos, would have found it necessary to be able to read the Bible. Yet this was presumably done in Greek, and not Arabic, although the lack of evidence, as yet, for an Arabic Bible, means that at the moment we cannot say either way.[92] Ultimately, there is not, as yet, any conclusive evidence for a link between Christianity or the activities of missionaries or monks and the development of the Arabic script. However, as in the case of the potential connection between the activities of the Jafnids and the development

[90] Robin, 'La réforme de l'écriture arabe', 329; cf. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 146.

[91] Bede, *HE* 1.25 (AD 597).

[92] Robin, 'Les inscriptions de l'Arabie antique et les études arabes', 559: 'les premiers indices assurés d'une traduction en arabe ne sont pas antérieurs au VIII[e] s.' Most recently, G. Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read*, trans. S. M. Toorawa (Edinburgh, 2002), esp 24–7, casting further doubt on the existence of an Arabic Bible. Cf. R. G. Khoury, 'Quelques réflexions sur la première ou les premières Bibles arabes', in Fahd (ed.), *L'Arabie préislamique et son environnement historique et culturel*, 549–62, suggesting, at 560, that the evidence favours an Arab Bible, 'qui n'a pas survécu la destruction et les catastrophes guerrières et naturelles adverses à la région'.

of the Arabic script, the possibility of such a connection cannot be eliminated.

It has been suggested that in a culture of relatively low literacy rates, writing was not likely to have been very useful, beyond its application for a limited number of specific activities.[93] We have already seen this problem in connection with the general purpose of inscriptions, where whether or not anyone could read them may have been of secondary importance. Can this fact help us to approach the Zebed, Ḥarrān, and Seis inscriptions? In his argument for influences bearing on the Arabic script, Robin contemplates the possibility that such development 'a certainement répondu à un besoin d'affirmation politique et culturelle des Arabes de Syrie'.[94] One of the most interesting questions arising from this is the underlying one of the level of visibility, or prominence, of Arab groups in Syria. The Jebel Seis inscription, a graffito in a remote position, is the most problematic from this perspective: whilst it shows us that at least one person affiliated with the Jafnids wrote in Arabic, it may have been written for any number of reasons.

In contrast, both the Zebed and Ḥarrān inscriptions were monumental, permanent records inscised in stone to record for posterity and to God the generosity, wealth, or status of those who erected them. Much like the Greek inscriptions associated with the Jafnids or that at Nemāra, it is unlikely to have mattered much whether anyone could actually read them. In this respect, the main issue was probably one of status, particularly that of prominent leaders who possessed the ability to pay for, and erect, such inscriptions. In the case of Zebed, the presence of three separate languages on the inscription might suggest, as Robin proposes, that the martyrion was the product of the efforts from three coexisting 'communities', each of which recorded their involvement in a slightly different way.[95] However, even the use of the word 'communauté' raises questions, since it is

[93] See the discussion in Macdonald, 'Literacy in an oral environment', esp the individual cases covered, 45–68, demonstrating the various applications and limitations of writing. On literacy in the Roman Empire in general, see A. K. Bowman, 'Literacy in the Roman Empire: mass and mode', in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Literacy in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor, 1991), 119–32, at 119, responding to the argument for generally low literacy rates put forward by W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

[94] Robin, 'La réforme de l'écriture arabe', 330.

[95] Ibid. 338.

very hard to know what to deduce about the nature of the people dedicating the inscription. It may be simply that, instead of three (distinct?) communities, the inscription reflects the languages habitually used by its patrons who, whilst local leaders, were not necessarily local leaders of individual communities.

Despite these difficulties, however, what is very clear is the prestige and indication of local standing which the inscription conferred upon all of the names of the people which appear on it, and there is a parallel with the inscription from Ḥarrān, which was erected by a man identified as a phylarch. The inscriptions at Zebed and Ḥarrān were therefore expressions of local status of a type which would have been very familiar to those who saw them, regardless of whether or not anyone could read them. Once again, I would suggest that this is not so much an essentially unprovable question of Arabic being deliberately used as a linguistic marker to show difference, as it is one of status being demonstrated in Arabic in a very recognisable format. In other words, it is a very significant point, in my view, that elites involved in standard late Roman 'community projects' were using Arabic in an environment where Greek was, in the vast majority of cases, the preferred language for inscriptions. The point I wish to make is thus one about the visibility of elites using Arabic, and it offers a clear parallel with what I have suggested for the Nemāra inscription. The Zebed and Ḥarrān inscriptions conveyed status, and they did so for people using Arabic within a high-profile late Roman context.

I would suggest therefore that one way to address the vexing problem of what the use of Arabic on these inscriptions represented is by seeing it against the background of the prominence of local late antique elites. Even if 'Saracen' bishops signed subscriptions in Greek, and Arab phylarchs appeared in Greek inscriptions at religious sites such as Qaṣr al-Ḥayr, it is reasonable to suppose that Arabic was the habitually used language of some sixth-century elites, religious or otherwise. Some of these leaders would have been engaged in normal elite activities, such as the erection of martyria or patronising inscriptions to religious figures of particular interest, such as St Sergius. The use of Arabic at Zebed and Ḥarrān provides physical traces of the developing Arabic script, raising questions over how that came about, and what events or situations might have influenced it. Yet both of these inscriptions also reveal the prominence of (Christian) people using Arabic in the Roman Empire, and this suggests that a facet of

'Arabness' in this period might be measured through the demonstration of status vis-à-vis the Empire, at least in Syria.

The question of what can be deduced about Arab identity from the three sixth-century inscriptions is a particularly challenging one. There may have been a catalyst for the development of the Arabic script, and the writing of Arabic in (what we call) the Arabic script may be significant for Arab identities. But—at the moment—there is simply not enough evidence for us to decide conclusively either way. It is rather, I wish to propose here, the connection with visibility of status which offers us an alternative way to approach this difficult material. In this respect, beyond the three isolated sixth-century inscriptions, it is worth noting again the fact that the Arabic script becomes visible to us during the time when the Jafnids and the Naṣrids enjoyed the apex of their power, relative to the Roman and Sasanian empires. This may of course equally be a coincidence, although I think it is unlikely. At the same time, we also find the ongoing creation of a substantial body of orally transmitted poetry, as well as of a body of stories about the battles between the Arab tribes. Although the production of these stories and poems was not confined to the sixth century, and had most likely been occurring for some time, their contemporaneity with the prominence of the Jafnids, Naṣrids, Ḥurjids, and others suggests that developments in northern Arabia, which would provide a substantial part of the material for the creation of later Arab identities, were well under way in the fifth and sixth centuries.

THE ORAL TRADITION

As a discursive construct, ethnicity is most usefully assessed through a self-representative or self-conscious oral or literary product, which can help to define to which group or groups an individual or group of individuals understands and perceives himself or themselves to belong. The most promising late antique cultural product concerning the Arabs is the collection of oral poetry, attributed by later writers to fifth- and sixth-century Arab poets, as well as the stories known as the *ayyām al-ʿarab*, which relate the legendary battles between the tribes of pre-Islamic Arabia. Both of these groups of stories and poems are available to us only from much later collections, and were susceptible to the concerns and interests of their editors and transmitters. This section

will focus on the poetry, for which there is more information concerning matters of authenticity, transmission, and its usefulness for understanding the society and culture of the sixth century. It should be noted, however, that many of the problems and issues related to the poetry, as an art-form capable of giving substance to ideas of identity, and preserving ideas of historical fact, local myth, and what was held to be important or relevant at various points in its evolution, will also apply to the battle stories. Therefore many of the conclusions drawn for the poetry will be applicable to the *ayyām* stories as well.[96]

Early Muslim writers revered the poetry of pre-Islamic Arabia, in particular, seeing it as a repository of collective memory with information on grammar, language, and events.[97] The most elegant surviving examples of this poetry belong to the celebrated *qaṣīdah* or 'ode' form. It is now widely thought that the *qaṣīdah* form grew from shorter, more informal poems which ensured that the *qaṣīdah* itself was well-developed by the end of the sixth century.[98] The background to this development is sometimes evoked from the well-known passage from Sozomen which remarks that, even in the author's day, Arab tribes still declaimed songs about the victories of the celebrated Arab leader Mavia. As mentioned earlier, the verses from ʿĒn ʿAvdat are also sometimes used to adduce the antiquity of the poetic tradition, although the controversy over the exact purpose of the two verse lines, as well as the dispute over the precise dating of the inscription itself, ensures that that the debate over their value is unresolved.[99]

[96] For an overview of the *ayyām al-ʿarab*, see *EI*^{2}, s.v. See also W. Caskel, 'Aijām al-ʿarab. Studien zur altarabischen Epik', *Islamica*, 3 (1930), 1–99; the short description given by Hoyland, *Arabia*, 224–7; Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 6.

[97] A. el Tayib, 'Pre-Islamic poetry', in A. F. L. Beeston, T. M. Johnstone, R. B. Serjeant, and G. R. Smith (eds.), *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge, 1983), 27–114, at 27; A. A. Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*, ed. and trans. L. Conrad (Princeton, 1983), 18, discussing the importance of poetry as a perceived source of information about genealogies, great deeds, and language. See as well the useful introduction in M. A. Sells, *Desert Tracings: Six Classic Arabian Odes by ʿAlqama, Shanfara, Labid, ʿAntara, Al-Aʿsha and Dhu al-Rumma* (Middletown, Conn., 1989).

[98] For a comprehensive discussion of the characteristics of the *qaṣīdah* form, see el Tayib, 'Pre-Islamic poetry', 31, 41–109, as well as A. S. Gamal, 'The beginnings of classical Arabic poetry', in Mir (ed.), *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam*, 41–67, at 48. See too the discussion in Hoyland, *Arabia*, 212–13, and A. Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry*, 2 vols (Reading, 1992–6), i. 7–8.

[99] Soz. *HE* 6. 38; Gamal, 'The beginnings of classical Arabic poetry', 62–3; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 212.

Finally, a 27-line rhyming text from Yemen, tentatively dated to between the first and third centuries, may offer some additional evidence for the composition of verse, although its relationship to the *qaṣīdah* form is only tentative at best.[100]

The stories of heroism and war, as well as the emphasis given to the various constituent elements contained in the poems and the *ayyām al-ʿarab*, surely exerted a significant influence on the formation of concepts of identity. This is especially likely since, in common with other bodies of oral culture, these stories and poems probably helped to encode the ethics, morals, perceived history, and genealogies of the culture which produced them, preserving what was considered to be important.[101] It is tempting therefore to try to use the poetry or the *ayyām* stories for their information on society, culture, and concepts of identity. Some of the poets, such as al-Nābighah, were reputed to have alternated in patronage between al-Ḥīrah and Jabiya, and some of the surviving poems speak of historically verifiable figures.[102] There are a number of problems involved with trying to apply the poems to questions about the place and identity of the Arabs in Late Antiquity, however. It is unclear how the poems evolved, or when the corpus of works, attributed to some sixty or seventy individual authors (who were not necessarily always the 'authors' of the poems[103]) and comprised of either mere fragments or long, elegant odes of up to one hundred and twenty lines or more, was collected in the written form which is available to modern scholars. Furthermore, whilst Muslim writers were interested in the development of Arabic, particularly at al-Ḥīrah,[104] and it is sometimes claimed that the poetry was written down there,[105] there is no clear evidence for this. As Schoeler has recently pointed out, the 'transmission of knowledge' in the early Islamic period was not necessarily *either* oral *or* written. It

[100] Robin, 'Les inscriptions de l'Arabie antique et les études arabes', 517–22; id., 'Les plus anciens monuments de la langue Arabe', 122–3, esp. 125.

[101] Cf. Hoyland, *Arabia*, 212; cf. too Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 84.

[102] On al-Nābighah, *EI*^{2} 840–2, and El Tayib, 'Pre-Islamic poetry', 47–5.

[103] On this cf. e.g. W. N. 'Arafāt, 'An aspect of the forger's art in early Islamic poetry', *BSOAS*, 28 (1965), 477–82, stressing how poems could be forged for contemporary ideological concerns or the demands of particular narratives, and attributed to famous poets.

[104] el Tayib, 'Pre-Islamic poetry', 33–5; Gamal, 'The beginnings of classical Arabic poetry', 61; Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry*, i. 6; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 212, 241; Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe*, ii. 301–13.

[105] Shahid, 'The composition of Arabic poetry in the fourth century', 90.

is reasonable to doubt that the sixth-century residents of al-Ḥīrah either necessarily needed to, or wanted to, produce written editions of the poems that they may have heard performed at the Naṣrid court. It is more likely instead that the poems continued to circulate in oral form, surviving because of their popularity, the quality and relevance of the material, and the status of poetry in Arab society, with any written versions probably fulfilling the role of an aide-mémoire.[106]

Even before written editions were created, the flexibility of oral composition as a technique meant that the poems remained especially susceptible to changes between poets and generations as part of the process of transmission. These changes principally concerned elements of grammar and rhyme, as parts of the poems which were 'crooked' were fixed and improved by the *ruwāt*, the 'transmitters' whose job it was to disseminate the poems and keep them alive after the poet's death.[107] Even if the content of the poem remained virtually unaltered, the differing levels of importance and emphasis accorded to perceptions of the *Jāhiliyya* in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods also means that different elements of the poems could have been accorded more significance and value as Muslim concepts of the past developed.[108] What seems certain is that the poems are not very suitable for use as historical sources.[109] Shahid attempted to apply the works of the poets ostensibly connected with Ghassān to explore the history of the Jafnids, but the results of his efforts are not convincing.[110] Part of the problem is that sometimes, even when

[106] Cf. Macdonald, 'Literacy in an oral environment', 68–102; Schoeler, *Genesis of Literature*, 18–24, esp. 21: 'for contracts, safe-conducts and books proper, writing had a fundamental and intrinsic role to play, but in the case of poetry, its role was purely auxiliary'; id., 'The relationship of literacy and memory in the second/eighth century', in Macdonald (ed.), *The Development of Arabic*; Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry*, i. 5–6; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 212. For a perspective for a different period, R. Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 1989), 2; Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 29.

[107] Schoeler, *Genesis of Literature*, 18–20.

[108] R. Drory, 'The Abbasid construction of the Jahiliyya: cultural authority in the making', *Studia Islamica*, 83 (1996), 33–49.

[109] Cf. J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London, 1985).

[110] e.g. Shahid, *Sixth Century*, ii/1, 221, seeing the presence of familiar toponyms in the poems of al-Nābighah as 'proof' of Ghassānid settlement; on the same page, taking a description of the Golan as the place from which the Ghassānids would set out on raids at face value; and 220, where he considers that the presumed sixth-century floruit of the pre-Islamic poets makes them 'primary sources for Ghassānid history' with no consideration of the numerous problems discussed in this section. See

confirmation of historical figures or events is available, there can be unexpected problems. For example, the most famous of the authors appearing in the *Muʿallaqāt*, Imruʾ l-Qays of Kinda, is associated with poems which deal with the death of his father at the hands of a rival tribe, and his subsequent exile and determination to obtain revenge and regain his rightful position; he is even said to have journeyed to Constantinople to enlist the support of Justinian. The figure of Imruʾ l-Qays and numerous elements of the story bear more than a passing resemblance to what is known of Kinda from the accounts of Roman diplomatic interest in Arabia, recorded in the history of Procopius, and the excerpts of Nonnosus. In Procopius, Kaisos appears as 'the fugitive' and the Roman favourite for leadership of the 'Maddene Saracens', Maʿadd, whilst Nonnosus, in apparent agreement with the poet's own verses, talks of Kaisos' visit to the capital.[111] As a result of this seeming correspondence, Tuetey and Arberry both posited, reasonably, a connection between Kaisos and Imruʾ l-Qays.[112] Yet even this apparently straightforward association is problematic. The name Imruʾ l-Qays was relatively popular, and is attached to a number of reputed ancient poets,[113] whilst the name can also be variously rendered as Kaisos, Qays, or Amorkesos. Finally, the later appearance of a ninth-century legend about Imruʾ l-Qays, focused on a quest for revenge directed against the murderers of his father, casts further doubt on the association between the 'Kinda poet' and a real figure.[114]

The most reasonable estimates place the collation of the poems in written editions in the seventh or eighth centuries at the earliest.[115] Different types of collection existed, such as the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, named for its compiler, al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī, an eighth-century philologist, or the *Muʿallaqāt*. The *Muʿallaqāt* is perhaps the most famous group of poems, a selection of seven; it was supposedly put together by one Hammad al-Rāwiya ('The Transmitter'), although

too Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 84, who considers both the poems and the battle stories to be fundamentally oriented away from historical concerns.

[111] Proc. *BP* 1.20.9–10; Phot. *Bib*. 3.

[112] Tuetey, *Imrualkais of Kinda*, 69–99; Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 31, 38.

[113] Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe*, ii. 261.

[114] Olinder, *Kings of Kinda*, 110–18; Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry*, i. 52: 'legends abound about this poet, but close examination shows that virtually none of them have any substance.'

[115] Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry*, i. 23.

there were probably many such poetry 'specialists'.[116] Al-Rāwiya may have found his candidates for the most compelling examples of the genre skewed by popular taste; certain poems may have been elevated, and others suppressed,[117] and the collection of the *ayyām*, too, is likely to have suffered from the same concerns.[118] The numerous editions of the *Muʿallaqāt* pose a challenge. Kister, for one, has suggested that al-Rāwiya may have had access to a variety of collections, including one made for Muʿāwiya as well as one for ʿAbd al-Malik. Even after al-Rāwiya developed his version of the *Muʿallaqāt*, perhaps—but not necessarily—derived from the selection of seven poems made for Muʿāwiya, Ibn Khaldūn could still talk much later of the nine *Muʿallaqāt*, suggesting that there were still, as late as the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, competing versions circulating.[119]

It is probably impossible to arrive at a definitive 'edition' of the poems as they were composed in the pre-Islamic period, and it is tempting to question their authenticity. Yet there is a consensus that the original poems are extremely unlikely to have been fabricated after the fact, and this means that the poems as we have them today are indicative of an actual cultural tradition and activity, even if they themselves are not in their original versions.[120] Experts also note the homogeneity of the most prominent part of the corpus, noting that if the misleading and often fictional biographies of the poets and the disputed content of the poems themselves are put to one side for a moment, analyses based on poetics—in this case, primarily for the poets connected to the *Muʿallaqāt*—point to a pre-Islamic composition date in a geographically confined area, based on a tradition with several centuries behind it.[121] It is then the form, rather than the

[116] Ibid. i. 21–3; Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 16–21.

[117] Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 17; Conrad, 'The Arabs', 678.

[118] Cf. Hoyland, *Arabia*, 225.

[119] Kister, 'The Seven Odes', 29–36; Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry*, ii. 21–2; Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, ch. 6, 58.

[120] Cf. Hoyland, *Arabia*, 212.

[121] A. Arazi and S. Maslha (eds.), *Six Early Arab Poets: New Edition and Concordance. Based on W. Ahlwardt's* The Divans of the Six Ancient Arabic Poets (Jerusalem, 1999), 13: 'the poetry of these six poets, as regards form, metre, and poetical characteristics, was composed in the course of the five decades preceding the emergence of Islam . . . it was composed in one period and in a single place'; also Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry*, i. 4–5, 19; J. E. Montgomery, 'The deserted encampment in ancient Arabic poetry: a nexus of topical comparisons', *JSS*, 40/2 (1995), 283–316, at 284.

content, which is of primary interest.[122] Other formal aspects add to the credibility of this position, such as the repetition, imitation, and copying of material between poems,[123] and (tentatively) the Iranian linguistic intrusions in the poems of those poets said to have been resident at al-Ḥīrah.[124] Comparative analyses of pre-Islamic poetry and the oral poetry of other societies lend further support to the position stressing the validity of seeing a tangible body of culture behind the pre-Islamic poems.[125] What this suggests, then, is that, even if we cannot talk of the identities of specific poets or use the poems themselves as historical documents, it seems clear that the production of the poems is not in dispute.

For helpful parallels to this situation we might look briefly to the Homeric epics, and to the medieval epic of *Digenes Akretis*. These are useful as a comparison not on the basis of similarity of form, content, or purpose, as the Homeric epics, at least, are very different in these respects to the pre-Islamic poems. Attempts have been made to fit the *qaṣīdah* into the theories of Parry and Lord, most notably by Zwettler, who suggested that the *qaṣīdah* forms were oral-formulaic in nature, like the Homeric poems; Gregor Schoeler has recently demonstrated, convincingly, that this cannot be the case.[126] Where the Homeric epics and *Digenes Akritis* are useful is that, in common with the

[122] Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry*, i. 5: 'the only conclusion that one can draw . . . is that the conventions of poetry, at both a general and a fairly specific level, had become widely established well before the composition of the earliest surviving poems'; cf. too H. A. R. Gibb, *Arabic Literature: An Introduction* (2nd rev. edn, Oxford, 1963), 21, who argues that it would have been impossible for eighth- and ninth-century collectors of poetry to have invented 'all of [the pre-Islamic poetry's] local and personal diversities'. He goes on to say: 'while it may very seldom be possible to provide objective evidence for the authenticity of any given poem with complete certitude, nevertheless . . . there can be no doubt that the commonly accepted nucleus of poems ascribed to the poets of the sixth century is a faithful reproduction of their *poetic output and technique*, and thus substantially authentic' (my italics).

[123] Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry*, i. 19.

[124] Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe*, ii. 347, although he notes that they are difficult to date effectively and may be later interpolations; P. K. Hitti, *The Arab Heritage* (New York, 1944), 126. The poet often referenced in this regard is Al A'shā. *EI*^{2} notes his preference for 'Persian' and 'foreign' words.

[125] M. V. McDonald, 'Orally transmitted poetry in pre-Islamic Arabia and other pre-literate societies', *JAL* 9 (1978), 14–31, at 30–1; Sells, *Desert Tracings*, 17.

[126] M. Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry: Its Character and Implications* (Columbus, Oh., 1978), esp. 189–234, building on, broadly, A. B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960); and M. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers* (Oxford, 1971). See G. Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, trans. U. Vagelpohl, ed. J. E. Montgomery (London, 2006), 87–111.

pre-Islamic poems, there are considerable questions about when they were created, and what relationship the later written forms share with their oral predecessors. Yet there is also little doubt that they reflect an earlier creation of culture, in a specific period. For example, scholars such as Foley and Powell have identified the deeply embedded history of oral tradition lying behind the texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, expressed, in this case, through the formulaic and recurring scenes of the Homeric stories.[127] The written versions of the Homeric epics which we possess today reflect, then, a much older form of culture-creation. The medieval epic of *Digenes Akretis* provides more clues. As with the pre-Islamic poetry collections, there is no clear agreement over the manuscript tradition, and the background against which the poem was written down is also subject to considerable debate.[128] The written versions that were produced contain numerous but often disconnected pieces of 'historical' information, and were also sometimes contaminated by the process of transmission, during which original elements of the poems were lost and new ones added.[129] At the same time, some versions of the *Digenis* stories exhibit certain formal, poetical, or other characteristics which allow their place and general time of origin to be broadly identified. So, despite the differences in form and purpose between the Homeric epics, *Digenes*, and the poetry of Arabia, while the written poems are not always very useful as historical documents, and do not necessarily mirror the oral product as it was created at any specific moment, they do reflect the creation of a cultural artefact during a certain period.[130]

[127] J. Foley, 'Oral tradition and its implications', in B. Powell and I. Morris (eds.), *A New Companion to Homer* (Leiden, 1997), 146–73, at 167–73; in the same volume, B. Powell, 'Homer and writing', 3–32, at 3; cf. Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record*, 2.

[128] On *Digenes Akretis* see R. Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (2nd rev. edn., London, 1996), and E. Jeffreys (ed.), *Digenis Akretis: The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions* (Cambridge, 1998).

[129] P. Magdalino, '*Digenes Akrites* and Byzantine literature: the twelfth-century background to the Grottaferrata version', in R. Beaton and D. Ricks (eds.), *Digenes Akrites: New Approaches to Byzantine Heroic Poetry* (Aldershot, 1993), 1–14, at 1–4.

[130] Jeffreys, *Digenis Akretis*, pp. xli, lvi, and xvi–xviii on the problems of historical interpretation from the poetry; also, id., 'Maximou and Digenis', *Byzantinoslavica*, 56/2 (1995), 367–76, at 374–5; see too S. Alexiou, '*Digenes Akrites*: Escorial or Grottaferrata? An overview', in Beaton and Ricks (eds.), *Digenes Akrites*, 15–25, at 17.

The point of these parallels is that the very late production of written editions may well pose a problem for those who wish to understand what the poems 'were like' in the sixth century, or for those who wish to assess historical information that they believe may be contained within. Behind the earliest extant written collections, however, is a tradition of oral literature which, even if its specifics are difficult to establish, need not be doubted. This may sound like an obvious point to make. Yet if we bypass the essentially unanswerable questions such as the exact nature of the relationship between the content of the poems in the sixth and the eighth centuries, or whether a certain figure is 'historical' or not, and approach the pre-Islamic poetry as a reflection of the creation of culture, an observation might be made concerning the question of the link between language, culture, and identity. Our sources are not adequate for us to decide the exact nature of the identities that the poems and battle stories surely helped to foster. Yet, placed in the context of the wider discussion throughout this study, I would suggest that it is worthwhile to draw broad—if very tentative—connections between the creation of the poetry and the *ayyām al-ʿarab*, the development of the Arabic script, and the appearance of Arabic on inscriptions connected with late antique elites, with the increased status and visibility of certain specific groups of Arabs such as the Jafnids and the Naṣrids.[131] I am not suggesting that it was only the Jafnids or the Naṣrids who should be linked to the poems or the battle stories—others were almost certainly involved, and obviously throughout a much wider area than the periphery of the Roman and Sasanian empires. Yet the widespread occurrence in the poems of those linked to the Jafnids and the Naṣrids, and the associations between, for example, Imruʾ l-Qays of Kinda and the Romans, alongside the developments summarised above, do suggest an intriguing conclusion. This is that the creation of the poems and the battle stories, which can only have proved critical for the delineation of identities and the expression of ethnicity, even if the specifics are unknown to us, were bound up in the broader context of greater Arab political awareness and the development of Arabic, all of which were taking place within the 'north Arabian cultural universe'[132]—itself part of the wider

[131] Cf. Hoyland, 'Late Roman Provincia Arabia', 134.

[132] The phrase used by G. E. Grunebaum, 'The nature of Arab unity before Islam', *Arabica*, 10 (1963), 4–19, at 9.

political and cultural milieu of the late antique Near East, dominated by the empires of Rome and Sasanian Iran.

BEDOUIN IDENTITIES AND THE QUESTION OF ISHMAEL

Moving away slightly from the issue of language, I wish to close this chapter with a brief consideration of two aspects of Arab cultural identity—the romanticisation of the 'bedouin' Arab identity, and the question of Ishmaelite identity. Both have their roots in the late antique period. In common with the connection between Arabic and Arab identity, they too would develop in new ways after the seventh century. Taken together, and alongside the discussion in this chapter, they serve to emphasise the importance of the fifth- and sixth-century Near Eastern context for the creation (and understanding) of later, Muslim, identities.

Under the Umayyad caliphate, the concept of the 'pure' bedouin was held in high esteem. El Tayib reports the tradition that noble families would send their elite into 'the desert' to learn pure Arabic from the bedouin, and try to understand the bedouin lifestyle.[133] Where had this idea come from? One important and heavily romanticised facet of the identity of 'arab' or *bedu* had been—for a long time—the desert dweller, free from authority, wild, aggressive, and beholden to nobody. This was frequently turned into a negative stereotype and was a common literary topos for Graeco-Roman authors. Whilst the idea that the 'steppe' Arabs lived only in the desert showed some sign of abating (or at least becoming modified) in some sixth-century Graeco-Roman literature (see Ch. 3 n. 181), and while ancient authors were aware, as we have seen, of settled peoples whom they also labelled as Arabs, the negative sentiment surrounding the bedouin stereotype remained, and the popularity of the image of the uncouth nomad continued. An interesting foil to this is one of the key topics of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, which applied a

[133] el Tayib, 'Pre-Islamic poetry', 35–6, describing, too, the belief 'that the people of Mecca sent their children to be suckled and brought up during their early years by bedouin foster-mothers, for it was believed that the desert air was healthy and desert speech pure.'

positive bias onto an idealised bedouin lifestyle, free from negative connotations.[134] The romanticisation of this way of life was largely dependent on a recurring set of similar themes, such as the abandoned desert encampment and the role of animals, for example the horse and the camel. These in turn were dependent on underlying compositional forms, and we might recognise this constantly recurring formal aspect of the poetry as preserving a way of expressing a type of existence which resonated with the poet and his audience, even if it was not a daily reality for all.

There are a couple of possible explanations for the enduring popularity of the bedouin elements of the poetry. First, in a recent study Montgomery has noted the exaggerated emphasis on the camel at the expense of the horse, and the apparent shift in interest from 'foreign cultures and luxuries to an awareness in the pride and nobility of the desert' in some parts of the poetry corpus. The bedouin elements which were already common to pre-Islamic poetry were thus given heightened attention.[135] Kister suggests that a possible reason for this is the changing situation for the Lakhmids towards the end of the sixth century, ultimately leading to the deposition of al-Nuʿmān and the destruction of the Naṣrids, moving the balance of power in north Arabia and southern Iraq away from al-Ḥīrah. Montgomery argues that this might then have resulted in a raised awareness of 'a vogue for the bedouin' which over time developed into something considerably more substantial.[136] If accurate, it places the 'emergence of Poet as Bedouin Hero' firmly in the pre-Islamic period and perhaps as an indirect result of the relationship between the Naṣrids and Sasanians, since the demise of the Naṣrid dynasty was a direct result of that relationship. It may also reflect once more the increased self-confidence of the Arab groups in Late Antiquity.[137] Montgomery's explanation, based on Kister, is certainly plausible; but there is also an alternative.

It is also conceivable, if equally difficult to prove, that the appearance and growing prominence of the idealised desert lifestyle represents an indigenous response to a common cultural stereotype which

[134] Ibid. 35; cf. Hoyland, *Arabia*, 244.
[135] Montgomery, 'The deserted encampment in ancient Arabic poetry', 312–14.
[136] Ibid. 313; M. J. Kister, 'Mecca and Tamīm (aspects of their relations)', *JESHO* 8/2 (1965), 113–63; el Tayib, 'Pre-Islamic poetry', 35.
[137] Montgomery, 'The deserted encampment in ancient Arabic poetry', 315.

was appropriated and then 'repackaged'. This suggestion parallels a similar process described by Schwartz in his argument for the appropriation of aspects of Christianity in late antique Judaism, as a response to imperial policies and pressures. Symbols intimately connected with Jewish identity, such as the local village synagogue, were closely linked to common social, religious, and cultural forms in Late Antiquity which were also popular with Christians—and so, Schwartz suggests, it was no accident that an upsurge in the construction of churches was accompanied by a corresponding increase in the building of synagogues. By taking ownership of and 'repackaging' these forms, Jews could build and reinforce their identity as a response to imperial encroachment and the pressures of Christianity. This process also ensured that they could mitigate, to some extent, their increasing exclusion from late antique society and patronage networks which were becoming more and more dominated by Christianity.[138] In short, they took something that was a common part of life, reworked it, and found new ways to express it in a way that made it part of their identity.

For the late antique Arabs, it is difficult to imagine that, through their contact with courts and imperial representatives, the Jafnids and Naṣrids were unaware of the prejudices against them and the life which they were often held to represent. Certainly the sentiment of the vignette preserved by Michael the Syrian, whereby al-Ḥārith inflicted a decidedly stereotypical meal of camel meat on his Chalcedonian 'enemy', suggests that this may have been the case, although, as noted in Chapter 2, the veracity of the story is open to question. At the same time, the negative bedouin stereotype required a positive interpretation to ensure its later acceptability under the Umayyads, and the most likely venue for this to have occurred is in the poetic cultural environment of the fifth and sixth centuries. Like so much else, the eventual development of such a positive reinterpretation of a classical image of the 'Arab way of life' may have only occurred much later. In this case, it might have come about when the 'new' urban reality of life under the caliphate was achieved, for only then might the necessary (if artificial)

[138] Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 15–16, 179, 200–2. As mentioned briefly in Ch. 1, ideas advanced by Schwartz have been developed by Boyarin, *Border Lines*, particularly the delineation of religions against each other—in this case, Christianity against Judaism. See the generally favourable review by F. Millar, 'Transformations of Judaism under Graeco-Roman rule: responses to Seth Schwartz's *Imperialism and Jewish Society*', *JJS*, 57/1 (2006), 139–59.

sense of difference between the categories of Arab city dweller and Arab desert dweller prompt the new, urban elite to celebrate a romanticised bedouin existence in a sedentary environment. It was the bedouin who had after all, in popular consciousness at least, composed the poetry that celebrated the desert life in the first place.[139] Whilst this suggestion cannot be proved, especially since we cannot be sure that the 'positive' bedouin image in pre-Islamic poetry is not more of a reflection of the Umayyad period than the sixth century, it is a plausible hypothesis which is worth proposing within the context of this discussion.

A further aspect of the complex connection between the cultural background to Islam and the rich culture of the late antique Near East is the association between the Muslim Arabs and Abrahamic descent, via Hagar and Ishmael. This link was controversially explored by Crone and Cook in their landmark work, *Hagarism*, where the authors argued for a distinct link between Islam and Judaic messianism, and a rapprochement between Jews and Arabs in Late Antiquity which influenced the development of Muslim conceptions of their association with Abraham.[140] Most recently, this link has been explored by Fergus Millar, who has shown that, while the connection between Ishmaelite identity and the Arabs is attested well before the seventh century, with the earliest examples of the idea in Graeco-Roman writing circulating as early as the late Hellenistic period, it was Josephus who played the most significant role in the attribution of the descent myth by offering it as an explanation for the prevalence of 'Jewish custom' amongst the Arabs about whom he wrote.[141] After Josephus, the idea remained in circulation, appearing in numerous biblical commentaries and the works of ecclesiastical historians. Jerome's commentaries (for example) offer numerous observations on the putative connection between the Arabs or *Sarakēnoi* and biblical descent, as well as 'Jewish' practices or culture. He notes their abstention from pork,[142] their adherence to the custom of

[139] Cf. Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe*, ii. 293, 347.

[140] Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 3–4, 6–7, 46, 92.

[141] Joseph. *Ant.* 1.12.4; 2.9.3; see Millar, 'Theodosian Empire', 301. See too I. Eph'al, '"Ishmael" and "Arab(s)": a transformation of ethnological terms', *JNES*, 35/4 (1976), 225–35; F. Millar, 'Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus and the origins of Islam', *JJS*, 44/1 (1993), 23–45, esp. 32, 44–5; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 243. For information on the Hellenistic examples of the story, see Retsö, *The Arabs*, 335–9.

[142] Jer. *Adv. Jovinianum* 2.7 (*PL* 23, col. 294).

circumcision,[143] and the belief that the word *Saraceni* was derived from the name Sara. Yet there is no particular sense in Jerome's comments that following the Law (through either custom or obedience) made the Arabs particularly singular, and, in the case of descent from Sara, the implication in Jerome's text is negative. He accuses the Saracens of falsely assuming Sara's name, so as to attach themselves to a free descendant instead of suffering the ignominy of descent from the slave, Hagar.[144]

Throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, references to a link between Abraham and the Arabs continue to surface at various intervals. Eusebius connects the *Agareni* and *Saraceni*,[145] and Theodoret also gives some equivalence to the two. For his part, Philostorgius says that the south Arabians, who were known in earlier times as 'Sabaioi', a name in which we can recognise that of the Sabaeans, were now called 'Homeritai'. This is the name also given to the Ḥimyarites by Procopius, which shows that the term gained some currency in literary circles.[146] It is not the name, however, but the gloss given to it by Philostorgius which is most interesting. He indicates that, while the Homeritai were understood to be descended from Abraham (explaining why the Homeritai observe circumcision), this had not occurred through Hagar, or Sara, but through Chettura, the wife of Abraham after Sara. That a separate or competing version of Abrahamic descent was current illustrates the flexibility of the story in Late Antiquity.[147]

In these stories there is no clear indication that circumcision or abstention from pork (or any other 'Judaising' trait) was consciously followed from within, implying that the idea of Abrahamic descent was still an external categorisation. It is striking that such commentary is also regularly accompanied by negative stereotypical comments about Arabs or Saracens; perhaps the proffered connection with Abraham was always intended to be negative for Christian authors, allowing for a more effective degradation for the Arabs in

[143] Jer. *Com. In Ierem*. 2.84 (*CCSL* 74, 101); cf. Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity*, 486–7.

[144] Millar, 'Theodosian Empire', 304; Jer. *Com. In Ezech*. 8.25.1–7 (*CCSL* 75, 335); cf. *Chron. 1234* 1.237, linking descent from Hagar to the Arabs' position as a 'contemptible people'. The scene is set during the time of Heraclius.

[145] Euseb. *Chron*. 23b.

[146] Theod. *HE* 4.20; Proc. *BP* 1.20.9–10.

[147] Philostorgius, *HE* 3.4; Millar, 'Theodosian Empire', 305–6. See too id. 'Hagar', 44; cf. a similar story found in Origen, *Selecta in Genesim* 31 (*PG* 12, col. 120).

Christian literature through the association of 'false belief with the machinations of the Jews'.[148] Only occasionally is a positive connotation provided. Cyril of Scythopolis, writing the biography of St Euthymius, remarked of a group of newly converted Saracens that they had, by adopting Christianity, assumed descent from Sara, instead of from Ishmael.[149] Abrahamic descent, though, continued to be applied from the outside. It was not generally understood to hold any particular meaning for those to whom it was ascribed, nor was it an especially beneficial phenomenon.[150]

When did Abrahamic descent become a phenomenon to be internalised and offered by the Arabs as their own in the years before Islam—if at all? Dagorn suggests that, while the idea of the connection was known to Jews and Christians, it was not until the Islamic period that Arabs themselves may have adopted it.[151] On the other hand, Crone speculates that a 'nativist' desire for a universalist movement with which to counter imperial pressures, particularly those brought by the conquests of Sasanian Iran in the seventh century, may have resulted in the appropriation of the Abrahamic story.[152] Certainly any internalisation of the Abrahamic idea before Islam would have required a certain amount of contemporary currency. Millar suggests an early date for such an event, perhaps mirrored in the conversion narrative of Zokomos. In this narrative, Sozomen revisits the descent myth, commenting on the specious connection between the names 'Saracen' and 'Sara'. Once again, he goes on to say, it was the Abrahamic origins which explain the abstention from pork and the observance of Jewish customs. Over time, Sozomen explains, the Saracens forgot their roots, but were eventually reacquainted with them through contact with the Jews. Critically, those who found out the origins of their customs eventually took them back to their people, where they continued to follow them.[153] Here is the only point in any

[148] E.g. as in *Isaac of Antioch* 1. 208, in the context of a fifth-century attack on the city of Beth Hur, near Nisibis; cf. Conrad, 'The Arabs', 686; Millar, 'Theodosian Empire', 303.

[149] Cyr. Scyth. *V. Euth*. 10.

[150] Millar, 'Theodosian Empire', 305–6.

[151] R. Dagorn, *La geste d'Ismaël d'après l'onomastique et la tradition arabes* (Paris, 1981); cf. Shahid, *Fifth Century*, 382–3.

[152] Donner, 'The background to Islam', 516; Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, 246–50; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 243.

[153] Soz. *HE* 6. 38.

of the external observations of the Abrahamic descent story where any real credit for original action is offered to the Arabs, as, presumably, those who returned with the knowledge of their 'Jewish' roots were then able to begin a process of internalisation which, over time, allowed them to offer Abrahamic descent as 'their own'. By suggesting that it was the Arabs (and not outsiders) who appropriated and developed the connection with Abrahamic descent, Sozomen's passage offers some indigenous ethnic value to the Abrahamic descent story, well before it became part of Islam.[154]

One reason why this scenario is plausible, if not perhaps in the precise way in which it is described by Sozomen, is because of the long history of contact between Arabs and Christians and between Arabs and Jews.[155] The interests of the Jafnids and Naṣrids in north and central Arabia would have brought them within range of Jewish influences from Ḥimyar and Jewish populations in Yathrib.[156] Contact with Jewish populations in the Golan or west Syrian region is also not an impossible scenario.[157] Contact with Christians and the adoption of Christianity for whatever reason was a common occurrence, and Arab populations within the Roman imperial orbit were surely not entirely ignorant of the contents of the Bible, especially by the late fifth and early sixth centuries. The Christian inscriptions from Zebed and Ḥarrān are proof of Arabic-speaking Christians, and the well-attested involvement of the Jafnids with Christianity demonstrates the high probability of a reasonable appreciation of biblical history. The hint in Theodoret's *Life of Abbas* that Ishmaelite identity brought Arabs closer to conversion may also have played a part, given the obvious political and cultural benefits inherent in adopting Christianity. This may equally well, of course, simply be an external

[154] Millar, 'Theodosian Empire', 311–12.

[155] Cf. A. Shboul and A. Walmsley, 'Identity and self-image in Syria-Palestine in the transition from Byzantine to early Islamic rule: Arab Christians and Muslims', in Clarke and Harrison (eds.)., *Identities in the Eastern Mediterranean*, 255–87, at 263; Conrad, The 'Arabs', 684; N. de Lange, 'Jews in the age of Justinian', in Maas, *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 401–26, at 411.

[156] Donner, 'The background to Islam', 516; Kister, 'Al-Ḥīra', 144; Robin, 'La réforme de l'écriture arabe', 332.

[157] Cf. C. Ben David, 'Late antique Gaulanitis settlement patterns of Christians and Jews in rural landscapes', in Lewin and Pellegrini (eds.), *Settlements and Demography in the Near East in Late Antiquity*, 35–51, at 39. See too C. Dauphin, 'Farj en Gaulantide: refuge judéo-chrétien?', *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, 34 (1984), 233–45, at 244.

observation by a Christian author.[158] Finally, the expansion of Roman interests into the steppe, which introduced a new level and frequency of contact between Arab groups and Christian and Jewish religious populations, as well as the culture of the Empire, was of great importance.[159] It seems very likely that contact and integration with the society and culture of the Empire helped to provide some of the necessary groundwork for the Abrahamic descent myth to be developed in new ways.

These hypotheses highlight once more the central importance of the imperial late antique Near Eastern political, cultural, and religious environment to our understanding of early concepts of Arab identity. I do not mean to suggest here that there was no impetus on the part of the Arabs themselves: the variations in the Abrahamic descent story evidenced in the literature show that there were a number of related options available for rebranding and reinterpretation. A glance at two different examples from post-Roman Britain and Saxon England provides a useful, if unusual, comparison. In their respective cultural environments, both Bede and Gildas produced alternative versions of an English and a British past using biblical templates. Whilst Gildas, who preceded Bede by two and half centuries, used a redemptive Jeremiad to cast his own vision of the place of the Britons in the fifth-century British landscape, Bede took up an entirely different option, providing for the English of his own time an Old Testament migration myth which explained their origins, and legitimised their dominant position in England. Neither of these two stories were original to their authors or to the people whom they represented, and, without the catalyst provided by the widespread adoption of Christianity and the conditions provided by the cultural and religious climate of their respective times, they were unlikely to have occurred, or found widespread favour. Yet the originality lay in the appropriation and transmission of those stories as acceptable ways of explaining history. Gildas' emulation of the Old Testament prophetic voice, for example, paralleled that of Salvian, but he chose to deploy it in a different and original way. Indeed, the fact that the visions of the past offered by Bede or Gildas succeeded at all or found any currency—Gildas' *De Excidio* provided part of the critical background to later works

[158] Theod. *HR* 4. 12; Millar, 'Theodosian Empire', 309.

[159] Millar, 'Theodosian Empire', 311–13; id., *Roman Near East*, where this appears as a major theme.

concerned with Old Testament-inspired views of the past—speaks to the native internalisation, appropriation, and general acceptability of the way that the messages of Bede and Gildas were presented, during the period well before and after they were written.[160] From the same perspective, it is also inconceivable that the myth of Abrahamic descent contained within Islam would have been plausible or found general acceptance unless the numerous variations on the myth had been current—not simply as external categories, but as internal ideas—for some time. Although we will probably never know exactly when, or how, it seems that the 'native' idea of an Abrahamic descent for the Arabs was, necessarily, broadly contemporary to the critical period when Arabic started to be written more regularly, when bodies of poetry and stories of battles circulated in oral form, and when the political development of groups of Arabs such as the Jafnids was gaining momentum. In this respect, it is probably not a coincidence that the first papyrus in Arabic, dating to 22/644, 'suit', as Robin points out, 'des règles qui n'ont de sens que dans un système déjà défini avec précision'.[161]

CONCLUSION

In the absence of direct evidence, it is impossible to state with any certainty how the Arabs of Late Antiquity viewed themselves with regard to their ethnic identity. The question of what role language played in creating or reinforcing identities poses especially difficult problems. As a recent article reminds us, 'a shared language, even if it was not considered a sign of ethnic distinction, must have been an important factor,'[162] and so it seems reasonable to assume, at least, that the use of Arabic in general, as well as for the oral tradition,

[160] I have discussed these examples at length in 'Crisis, provincial historiography and identity in sub-Roman Britain', in Digeser and Frakes (eds.), *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, 166–215.

[161] Robin, 'La réforme de l'écriture arabe', 344.

[162] J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, 'The debate about the ethnogenesis of the Germanic tribes', in H. Amirav and B. Romeny (eds.), *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron* (Leuven, 2007) 341–55, at 350.

surely played a role in defining commonality and difference, although, like so much here, we lack the specific evidence to understand exactly how this might have occurred.

The rise of Islam, and the Muslim military conquest of the Near East, provided an opportunity for the relationship between language and identity to develop in new ways, as the evolving society began to look backwards to those cultural aspects, such as the stories embedded in poems and accounts of intertribal warfare, to help provide some of the building material for the formation of their concept of the past. We are not in a position to state with any certainty how such elements were viewed at the time, or what precise role they played in helping to delineate identities. The discussion here has tried, as an alternative way of approaching this difficult problem, to draw attention to the very important fact that some of these elements that helped to express later concepts of Arab identity initially evolved against the political and cultural background of the late antique Near East and the empowerment of Arab elites.

The probable contemporaneity of at least the majority of these diverse aspects—poetry, stories, language, Ishmaelite identities, and so on—lends credibility to what Macdonald has called 'a complex of language and culture'. While Macdonald deliberately leaves the phrase undefined, I understand it to reflect a set of criteria, some of which allowed Arabs to be identified by others, initially, but which also eventually provided a means to identify themselves, in their own way.[163] How far back the existence of this 'complex' can be traced is debatable, but it seems plausible to suggest the time of the Nemāra inscription as a general starting point. It is with Nemāra, after all, that the slow emergence of greater political 'consciousness' within the zone of contact with the Roman Empire becomes more traceable, and it was this emergence that underpinned closer imperial political, religious, and cultural connections. The increased confidence and status of individuals, or representatives of possibly larger groups, using Arabic, especially on monumental inscriptions, offers a glimpse of evolving Arab identities in Late Antiquity. Equally

[163] Macdonald, 'Arabs, Arabias and Arabic', 304 n. 139: 'I leave this term undefined on purpose. Today, «Arab culture» (like any other) is fundamentally undefinable in any strict sense which does not produce a host of exceptions.' Cf. Grunebaum, 'The nature of Arab unity before Islam', 5, contrasting the idea of the 'Kulturnation' against that of the 'Staatsnation'.

importantly, perhaps, it also offers further support for the fundamental role played by the complex and vibrant cultural milieu of the late antique Roman Near East in providing fertile ground for the evolution of some of the elements which helped in the formation of later, Muslim identities.

5

Between Empires: The Jafnids, The Naṣrids, And Late Antiquity[1]

INTRODUCTION

In 575, three years after escaping from the imperial plot against his life, the Jafnid leader al-Mundhir sought a meeting with a Roman patrician, Justinian, to heal the divisions between the Jafnids and Constantinople. Exactly what motivated him is unclear; John of Ephesus suggests that he was angered by the successful expeditions of the Naṣrids, who had burned and pillaged as far as Antioch with little resistance. Driven by pride, perhaps, rather than renewed loyalties, he accepted Justinian's response to his message and the two met peacefully at Reṣāfa outside the shrine of St Sergius. After accepting the repeated denials of imperial complicity in the attempt on his life, al-Mundhir set about making up for his absence with a devastating assault into Mesopotamian territory.[2] The reunion between the Romans and the Jafnids was only temporary, however, and a dangerous political quarrel with the Roman general and future emperor, Maurice, as well as the hardening positions in the dispute between the Chalcedonians and miaphysites, would eventually bring about al-Mundhir's deposition and exile. The fate of the Jafnids was to be paralleled further east, as the Sasanians unceremoniously dismembered the Naṣrid leadership in al-Ḥīrah and replaced their last leader, al-Nuʿmān, with one more closely aligned with Sasanian interests. Michael the Syrian

[1] Aspects of this chapter and the one that follows will appear under the title 'Emperors, politics, and the plague', in C. Robin and D. Genequand (eds.), *Regards croisés de l'histoire et de l'archéologie sur la dynastie Jafnide* (forthcoming).

[2] Joh. Eph. *HE* pp. 282–88 (3.6.3–4).

records the fragmentation at this time of the Arab groups into a number of parts, each under its own chieftain, characteristically blaming the end of the 'Christian *ṭayyāyē*' squarely on the perfidy of the (Chalcedonian) Roman Empire.[3]

By the turn of the seventh century, the state support which had done so much to transform the Jafnids and Naṣrids into contenders in sixth-century politics had evaporated, and their balanced involvement in religious and political matters, as well as their dynamic personal leadership, was also gone. To conclude this study of the place of the Jafnids and Naṣrids within the religious, political, and cultural fabric of the late antique Near East, I will, first, evaluate the causes of the events which overcame them. This is the subject of the present chapter. Afterwards, in the Conclusion, the discussion will reflect on how the exploration of the themes and events in this study contributes to our understanding of the place of groups such as the Jafnids in Late Antiquity, and beyond.

ROME AND THE JAFNIDS AFTER 582

The sources for the last quarter of the sixth century concerning the Jafnids and their supporters are very poor. We are forced to rely on the testimonies of John of Ephesus, as well as the scant reports given by Evagrius, while a few notices in later chronicles and other sources provide some additional structure. One of the particular problems about using John and Evagrius is their personalisation of the political, social, and religious issues which they discuss. As noted in the first chapter, one of John's interests was the elite of the Roman Empire, who, in John's view, derived their power and position partly from tradition and partly from 'rational legality'. This meant that they relied on the Emperor for their positions; and so this idea of inherent vulnerability is also visible in John's portrait of the place of al-Mundhir, especially as someone who was unable to lay credible claim either to tradition or to legality beyond the position of phylarch, and the precedent set with his father, al-Ḥārith.[4] John's explanation for the events of the 580s is problematic, then, but because of the

[3] Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 374–5.
[4] van Ginkel, 'John of Ephesus', 119–22.

scarcity of sources we must use his work as well as that of Evagrius if we are to arrive at even a partial picture of the way in which al-Mundhir was deposed. I will suggest here that, while John and Evagrius indeed do present highly personalised accounts, the importance of strong personal leadership and the typical manner in which Roman leaders conducted client relationships show that personal politics is at least part of the explanation.

For the people under Jafnid leadership we have little information. John of Ephesus records a series of riots or small uprisings which occurred after the arrest of al-Mundhir and which came to a head in a short and violent siege of Bostra. Defeating the Roman force sent against them, after which the terrified inhabitants of the town handed over al-Mundhir's armour and personal property—which the besiegers were demanding—the force loyal to the Jafnids dispersed.[5] The loss of significant parts of John's manuscript is unfortunate, but Michael the Syrian's comment on the 'end' of the Christian Arab allies suggests that, with the dissolution of the Jafnid leadership, the people who had followed them lost a large part of their political cohesion, perhaps with the same type of 'disintegration' experienced by the Goths and Huns as politically cohesive groups after the loss of Alaric and Attila. It is reasonable to assume that different groups of these people went on to offer their allegiance to other leaders or local Roman civic, ecclesiastical, or military authorities,[6] or simply continued with a civilian existence.[7] Some, angered by the Romans, may have decided to court Sasanian favour.[8] Shahid has speculated that in the early seventh century some continued in Roman service under the leadership of one Jabala, who appears in later Arab sources negotiating with the caliph Umar in the 640s,[9] and who may be the same

[5] Joh. Eph. *HE* pp. 176–7 (3.3.41–2).

[6] e.g. Theoph. Sim. *Hist*. 2.10.6, describing Saracen phylarchs on campaign with the Romans in 586, and 8.1.1. on Roman-allied Saracens creating diplomatic problems with the Sasanians at the end of the reign of Maurice.

[7] Bar Hebraeus, *Chron*. pp. 31^{v}–32, enumerating the places, e.g. Emesa, where some of the Arabs previously allied to Rome chose to settle.

[8] As suggested by Shahid, *Sixth Century*, i/1, 543; Nöldeke, *Ghassânischen Fürsten*, 32. The implication in Mich. Syr. *Chron*. p. 375 is that a good part of the Arabs allied to Rome chose to give their loyalties to the Sasanians instead. Bar Hebraeus (n. 7) and Michael also both report the same story, suggesting that Nuʿmān, on a visit to Constantinople, threatened to defect to Iran.

[9] The story is in Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *Al-ʿIqd al-farīd* (Beirut, 1982), discussed by I. Shahid, 'Ghassān post Ghassān', in C. E. Bosworth, C. Issawi, R. Savory, and

figure who appears on a late sixth- or early seventh-century seal, discussed below. Shahid also suggests (using information gleaned from poetry) that after fighting for Heraclius against the Sasanians, and later at the battle of Yarmuk, large numbers of the peoples of Ghassān migrated to Anatolia.[10] There is no evidence for this in archaeological or contemporary literary accounts, but it seems plausible in the wider sense that at least some of those who had fought for the Jafnids and lived close to or within the Roman Empire would have continued that association. Nevertheless, without a strong Roman-allied leadership at their head, the people who had supported al-Mundhir and his son al-Nuʿmān in Syria and parts of north Arabia probably found that the arrival of Islam and new political opportunities offered an appealing range of options in the 630s and afterwards, especially after the implications of the Roman defeat at Yarmuk slowly became apparent.

What happened to the Jafnids? There are a number of possibilities to explain the deposition of al-Mundhir and the diffusion of Jafnid power and authority: the failure of the Jafnids to operate effectively in the top echelon of Roman politics, their role as participants in the ecclesiastical disputes of the sixth century, and the pressures caused by the shifting economic situation in Syria during the same time period were all factors which could have played a part.

In his account, John of Ephesus focuses on court intrigue between al-Mundhir, the future Emperor Maurice, and an official named Magnus in his description of al-Mundhir's last years as the head of the Jafnids. John explains that Maurice, smarting from the failure of the joint expedition with al-Mundhir against Iran, blamed the Jafnid leader for leaking intelligence about their plans to the Iranians. John is clear that he, at least, believed the charges to be unwarranted, but accusations of duplicity were not new for the Jafnids, and the recent history of their relations with Constantinople was not promising. Professional jealousies or fear of an imperial rebuke or demotion surely also encouraged Maurice to make his accusations to Tiberius, and blaming problems on al-Mundhir diverted attention away from

A. L. Udovitch (eds.), *The Islamic World: From Classical to Modern Times. Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis* (Princeton, 1989), 323–36; id., *Sixth Century* i/1, 636–7, 646–8.

[10] Shahid, 'Ghassān post Ghassān', 324–5; id., *Sixth Century*, i/1, 636–7, 644–8. Note the negative comments on the usefulness of poetry for dealing with this particular problem by Nöldeke, *Ghassânischen Fürsten*, 33.

any shortcomings on Maurice's part. More importantly, al-Mundhir was a convenient target. His ascendancy had conferred upon him a degree of power of the sort liable to make him unpopular with the other young, ambitious men who sought and depended on the good favour of the Emperor. His pre-eminence was also unsuitable in the eyes of some for a certain 'type' of barbarian, and the persistence of the desert-dweller nomadic stereotype did not help. Indeed, it would always rob the Arabs of any pretence of urbanity or sophistication in the eyes of their detractors, and the Jafnids were no less short of critics than any of their predecessors, such as Amorkesos. Timely literary comparisons between al-Mundhir and treacherous, cowardly Scythians in the histories of Evagrius show that 'barbarian' was still an expedient label to apply to the Jafnids.[11] At the same time al-Mundhir was not, of course, entirely blameless in the events that overtook him. His occasional double-dealings and independence on the battlefield suggests that Roman commanders had some reason to be wary, and an expectation that the Jafnids might attempt to 'faire en secret le jeu des Perses' may also have been current; suspicion could hardly have been absent from frontier military campaigns, and even if there were not other forms of intrigue, the question over Roman payments to the Lakhmids was enough to ensure a healthy distrust.[12] We know little about al-Mundhir's personality, but the attempt on his life in the 570s was fuelled by a rather haughty demand for gold, and his pretences to independence may have irritated the Emperor and his allies in Constantinople.

Al-Mundhir seems to have made powerful enemies. Magnus, a *curator* and prominent figure at court, also turned against al-Mundhir, choosing, presumably (and not surprisingly) career interests at the centre over friendship with a barbarian.[13] He prepared a trap, to be sprung during the consecration of a church which Magnus had funded. In an alternative version of this story, Magnus asked al-Mundhir to come to see him, claiming fatigue after a long journey, but the outcome

[11] Evag. *HE* 5.20; Theoph. Sim. *Hist*. 3.1 provides similar commentary.

[12] P. Goubert, 'Le problème ghassanide à la veille de l'Islam', in *Actes du VI^e^ congrès international d'études byzantines, Paris, 27 juillet–2 août 1948* (Paris, 1950), 103–18, at 105. See also Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian*, 257–8, who suggests that the events reported in John's account were 'probably invented by al-Mundhir to excuse his treachery', and thinks that he would have willingly accepted bribes to allow Sasanian forces through.

[13] For a detailed description of Magnus' career, see *PLRE* IIIA, s.v. 'Magnus'.

was the same in both cases.[14] Submitting to the force of arms and robbed of his bodyguard, he complained to Magnus that his removal to Constantinople, depriving his army of its leader, would only expose the families and property of his followers to the predatory activities of the Naṣrids and their allies. Predictably, al-Mundhir's pleas went unheeded. Treated like any other client leader who was now no longer of use, he was transported to the capital in ignominy, denied a chance to defend himself before the Emperor, and placed under house arrest alongside his wife and children.[15]

After this one of al-Mundhir's sons, al-Nuʿmān, led an uprising which resulted in considerable looting and damage, including the siege of Bostra mentioned earlier.[16] In response, Tiberius ordered Magnus to install a more cooperative Arab leader to appease the rioters as well as to enable the administration to dispose of the more difficult members of the Jafnids.[17] Tiberius died in 582, and when Maurice assumed the throne, he too acted swiftly to put an end to any further trouble. According to Evagrius (who, sympathetic to the Emperor, claims that Maurice decided to exercise restraint)—al-Mundhir was exiled to Sicily along with his family.[18] Magnus apparently tried to capture al-Nuʿmān through deceit, although it seems that he failed, and with Magnus dead shortly afterwards al-Nuʿmān was able to obtain a tense audience with Maurice in the capital. He was unsuccessful in obtaining clemency for al-Mundhir, though, and later sources report that, after leaving, he was taken captive on the road home.[19] John's work is lost at this point, but surviving chapter headings provide some further clues; chapter 54 of the third book indicates al-Mundhir's exile, and chapter 56, al-Nuʿmān's presence in Constantinople to secure his father's freedom.[20] A Syriac source suggests that al-Mundhir was released from his exile in 602, by which time he may have been in his fifties or even older, but nothing more is heard of either him or his son.[21]

[14] Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 373–4.
[15] Joh. Eph. *HE* 176 (3.3.41).
[16] John's account is partially corroborated by Evag. *HE* 6.2.
[17] Joh. Eph. *HE* 176–8 (3.3.41–3).
[18] Evag. *HE* 6.2; also Joh. Eph. *HE* 181 (3.3.54); see the useful discussion in Shahid, *Sixth Century*, i/1, 532–40. On the positive attitude of Evagrius towards Maurice, see Allen, *Evagrius*, 11–14, 246.
[19] See Bar Hebraeus, *Chron.* 31^{v}–32, and Mich. Syr., *Chron.* 373–4.
[20] Joh. Eph. *HE* 181–2 (3.3.54, 56).
[21] *Chron. 1234* 1.219.

With al-Numān, certainties about the lineage of the Jafnids in the literary sources become unclear. Michael the Syrian records a phylarch named Jafna, acting as a negotiator at Jabiya; the location and the name, as well as the association with St Sergius in the story, strongly suggest a Jafnid connection.[22] There is another occurrence of this name in the *Chronicle to 1234*, which describes one Abū Jafna Numān. Here he is explicitly described as the son of al-Mundhir, leader of the Saracen forces subordinate to the Romans, and resident at Reṣāfa. His role in the story is to act as a go-between for Maurice; because of his name it is tempting to see a conflation with the al-Numān who petitioned Maurice for al-Mundhir's release, but it is also possible that he was a different Jafnid who continued to work with the Romans after 582.[23] Finally, a seal bearing the name 'Jabala', which was the name of al-Ḥārith's father,[24] also suggests that elements of the Jafnid leadership remained active in a diminished way.[25] The seal, with the words *ΓΑΒΑΛΑ* on the obverse and *Π.ΤΡΙΚΙΟΥ* on the reverse, was dated on the basis of palaeographical characteristics to the last third of the sixth century or the first quarter of the seventh, and offers a similar type of 'Romanised' image associated with al-Mundhir and al-Ḥārith.[26] There is no other contemporary evidence for Jabala, who may or may not be the same figure whom Shahid prefers as the leader of the Arab allies of the Romans at Yarmuk. I am inclined to be sceptical about the survival of the Jafnids in any major way, since the moves made against the leadership by Tiberius and Maurice suggest that their prospects were very poor.[27] At the same time, it is reasonable to assume that some of the people who supported al-Mundhir, as well as the Naṣrid al-Nuʿmān, would have continued their association with the erstwhile patrons of their leaders. Certainly the execution of al-Nuʿmān did not bring to a

[22] Mich. Syr. *Chron.* 384; see Shahid, *Sixth Century*, i/1, 554.

[23] *Chron. 1234* 1.215–16.

[24] Theoph. *Chron.* 144.

[25] Cf. Shahid, *Sixth Century*, 540–1, who prefers a 'restoration' of the 'Ghassānid phylarchate' on very flimsy evidence.

[26] I. Shahid, 'Sigillography in the service of history: new light', in C. Sode and S. Takács (eds.), *Novum Millennium: Studies on Byzantine History and Culture. Dedicated to Paul Speck, 19 December, 1999* (Aldershot, 2001), 369–78.

[27] Nöldeke, *Ghassânischen Fürsten*, 33, who sees a time of 'anarchy' after the exile of Mundhir.

permanent end the alliance between the Sasanians and Arab auxiliaries, who appear in the 620s trying to ambush Roman troops.[28]

It is hard to be sure if John's account of the demise of al-Mundhir is accurate, but one point in favour of critically accepting aspects of it is that the deposition and exile of al-Mundhir is typical of the way that the Roman leadership had traditionally approached difficult client leaders. As Isaac notes, 'Romans knew client-kings, *not* client-kingdoms'; Heather's analysis of Roman attitudes towards actual or potential clients in the west shows that a key aspect of client-management practice involved the cultivation of personal relationships; and relations between those in Constantinople and the client kingdoms of the fifth and sixth centuries were often conducted in much the same fashion. The personal nature of such agreements is also consistent with the attitude towards those between Rome and Sasanian Iran, which were inter-ruler, not inter-state, treaties. The most effective way to influence a barbarian people or group, either positively or negatively, was through its leaders, using kidnap, execution, money, titles, or other well-tried and tested means, and the history of the Jafnids' relationship with Rome fits very well into this general framework.[29] The comparative examples of similar centre–periphery/state–tribe relationships from other periods, discussed below, offer some support to this position. Furthermore, the idea of vulnerability inherent in the narrative framework used by John of Ephesus reflects at least part of the reality of the problems and dilemmas of the Jafnids as a group of people who found themselves 'in-between'. The Jafnids used the opportunities offered by the ongoing conflict between the Roman and Sasanian empires to win prestige on the battlefield. As elites, the Jafnids took the opportunity to increase their standing within the Roman Empire through religious politics. Yet the support which they received from the imperial authorities—which enhanced their personal power and wealth and the position of their subordinates—was inherently hazardous. As the power of the Jafnids was strengthened, their dependency on the Empire increased at a proportional

[28] Theoph. *Chron*. 304.

[29] Isaac, *Limits*, 395; Heather, 'Late Roman art', 20–32, on the personal dimension of client management practice; see as well Greatrex, 'Byzantium and the east in the sixth century', 496–7; Millar, *Roman Near East*, 30–1, on Octavian's attitude towards Herod; Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy*, 161–3.

rate. This increasingly leveraged position brought with it an elevated amount of personal and political risk.

From a slightly different perspective, the Jafnids were also undermined by their own success. Arab allies of the fourth and fifth centuries were occasionally useful, and sometimes the objects of punitive policies, but they never offered a serious concern for the Empire. The sixth-century Jafnids presented an inherent military threat, like all sometime-wayward allies; but more importantly, they posed an unsettling conundrum. Not strong enough to seriously challenge the Empire, the Jafnids were quite capable of creating a deep connection to its politics, culture, and religion. These developments left them undesirably far from the periphery, where they belonged in the eyes of those who still saw them as barbarians, and uncomfortably close to the centre. The result was to strand the Jafnids in a vulnerable political no-man's land, for their career aspirations were limited on a practical level by the position of phylarch, which still occupied a middling position between Roman officialdom and the murky status of an auxiliary—even if it had become an accepted part of the Roman administrative hierarchy. That we never see a Jafnid or other recorded phylarch becoming an active *magister militum*, leading an army or achieving other high office, is curious; on the basis of our evidence, the highest title they attained was the largely symbolic *patrikios*, which raised their stature in the (political) community, but did not confer a powerful office with access to the very heart of court politics and favour in Constantinople. This may be a result of ambition, or because the strength of the Empire in the east, relative to its western counterpart, limited or otherwise affected the opportunities available to barbarian leaders.

Whatever the precise cause, I do not think, contrary to the opinions of Shahid, that any of the Jafnids attained the status of a military 'Romanised barbarian' like Silvanus, Mallobaudes, or Stilicho; and as a result, the Jafnids always remained outside what might be termed the administrative mainstream. This left them critically exposed, and the essential weakness of their position was proven when al-Mundhir made the mistake of alienating Maurice. And whilst a Silvanus could draw on a good deal of local support, al-Mundhir could not compete with the imperial networks of favour and patronage in the capital.[30]

[30] Cf. Amm. 15.5.15, on Silvanus.

In contrast, Maurice did not seem to have had much difficulty in convincing the Emperor that his condemnation of al-Mundhir should stand. Al-Mundhir had few reliable allies, with even his 'patron' Magnus turning out to be substantially less honest than he had hoped for. In an Empire where relations with client elites were conducted between individuals, the reconciliation established at Reṣāfa, which seemed so promising at the time, was doomed after the patrician Justinian's death in 577—and, in a piece of remarkably bad luck, it turned out to be Maurice who took over Justinian's duties. After the two fell out over the expedition to the Euphrates, al-Mundhir was easily outmanoeuvred at the imperial court, and it was a simple device which deceived him and sealed his fate.

Political considerations form one part of the possible explanation for what happened to al-Mundhir, but an additional factor is to be found in the shifting religious identities of the late sixth century. Essentially, as the divisions between Chalcedonians and miaphysites solidified, a process which accelerated after the consecration of Jacob Baradaeus, the Jafnids—who were popularly identified with the decision to provide Jacob to the miaphysites—found that their position was becoming less and less flexible. As discussed above, the early fluidity of the situation between the two 'sides' in the sixth century meant that, although the Jafnids were publicly sympathetic to the opponents of Chalcedon, there was not, as yet, a problem. Justinian was more focused on the general Christianisation of the periphery as a means of gaining indirect political control, and it was not too much of an immediate concern if the Axumites, Nubians, or those around the remote conceptual peripheries, such as the desert, did not yet adhere to Chalcedonian orthodoxy. It was more important to draw them into the Roman political orbit, and keep them from alliance with the Sasanians. Through this Justinian could also ensure that Roman financial interests in south Arabia were protected, and keep a watchful eye on the Ḥimyarites.[31]

However, the promising climate of possible reconciliation before the end of the sixth century was slowly eroded as the disputes between Chalcedonians and miaphysites wore on. During the reign of Justin II (565-78), which coincided with the death of al-Ḥārith and the accession of al-Mundhir, the attempts of the Emperor to achieve some kind

[31] van Rompay, 'Society and community', 250–1; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 126–8.

of lasting unity were continually frustrated. Internal disputes suggested that the weakened miaphysites might be reconciled with the Chalcedonians after all, but, especially after the death of Jacob Baradaeus in 578, it became increasingly difficult for the Chalcedonians to find an individual with a credible claim to be the representative of the miaphysites, and with whom they might negotiate. In consequence, being associated with the miaphysites no longer conferred the privilege of involvement with a strong position, but, rather, the embarrassment of being linked to a divided cause. Al-Mundhir's failure to find a solution to the quarrel between those who respectively supported Jacob, Paul, and the Alexandrians—where, in his failure to anticipate the actions of Damian, he again showed his vulnerability in dealing with high-level Roman politics—delivered a crippling blow to his prestige amongst both the Chalcedonians and the miaphysites who probably saw him, with good reason, as their advocate.[32]

The timing of these events was fatal to al-Mundhir, as they corresponded with the increased weakening of his political prestige, which was, in any case, continually hampered by the problem of his physical separation from Constantinople. The status of the Jafnids depended to an alarming degree on the maintenance of a precarious status quo, but, as the situation deteriorated in the late sixth century, the close link between the Jafnids and the divided miaphysite position slowly robbed al-Mundhir of his ability to manoeuvre. Eventually, al-Mundhir's failure to reconcile the Jacobites, Paulites, and Alexandrians as well as his ongoing link to a position increasingly at odds with Constantinople provided an easy justification, if indeed another one was needed, for him to be removed.

Success in the politics of the borderlands between the Romans and the Sasanians depended on a talent for balancing conflicting and competing agendas and demands, and finding a way around the numerous obstacles which these threw up. As I have stressed throughout this study, the Jafnids and the Naṣrids both proved themselves to be adept at managing the competing pressures and requirements which they faced as elites, but it was in the end an unfavourable combination of developments in the religious politics of the Roman Empire, and problems arising from the rapid ascent of the Jafnids, which proved lethal to al-Mundhir and which capped the

[32] van Rompay, 'Society and community', 251–2, 254–5; see as well Allen, 'The definition and enforcement of orthodoxy', 828–34.

possibilities available to those who came after him. The Jafnids lacked the depth of power and experience that would have helped them to deal correctly with the rapidly evolving political realities of the late sixth century; greater skill in both court and ecclesiastical politics, in particular, might have provided the ability to survive. Al-Mundhir does not seem to have had powerful allies, and in John's account of the allegations which Maurice made against him to Tiberius, al-Mundhir is conspicuous by his absence.[33] Both had sent messages to Tiberius stating their positions, but only Maurice followed up his visit in person. Whether this is because Maurice wanted to, or simply because he could—al-Mundhir had only been to the capital for an imperial audience before as an invitee—this is a revealing comment on al-Mundhir's ability to influence the top echelon of the Roman administration.

THE NAṢRIDS AT THE END OF THE SIXTH CENTURY

Political concerns certainly played a role in the fate of the Jafnids, and while we know far less about the way that the Naṣrid dynasty of the Lakhmids was dismantled, there are some striking similarities. The Arabic tradition represented by the stories preserved in al-Ṭabarī (discussed briefly at the beginning of the previous chapter) implies that al-Nuʿmān met his fate because of his treatment of ʿAdī, the famed poet and favourite of the Sasanian king. In the Syriac tradition, an alternative and more plausible story asserts that al-Nuʿmān had refused to come to the aid of Khusrau during this flight from the rebellion of Bahrām, and that this betrayal, not forgotten, led to al-Nuʿmān's imprisonment and death after the King lured him to Ctesiphon under false pretences.[34] It is impossible to be sure which story is the more accurate, but both suggest the extreme vulnerability of al-Nuʿmān's position once the Emperor had decided to move against him. This is not dissimilar to the experience of the Jafnids, and, like the Jafnids, problems with the Naṣrids had apparently been slowly building for some years. Al-Mundhir's receipt of funding from

[33] Joh. Eph. *HE* 174 (3.3.40).
[34] *Chron. Jacob of Edessa*, 20; Rothstein, *Dynastie*, 115–17.

the Romans, which ʿAmr had tried to re-establish, probably sowed distrust between the Naṣrids and Khusrau I in very much the same way as between Rome and the Jafnids. After the death of another al-Mundhir, the successor to ʿAmr (himself the successor to the vigorous al-Mundhir who caused the Romans so much trouble) there seems to have been a dispute over Sasanian recognition of the Naṣrid successor, a quarrel which may have ended with the temporary imposition of a Sasanian governor at al-Ḥīrah.[35] There may also have been other factors. Al-Nuʿmān's reported Christianisation was poor political judgement for one so close to the Sasanian administration, although his decision may have stemmed from misplaced optimism related to any rumours he may have heard, arising from Khusrau's meetings with Domitian of Melitene and Gregory of Antioch.[36] At any rate, it is indicative of the successful policies of his predecessors in avoiding an outright commitment to any religious position that he was the first, and last, Christian Naṣrid leader. On the other hand, the fact that the reported successor to al-Nuʿmān was a Christian member of Taghlib (who nevertheless 'ruled' alongside a Sasanian *marzbān*) suggests that al-Nuʿmān's conversion was not an overwhelmingly significant factor in his demise, and that, like the Jafnids, his execution was the end result of the increasing independence of the Naṣrids throughout the sixth century. Howard-Johnston has plausibly suggested that the Naṣrids were eliminated in preparation for the extension of Sasanian power west, around the desert; in such a case, 'a unitary system of client-management' centred on the Naṣrids was unlikely to be of much use.[37] If this was the case, or even if it was not, the irritation which the activities of the Naṣrids caused to the Sasanians probably had a significant influence on the Sasanian king's decision to dissolve the Naṣrid leadership in al-Ḥīrah.[38]

After the Naṣrids, the Iranians had little control of the desert fringes west and south of al-Ḥīrah, and at some point after 604 their armed forces were dealt a stunning blow at a battle which came to be known in Arabic sources as 'the day of Dhū Qār'.[39]

[35] Al-Ṭabarī i. 1017–18. The story is also discussed in Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 198.

[36] Cf. the discussion in M. Whitby, 'The successors of Justinian', in *CAH* 14, 86–111, at 103.

[37] J. Howard-Johnston, 'Al-Tabari on the last great war of antiquity', in *East Rome, Sasanian Persia, and the End of Antiquity* (Aldershot, 2006), 1–22, at 20–1.

[38] Also the opinion of Bosworth, 'Iran and the Arabs', 607.

[39] Al-Ṭabarī, i. 1016, 1032.

Bosworth considers that the Arabs of the southern desert 'scented weakness',[40] and in hindsight it is straightforward to suggest that removing the Naṣrids left the route clear for the Muslim armies a generation later. Did the Romans and Sasanians make a mistake in disrupting the fortunes of their Arab clients? The failure of the much-better equipped and manned Sasanian and Roman armies to deal adequately with the Muslim military threat suggests that they did not, and that neither the Jafnids nor the Naṣrids and their allies could have posed a meaningful obstacle to the seventh-century conquests. Instead, the removal of the top level of Arab client leadership was, at the time, simply a matter of expediency for two empires that had far more significant concerns than the well-being of their Arab clients.

THE ECONOMY AND THE JUSTINIANIC PLAGUE

I have emphasised the political influences on the affairs of the Jafnids and Naṣrids here, but it is also worth considering the potential impact on their activities of the decline which seems to have been experienced by some parts of the Near East in the second half of the sixth century. The most vigorous proponents of the 'decline thesis', most notably Kennedy, oppose the vitality of distinctive strands of continuity in economic, political, religious, or social and cultural life between the sixth and seventh centuries (of which more will be said in the Conclusion), focusing instead on patterns of change during this period. Certainly, the sixth-century Roman world was hardly static, and the decline which some authors point to was not universal, and may have been taking place alongside any possible continued growth during the same period. The crux of the debate is thus concerned with the finer points about what might have caused any changes, in which parts of the Empire they might have occurred, and why, and how severe or far-reaching such changes might have been. Kennedy has recently restated and reinforced opinions first aired in two key articles, pointing to several causal factors in support of his thesis of a

[40] Bosworth, 'Iran and the Arabs', 608; this is the opinion too of J. Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia: From 550 BC to 650 AD*, trans. A. Azodi (London, 1996), 196.

marked socioeconomic and material slowdown during the mid-sixth century. Such factors include endemic warfare, famine, forced population movement (a consequence of war), and recurring episodes of the bubonic plague, which had broken out in Egypt in 541.[41] In common with Kennedy, Liebeschuetz and others have also invoked the plague as a key cause of decline.[42] In support, these authors look to the ancient historical sources, such as Evagrius, Procopius, or the second book of John of Ephesus' *History*, preserved in the later *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, which often describe mass mortality, human misery, and farms and animals left unattended owing to the deaths of farmers and farm workers.[43] Conrad, too, has suggested that the effects of the plague were widespread and were a contributing factor to the ease of the seventh-century Muslim invasions, and thus an integral component of long-term change in the region.[44] Finally, proponents of the decline thesis are not, of course, confined to the Near East.[45]

The debate continues, however, over the nature of any decline, the severity of the plague, and the difficulties involved in accurately

[41] H. Kennedy, 'Justinianic plague in Syria and the archaeological evidence', in L. K. Little (ed.), *Plague and the End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541–750* (Cambridge, 2007), 87–98, arguing against the more optimistic view of Foss, 'Syria in transition', 259–60, and restating the decline thesis first aired in H. Kennedy, 'From *polis* to *madina*: urban change in late antique and Early Islamic Syria', *Past and Present*, 106 (1985), 3–27, as well as id., 'The last century of Byzantine Syria: a reinterpretation', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 10 (1985), 141–84; recently, M. Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians. Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Göttingen, 2003), 325–41, 423–6, has also taken a 'catastrophist' line, emphasising the impact of the plague.

[42] J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford, 2001), esp. 52–4, 409–10; H. Kennedy and Liebeschuetz, 'Antioch and the villages of northern Syria in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D.: trends and problems', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 32 (1988), 65–90, esp. 90 n. 144. See the collected articles in Little (ed.), *Plague and the End of Antiquity*, as well as the recent work of D. Ch. Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire* (Aldershot, 2004), esp. 140–54.

[43] e.g. Evag. *HE* 4.29, Proc. *BP* 2.22.1–39. For the second book of John of Ephesus' *HE* see the third part of the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn* (= *Chronicle of Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē*). Citations here are to Chabot's edition. Parts 3 and 4 have also recently been translated as *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn, Parts III and IV, A.D. 448–775* (trans. with notes and introduction by A. Harrak) (Toronto, 1999), and critically assessed by Witakowski, *The Syriac Chronicle of Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Maḥrē*.

[44] L. Conrad, 'The plague in Bilād al-Shām in pre-Islamic times', in M. A. Bakhit and M. Asfour (eds.), *Proceedings of the Symposium on Bilād al-Shām during the Byzantine Period, Muharram 9–13 1040. A.H./November 15–19 1983*, 2 vols (Amman, 1986), ii. 143–63, at 156–7.

[45] e.g. B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford, 2005), for a recent strong statement.

assessing the ancient source material. It is not clear, for example, to what extent the effects of the plague are exaggerated in the ancient literary sources. Durliat has suggested that they are of limited value, partly because of the sensationalism attached to descriptions of such events, but Sarris has plausibly suggested that the non-literary sources provide some corroboration, and argues that scholars have been overly sceptical in their approach to contemporary testimony of the effects of the plague.[46] The archaeological data also provide major interpretative challenges. Kennedy's recent discussion of the perceived correlation between the archaeological and non-archaeological data for slowdown clearly shows how the interpretation of such data can lead to quite different conclusions; and Ward-Perkins and Sartre have shown the difficulty of extrapolating a linear relationship between building inscriptions and population levels, meaning that the absence of such inscriptions does not necessarily mean a drop in population.[47] Finally, both Howard-Johnston and Whitby have convincingly argued (against Conrad) that the plague did not exercise a significant pressure on army recruitment, and so was not a material cause in the defeat of the Roman armies in the seventh century. This implies that population decline or a drop in economic activity related to a devastating event, such as the plague, cannot necessarily be cited as a major cause of the 'end' of Roman Late Antiquity, itself a concept which favours a distinctly catastrophist perspective.[48]

There is therefore no consensus, and the debate will continue. It is, however, important to note that the two positions are not necessarily

[46] J. Durliat, 'La peste du VI^{e} siècle, pour un nouvel examen des sources byzantines', in C. Abadie-Reynal (ed.), *Hommes et richessess dans l'Empire byzantin*, i. (Paris, 1989), 107–19; P. Sarris, 'The Justinianic plague: origins and effects', *Continuity and Change*, 17/2 (2002), 169–82.

[47] Kennedy, 'Justinianic plague in Syria and the archaeological evidence', 87–98; B. Ward-Perkins, 'Land, labour and settlement', in *CAH* 14, 315–45, at 324; M. Sartre, 'Le peuplement et le développement du Ḥawrān antique à la lumière des inscriptions grecques et latines', in Dentzer (ed.), *Hauran I*, 189–202, at 196.

[48] J. Howard-Johnston, 'Pride and fall: Khusro II and his regime, 626–628', in G. Gnoli (ed.), *La Persia e Bisanzio (Atti dei Convegni Lincei 2001)* (Rome, 2004), 93–113, at 98, arguing that the Romans could still muster a significant force under Heraclius, suggesting military resources were not weakened sufficiently to prevent the campaigns of the seventh century: M. Whitby, 'Recruitment in Roman armies from Justinian to Heraclius', in Cameron (ed.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, iii. 61–124, who, while accepting that recruitment was probably affected, suggests, at 122, that 'the Arabs took over territory by energetic conquest, not by default on the part of their opponents.'

mutually exclusive. For example, Whittow's argument (broadly contra Kennedy) that the drop in the prominence of the *curiales* in the Roman cities in Late Antiquity masked a continued and underlying prosperity reflects the fact that continuities could themselves be embedded in processes of change.[49] It will remain difficult to apply a single continuist or catastrophist paradigm to the Near East in the mid-sixth century.

The Jafnids are rarely integrated into the framework of this debate, but it is hard to imagine that any economic decline in the parts of the Empire where they were most active would not have had some kind of effect on their fortunes. Most recently, Zvi Maʿoz has conjectured on very flimsy grounds that a decline in manpower, resulting from the plague, affected the military power of 'Ghassān' and led to the cancellation of the agreement between the Jafnids and the Emperor.[50] Certainly the association of the Jafnids with rural areas did not, probably, give them much protection from the plague,[51] and Conrad notes references to fear of the pestilence in the poems of the *jahiliyya* poet Thābit, whose writings (in Conrad's view) reflect attacks of the plague on the Golan and the Ḥaurān, populous rural areas associated with the Jafnids. Maʿoz supports Conrad's interpretation, but it must be stressed that there is no other reliable contemporary source, and Conrad himself admits that there are unavoidable problems in relying on Thābit's poetry.[52]

The material evidence does not provide much help either because, while there is fairly ample archaeological information for the coastal areas of the Mediterranean and the towns and villages of northern Syria, which can aid in rebuilding a picture of the state of the economy during the second half of the sixth century, the data

[49] M. Whittow, 'Ruling the Late Roman and Early Byzantine city: a continuous history', *Past and Present*, 129 (1990), 3–29.

[50] Z. U. Maʿoz, *The Ghassānids and the Fall of the Golan Synagogues* (Qazrin, 2008), 45–6, 83. Maʿoz's argument is that the plague severely weakened Ghassān, for which there is no evidence at all.

[51] See dramatically Joh. Eph. *HE* II = *Chron. Zuq*. 87, 88, 92, 95, on the devastation of rural areas, as well as Joh. Eph. *Vitae* (*PO* 17, 261). See too L. K. Little, 'Life and afterlife of the first plague pandemic', in *Plague and the End of Antiquity*, 3–32, at 24–5; Conrad, 'The plague in Bilād al-Shām', 151.

[52] Maʿoz, *The Ghassānids*, 81–2; L. Conrad, 'Epidemic disease in central Syria in the late sixth century: some new insights from the verse of Hassan ibn Thābit', *BMGS*, 18 (1994), 12–58, esp. 15 (source problems) and 29, 52, 54–5.

for the Ḥaurān and southern Syria are incomplete and inconsistent.[53] For example, dated building inscriptions in Bostra came to an end after the 540s, suggesting a decline in prosperity in the Ḥaurān, but in the countryside there was an upsurge in the dedication of churches.[54] The increase in church dedications might be connected to a post-epidemic population recovery, or might equally reflect a continuation in local prosperity, which may have nothing to do with the effects of the plague or any decline in the rest of Syria.[55] Sartre concedes that the drop in building activities in Bostra might even be the simple result of the sheer number of buildings erected in the decades beforehand, with the end of new buildings dated by inscription in the city thus providing a misleading picture, prompting us to look for a catastrophic explanation where none may in fact exist.[56] Complicating the picture is the evidence from two sites in the Ḥaurān, Rihab, where mosaics were laid down in the late sixth century, and Sammā', where Foss notes a building inscription dated to 624. It would be overly bold to suggest that these isolated activities constitute proof for normal building activities continuing into the seventh century, although they do at least show that not all activity had ceased.[57] The difficulty of course lies in correctly explaining these data, and there is no compelling evidence either for or against a socioeconomic slowdown in the Ḥaurān in its entirety. Magness's recent work on southern Palestine, where she specifically responds to Kennedy's catastrophe thesis, makes a compelling argument for economic and demographic vibrancy in some parts of the area, and certainly suggests that a picture of universal decline should not be accepted.[58]

[53] For what very little can be suggested, see Villeneuve, 'L'économie rurale', 128–9, who suggests that at some point changes were under way which saw the establishment of small, poor villages and monasteries, and what he vaguely calls 'le retour en force des nomades'.

[54] M. Sartre, *Bostra: Des origins à l'Islam* (Paris, 1985), 135–9.

[55] Kennedy, 'Justinianic plague in Syria', 95; Sartre, 'Le peuplement', 197, who notes, 'la floraison d'églises que l'on observe tout à coup une dizaine d'années après la peste prouve que la prospérité est revenue et que l'importance de la population n'est pas sérieusement diminuée.' See too R. Cormack, 'The visual arts', *CAH* 14, 884–917, at 912, noting that events such as plague outbreaks can provide an impetus for acts of private patronage like church endowments.

[56] Sartre, *Bostra*, 127–8.

[57] Foss, 'Syria in transition', 252–4; cf. Sartre, *Bostra*, 138.

[58] J. Magness, *The Archaeology of the Early Islamic Settlement in Palestine* (Winona Lake, Ind., 2003), 195–214.

We can therefore only speculate about the effect of any of this on elites like the Jafnids and their supporters. On the strength of the literary sources, though, it is noteworthy that al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir maintained their leadership during this period, and lived through the numerous visitations of the plague, as did al-Mundhir's son, al-Nuʿmān. There were enough of the people led by the Jafnids to lay siege to Bostra under the direction of al-Nuʿmān in the 580s. It is also interesting to note that in his description of this event John specifically describes what they plundered: among the usual gold and silver booty, they took cotton, corn, wine, oil, troops of baggage animals, flocks of sheep, goats, and oxen. He also writes that they extracted plunder from the regions nearby.[59] John felt great indignation at what happened to al-Mundhir, and some exaggeration in this part of his work is to be expected; but any exaggeration is likely to be in the numbers, and not the objects, and it is significant that the majority of the items plundered were animal and agricultural products which were taken from people, not found wandering around untended or growing idly in the fields.[60] Of course, the attack on Bostra and the plundering of food and animals may have happened during a period of recovery from any decline, and until the Sasanian invasions of the seventh century, southern Syria does not seem to have been affected as directly by the wars between the two empires, in some contrast to the north. In short, there is no way of knowing if the prosperity reflected by John's description of the revolt is the result of continued prosperity in the face of decline elsewhere, or a short-term recovery from any impact of the plague—or, indeed, any other factor.

On the other hand, even if the plague failed to claim the senior Jafnid leadership or affect their ability to pursue their activities, it is possible that their income might have been affected. If imperial revenues were down, either as a result of the impact of the plague on the agricultural tax base or because of other reasons, such as the ongoing war with Iran, it is possible that the stipends in kind supporting the Jafnids, such as the corn subsidy, were affected. Certainly the disruption of the corn subsidy is given as a point of contention in

[59] Joh. Eph. *HE* 176 (3.3.42).

[60] Note that Maʿoz, *The Ghassānids*, 83, argues that the 'grain barns' of southern Syria were empty, since John of Ephesus does not say that they raided the region of Nuqraʾ, which Maʿoz considers critical. John is, however, quite clear that not only did they seize agricultural products, but also that they raided far afield in Arabia and Syria.

al-Nuʿmān's revolt at Bostra, but all the indications are that this was because of the Emperor's anger towards the Jafnids.[61] It is also difficult to imagine that the Jafnids had not cultivated other sources of income—these may have been agricultural (tax in kind), liable of course to a depletion in manpower, or they may have been based on plundering other groups or from any trade activities in which they were involved. All this is, however, purely speculation, and there is no evidence for the claims made by Maʿoz that revenues from taxing or guarding camel caravans fell as a general result of population depletion and a concomitant agricultural slowdown, or that the Jafnids did not have the ability to trade for oil, grain and other material goods after imperial stipends ended or were reduced with the removal of al-Mundhir.[62] I also cannot agree with Maʿoz's argument that a decline in manpower caused the fall of the Jafnids, because there is no evidence that they were 'replaced' with anyone else. On the contrary, it appears as if the imperial leadership in Constantinople considered southern Syria and Jordan to be of low military priority, with archaeological evidence demonstrating that the majority of the forts between Bostra and ʿAqaba were peacefully abandoned in the early to mid-fifth century.[63] There is no evidence that strategic concerns were on the mind of Tiberius or Maurice when they decided to move against al-Mundhir and his family.

While there is no evidence for the Jafnids being affected by any of the possible causes discussed above, there is some tentative evidence against any argument which suggests that the Jafnids were undone by economic factors. Indeed, that they were not completely affected by any economic slowdown in the second half of the sixth century is borne out by the fact that it was precisely in this period that almost all of the monuments built by or connected to the Jafnids appear. Al-Mundhir's building at Reṣāfa obviously belongs to his reign, and it was during this period that the house of Flavios Seos at al-Ḥayyat was built (578), which acknowledges al-Mundhir in its inscription. The inscriptions at Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī acknowledging al-Ḥārith also date to this period (568/9). The tower near Damascus at al-Burj was the work of al-Mundhir, who did not begin his tenure as Jafnid leader before 569. The fact that these are all dated close to each other may be

[61] Joh. Eph. *HE* 176–7 (3.3.42).
[62] Maʿoz, *The Ghassānids*, 43–5, 83–4.
[63] For this, see Fisher, 'A new perspective on Rome's desert frontier', 49–60.

the result of a number of factors, such as the consolidated political position of the Jafnids by this point, a post-plague recovery, or others, but the establishment of these structures is also consistent with the relative upsurge of church dedication in some parts of the Ḥaurān with which (as far as we can tell) the Jafnids were not associated.[64] The activity of the Jafnids during this period strongly suggests that they, as well as those dedicating the churches, were weathering any adverse economic conditions which were perhaps responsible for the decline in some parts of the Near East.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while it cannot be ruled out that an economic slowdown or the recurring attacks of the plague may have had a broad effect on the culture, economy, and society of the Near East in the sixth century, and while attacks of the plague most likely affected the people living in or either side of the frontier regions of the Roman Empire, including, perhaps, the people commonly referred to as Ghassān, there is no compelling evidence that any of these factors played a significant role in the removal and exile of al-Mundhir. As a result, I would conclude that the most likely causes for the arrest and exile of al-Mundhir, and the deposition of the Jafnids, are to be found in the shifting politics and ecclesiastical disputes of the latter half of the sixth century.

[64] Cf. Sartre, *Bostra*, 137–8.

6

The Jafnids and History in East and West

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this study, I have suggested that an important aspect of the Jafnids was that they belonged to two related but conceptually separate worlds. They were Christian allies of a Christian Empire. They commemorated themselves in the style of contemporary elites, mediated in ecclesiastical disputes, and enjoyed a personal relationship with the highest levels of the imperial court. At the same time, they had apparently entered the Roman Empire partly on their own terms, and maintained, from places like Reṣāfa or the southern Ḥaurān, a distinct connection to the barren world of the *jazira*, 'the island', which lay beyond the villages, cities, churches, and dry-farming regions of the Empire in the remote deserts between Syria and Iraq and south into the deserts of the Ḥijāz. In the sixth century, this remained a remote space, the literary preserve, at least, of the 'nomadic' Arabs who could still emerge to disrupt the civilised fabric of an ordered, Christian world.

THE JAFNIDS AND HISTORY IN EAST AND WEST

It is the existence of the Jafnids 'in-between' which frames a part of their significance to the broader historical processes that are a background element to this study, for in the history of the relations between states and tribes in the Near East, the experiences of the Jafnids strike a familiar note.[1] At the close of Chapter 3 I noted the

[1] Cf. Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids', 222.

similarities between facets of the Rome–Jafnid and Sasanian–Naṣrid relationships and those of the ways in which the twentieth-century Iranian government dealt with the tribal office of Sardar. The Sardar, whose office was not dissimilar to that of phylarch, was dependent on the government for much of his position, and was the main point of contact for Iranian officials; in turn, he exploited the opportunities available to him from state patronage, and passed the benefits on to those under his leadership.[2] The constant need for balance between the two worlds which the Sardar linked is echoed by the Jafnids' use of places like Reṣāfa, whose location favoured contact with the more mobile members of those under their control, as well as others whom the Jafnids might hope to win over. Here they might also meet and influence pilgrims at the shrine of St Sergius, and remain in touch with the flows of information or trade that passed through this relatively remote location. The efforts of the nineteenth-century Rashīdī family to remain connected to an important power base, the Shammar tribe, by camping with them for a few months every year—before returning to their base at Haïl—offer a clear parallel.[3] Sites like Reṣāfa also indicate another important facet of the state–tribe relationship, which is the method by which tribal leaders drew legitimacy from their association with cultural or political symbols of state power. When al-Mundhir was deposed, he forfeited his position of *patrikios* and surrendered his right to demonstrate his tangible and powerful link to St Sergius at Reṣāfa. This is another reason why the political elimination of tribal leadership had such far-reaching effects, since the removal of such symbols, or the severance of the link to state political or cultural legitimacy, had an immediate and dramatic effect on the ability of leaders like al-Mundhir to maintain their position.[4]

[2] Salzman, 'Tribal chiefs as middlemen', 207–9; see too Beck, 'Tribes and the state in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Iran', 215, 218.

[3] Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids', 221; al-Rasheed, 'The process of chiefdom-formation', 33–4; cf. U. Fabietti, 'Lords of the desert, lords of the frontier: nomadic pastoralism and political centralisation in Arabia and Baluchistan', in Fabietti and Salzman (eds.), *The Anthropology of Tribal and Peasant Pastoral Societies*, 415–25, at 417, describing (in reference to situations in Arabia and Baluchistan) the tribal sheikh as 'the axis around which rotated the interests of the two [i.e. nomadic and settled] communities'.

[4] See S. C. Caton, 'Anthropological theories of tribe and state formation in the Middle East: ideology and the semiotics of power', in Khoury and Kostiner (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, 74–108, at esp. 99–103.

It is certainly useful to set the situations of the sixth century against the attitudes of more modern states and empires towards their own tribal clients. During the Mandate, for example, the French provided million-franc subsidies to influential bedouin leaders, and even made a chief of a certain tribe a *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur*, a title, like *patrikios*, with powerful symbolic applications. At the same time, they encouraged minor divisions between bedouin leaders, and played individuals off against each other, in order to prevent them from forming more powerful groups.[5] Later in Saʿudi Arabia ʿAbd al-Aziz was faced with the problem of how to manage the tribes on whom much of his power depended. His solution was to create strong personal relationships with tribal leaders, and enrol their supporters in the army. Intermarriage between the leadership and the prominent families of the bedouin lineages solidified these relationships further.[6]

One of the most interesting comparative examples is provided by the actions of the Ottomans against the Rwala bedouin of Jordan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Ottomans followed the familiar tactics of using titles, honours, and money.[7] Especially interesting, however, is the approach which the Ottoman authorities took to wayward sheikhs whom they deemed to have strayed across the line. At the end of the nineteenth century, for example, the heads of the Shaʿlān lineage of the Rwala found themselves in a delicate position between the pressures of the Ottoman government and the demands of their own people. Like the Rashīdīs, who had entered into similar agreements with the Egyptians under Muḥammad ʿAlī at the end of the eighteenth century, Sheikh Sattam al-Shaʿlān, leader of the Rwala from 1877 to 1901, had initially embarked on a policy of limited cooperation with the Ottoman Empire. He helped the Ottoman forces keep order, and, in return, received troops to reinforce his position when he needed it. Sattam was invited to Istanbul at the behest of Sultan Abdul-Hamid II in 1892, where he was decorated, and given the title of *pasha* with which he could demonstrate to his followers that he had the ear and the

[5] C. Velud, 'French Mandate policy in the Syrian steppe', in Mundy and Musallam (eds.), *The Transformation of Nomadic Society*, 63–81, at 66–7.

[6] T. Niblock, 'Social structure and the development of the Saʿudi Arabian political system', in *State, Society and Economy in Saʿudi Arabia* (London, 1982), 75–105, at 90. Cf. too the use of intermarriage, e.g. between the *magister militum* Victor and the daughter of the Arab leader Mavia.

[7] Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids', 219–21.

support of the Ottoman leadership.[8] Even so, the Rwala were always at the mercy of the Ottomans, and, in 1897, when the bedouin became desperate for water for their camels and began to encroach upon the agricultural lands of the Empire, they found themselves susceptible to imperial sanction. Called to discuss the crisis, Sattam al-Shaʿlān found out that he was going to be arrested at the meeting (which had been secretly set up for precisely that purpose) and taken to Damascus. Sattam escaped on this occasion, but, some time later, Nuri al-Shaʿlān, leader of the Rwala in 1910, fell out with a senior military commander, Sami Pasha. During negotiations to solve the problem, Nuri was apprehended through deceit and subsequently languished for two years in an Ottoman prison cell in Damascus.[9]

These are just a few comparative examples, but it is clear that the experience of the Jafnids and their contemporaries was by no means unique in the wider history of the region, either before or after the coming of Islam. Temporarily useful, these types of frontier allies could appear as integrated parts of the apparatus of the state, or oddly separate at other times; excluded and arrested when distrust became too great, rewarded with titles and funding when they were most useful.[10]

What also emerges from comparisons is, as I have stressed, the similarities between the positions of tribal leaders in other periods and those in the late antique period. Strong dynastic leaders were, to some extent, creations of the state whose maintenance of them encouraged the growth and survival of the larger groups which they controlled.[11] There are a number of stories about the forceful character of individual bedouin leaders, but we know very little about the personalities of al-Ḥārith or al-Mundhir. Procopius' portrait of the Naṣrid al-Mundhir, as an energetic, vigorous, and formidable man, capable of swift and violent action, is one of the very few indications of the prowess and character of these types of highly effective leaders, but is affected by barbarian/nomad stereotypes. This portrait is

[8] N. Lewis, 'The Syrian steppe during the last century of Ottoman rule: Hauran and the Palmyrena', in Mundy and Musallam (eds.), *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East*, 33–43, at 37; for the Rashīdīs: al-Rasheed, 'The process of chiefdom-formation', 37–8.

[9] Lewis, 'The Syrian steppe during the last century of Ottoman rule', 37–9.

[10] Cf. Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids', 222; Beck, 'Tribes and the state in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Iran', 214.

[11] A. Hourani, 'Conclusion: tribes and states in Islamic history', in Khoury and Kostiner (eds.), *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, 303–12, at 305.

nevertheless entirely consistent with the fact that strength of character was a very important aspect of tribal leadership in other periods, and loyalty to those who had proven themselves to be successful and powerful was an important form of political glue which kept larger groups together.[12] Other more abstract or ideological forces could help to unite or combine, but it was a formidable warrior lineage, whose success drew others towards it, that initially underpinned the formation of the Ottoman Empire through the Osmanli dynasty, and which also characterised the success of inner Asian confederations such as the Uzbeks and Kazakhs. Such leadership could be very unstable, since it was very dependent on personal attributes and susceptible to challenge from those both within and without.[13] Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the importance of the type of character of an Alaric or an Attila in underpinning the ability of the Jafnids to sustain just three leaders over eighty-five years of nearly constant warfare, as well as numerous political and cultural challenges within the context of their relationship with the Roman Empire.

The experience of the Jafnids is also relevant, as I have noted throughout, in terms of the characteristic personal relationships which were maintained between barbarian elites and the court, emblematic of the ways that the Romans typically did business with barbarian and client leaders, and also through the consequences of these relationships as they developed, through the extension and appropriation of, and responses to, Roman cultural and political power.[14] The effects of such interaction with the Empire are of course most dramatically demonstrated by the transformation of the western barbarian groups into the heirs of the Roman Empire. Other contexts are also relevant: the numerous histories of uneven power relationships in the colonial borderlands of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries tend to highlight similar concerns and processes, and such studies serve to continually reinforce the relevance of taking

[12] See usefully Lancaster and Lancaster, 'Concepts of leadership in bedouin society', esp. 35, 44–59.

[13] On these points, Lapidus, 'Tribes and state formation in Islamic history', 33–4.

[14] e.g. Ch. 5 n. 29, also, the Tzani, Lazi, Axumites, as well as the way that Roman leaders did business with both eastern and western clients. See for individual specific examples as well Isaac, *Limits*, 119 (position of clients); Heather, 'Goths and Romans', 316, and Lenski, *Failure of Empire*, 146–7 (political growth as a result of sustained military pressure); Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops*, 50 (Christianisation); and see generally the discussions in Ch. 3.

a macrohistorical view and situating the Jafnids within wider historical contexts, especially those which explore the dynamics of uneven centre–periphery relationships and the cultural and political changes which often resulted from close interaction with a state or an empire. Despite appearances, these relationships were not completely one-sided, even if their outcomes were seldom favourable to the smaller, less powerful group.[15] Such encounters and relationships are not confined to any one particular historical period, as the experiences of the Jafnids and Naṣrids show.

Finally, the balance provided by such wider historical contexts holds one more level of interest. There is an inevitable temptation to analyse the pre-Islamic Arabs from the perspective of the events of the seventh century, because the Arabs, during that period and afterwards, transformed the political, cultural, and religious map of the Byzantine Near East. Yet to do so is to inject a specific set of concerns into the analysis, and it is equally important to remember that, to the Romans, the leaders of the Jafnids, like the leaders of the Tzani, Goths, Franks, Lazi, or Axumites—all peripheral peoples susceptible to Christianisation and direct or indirect political control—were for much of the fifth and sixth centuries simply another set of allies, or possible enemies, whose continued existence was often at the whim of the Empire and whose elimination was a perpetual possibility.[16] From the perspective of the leaders in Constantinople, such groups were useful but equally vulnerable, at the same time, to the punitive measures of the Empire when those relationships turned sour.

LATE ANTIQUITY AND AFTER

'The Islamic Empire was implicit in late antiquity, but nothing quite like it had ever been seen before.'[17] Fowden's comment reflects the

[15] Especially the excellent work of White, *The Middle Ground*; Radding, *Wandering Peoples*; L. M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth. Nahua–Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson, Ariz., 1989); Weber, *Spanish Frontier*. These works (and others like them) stress the dialogue between empire/state and tribe, emphasising how native groups were able to adapt to political, cultural, and religious pressures in very similar ways to those described here.

[16] Cf. Heather, 'Late Roman art', 56.

[17] Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 138.

inchoate nature of much that characterised the early Islamic Near East, which developed anew many of the dynamic social, cultural, political, and religious trends of the sixth and seventh centuries. While much was remade, not everything definitively continued or changed as a result of the Muslim conquests; taking into account the various arguments for decline, continuity, catastrophe and change, it is appropriate to approach the world of the seventh and eighth centuries as one where some traditions persisted, some declined, and some were adapted in new directions, building on trends that were sometimes, but not always, already under way in the Roman world of the sixth century.[18] It is important to keep in mind that even the most apparent changes frequently conceal more complex situations, as Schick has shown in his analysis of the decline in fortunes of the Christian population in Palestine, which was a result, he suggests, not of the most obvious ideological causes but of deeper social and political changes.[19] Similarly, while there may have been population decline in Palestine, demographic changes could also be localised and in some areas the population seems actually to have increased after (or in spite of) the Islamic conquest.[20]

Within this complex picture, many familiar aspects of life would carry on, as Walmsley has shown for the persistence of local ceramic

[18] On questions of periodisation, continuity, and change, see most recently three articles in the inaugural edition of the *JLA*, 1/1 (2008), which cover the problem in detail: C. Ando, 'Decline, fall, and transformation', 31–60; A. Marcone, 'A long Late Antiquity? Considerations on a controversial periodization', 4–19; and E. James, 'The rise and function of the concept "Late Antiquity"', 20–30. See too essays in Bowersock et al. (eds.), *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, esp. H. Kennedy, 'Islam', 219–37, and Averil Cameron, 'Remaking the past', 1–20; Donner, 'The background to Islam'; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*; Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, and *The World of Late Antiquity*. See also usefully H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (2nd edn., London, 2004), 14–16: 'it [the Muslim conquest] entered an already changing world and shaped and accelerated some of the existing trends.'

[19] Schick, *The Christian Communities*, esp. 220–4. See too Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 116–19; A. Shboul, 'Christians and Muslims in Syria and Upper Mesopotamia in the early Arab Islamic period: cultural change and continuity', in L. Olson (ed.), *Religious Change, Conversion and Culture* (Sydney, 1996), 74–92, at 75–7.

[20] A. Walmsley, 'The village ascendant in Byzantine and early Islamic Jordan: socio-economic forces and cultural responses', in J. Lefort, C. Morrisson, and J.-P. Sodini (eds.), *Les villages dans l'Empire byzantin (IV^e^– XV^e^ siècle)* (Paris, 2005), 511–22, at 511.

forms,[21] and as we can see with the way that local city elites and rulers, accustomed to running the bureaucracy, continued in large part to do so as part of the Umayyad administration.[22] Umayyad coinage initially imitated or copied the issues produced by Roman and Sasanian mints, before it eventually abandoned imperial imagery and developed identities of its own.[23] Whitcomb argues that the *amṣār*, Muslim military camps, developed partially out of the plans of the cities and Roman fortresses of the Near East.[24] The Umayyad mosque in Damascus appropriated the holy powers of its predecessors but, at the same time, used and advanced local Roman building practices.[25] The rich mosaics used to decorate the mosque's façade find parallels in the exquisite examples at the church of St Stephen at Umm al-Resas, produced in the early eighth century; the 'map' of cities around the borders of the mosaic, labelled in Greek, suggests that a Roman of the sixth century would not have found the cultural vocabulary of the mosaics too difficult to recognise.[26] Such continuities were rarely inert, and synthesis and innovation were an integral part of these persisting trends.[27] So even if its cultural appearance was

[21] A. Walmsley, 'Tradition, innovation, and imitation in the material culture of Islamic Jordan: the first four centuries', in M. Zaghloul and K. 'Amr (eds.), *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, v. (Amman, 1995), 657–68, at 668.

[22] Cf. C. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest: The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge, 2000), 90; W. Liebeschuetz, 'Late late antiquity (6th and 7th centuries) in the cities of the Roman Near East', *Mediterraneo Antico*, 3/1 (2000), 43–75, at 67–71.

[23] M. L. Bates, 'The coinage of Syria under the Umayyads, 692–750 AD', in M. A. Bakhit and R. Schick (eds.), *The Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilād al-Shām during the Umayyad Period. Proceedings of the Third Symposium, 2–7 Rabīʿ I 1408 A.H./24–29 October 1987*, 2 vols (Amman, 1989), ii. 195–228.

[24] D. Whitcomb, 'The Miṣr of Ayla: new evidence for the early Islamic city', in Zaghloul and 'Amr (eds.), *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, v. 277–88, at 287.

[25] Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 116–18. The Dome of the Rock reused Roman architectural forms and the persistence of artistic convention is revealed in its mosaics; on this see S. S. Blair, 'What is the date of the Dome of the Rock?', in J. Raby and J. Johns (eds.), *Bayt al-Maqdis. 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1992, 1999), i. 59–87; as well, K. A. C. Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture* (Harmondsworth, 1958), 38.

[26] Bowersock, *Mosaics as History*, 65–7; for the mosaics at Umm al-Rasas, see too S. Ognibene, *Umm al-Rasas: La Chiesa di Santo Stefano ed il «problema iconofobico»* (Rome, 2002), esp. 65–94, where they are described in detail; see too O. Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven, 1973), 207–9.

[27] As was the case with laws as well. For Roman contributions to *sharīʿa* law, see P. Crone, *Roman, Provincial and Islamic Law: The Origins of the Islamic Patronate* (Cambridge, 1987).

oddly familiar, the Umayyad mosque used the centuries-old sacred space for a quite different purpose, and the image of paradise offered by the mosaics was not directed to Jews or Christians, but Muslims.[28] Grounded in the 'cultural cross-currents' of the time, the artistic and architectural forms of the seventh and eighth centuries show an ability to blend the ancient heritage of the Mediterranean world with the evolving concerns of the new rulers of the Middle East.[29]

The Jafnids, Naṣrids, and other Arabs allied with the two empires were part of this dynamic and changing landscape which the Umayyads came to rule. In the late antique west the opportunity provided by the demise of Roman power, alongside the centuries-old transformation of the Germanic barbarians into 'alternative Romans', would permit events such as the attempts by the Ostrogoths to legitimise their rule in Italy by appealing to an ancient royal heritage worthy of the Romans themselves.[30] Counterfactualists might speculate on what could have happened if the Jafnids had enjoyed a similar opportunity to inherit or appropriate more significant Roman power in the east; we might have seen the further development of aspects of their Romanisation, such as the deployment of more Greek inscriptions, extensive construction of public buildings, or possibly the appropriation of Roman positions, rather than the largely honorific elite title of *patrikios*, which continued to operate alongside the restraints of the phylarchal position. Instead, the different course of events in the east, which resulted in the exile of the Jafnids, have blunted attempts to assess their role in the processes of continuity and change in the seventh century. Nevertheless, many of the themes and issues discussed in this study—the role of Arabic in the late antique Near East, the production of oral poetry, the political development of Arabs at the edges of the Roman Empire—force us to consider the continuities that may have spanned the somewhat artificial division represented by the Muslim invasions, and the role of the Jafnids in them.[31]

[28] Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 426.

[29] Cf. G. Fowden, 'Late-antique art in Syria and its Umayyad evolutions', *JRA*, 17 (2004), 282–304, at 303–4.

[30] The phrase 'alternative Romans' is from J. Alexander, 'Review of *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200–1000*, by P. Brown', *Theology*, 100 (1997), 221–2, at 222.

[31] Hoyland, 'Late Roman Provincia Arabia', 134, asking 'how far can we assume that the changes we see in the early Islamic period, with respect to administrative

One approach to the problem is to speculate about the continuity of building and settlement patterns, particularly in the way that the Jafnids might have provided settlement models for the Umayyads. Gaube argued, for example, that the stylistic similarities between the site of Khirbet al-Baida in Syria and the Umayyad *quṣūr*, as well as its numerous differences, suggested that it was a kind of *qaṣr* prototype, the result of a 'Ghassānid' building programme of the sort elaborated by al-Iṣfahānī. The fact that Gaube suggested that al-Baida was built by people connected to the Jafnids was used to explain the differences in relation to Umayyad *quṣūr*.[32] Gaube's thesis has not received much support, and neither has that of Shahid, who is the most vocal proponent of the position which sees evidence for conscious links between Jafnid and Umayyad buildings. This is because Shahid's argument is based on an uncritical acceptance of the veracity of the list of al-Iṣfahānī, and his conclusions are difficult to accept.[33] His other attempts to use the works of pre-Islamic poetry and Arab geographers such as Yāqūt to advance this argument have also produced similar, highly speculative, results.[34]

Taking a slightly different approach, Foss has raised the possibility that the presence of the Jafnids and the tribe of Ghassān (i.e. the people under Jafnid control) in southern Syria, and their presumed integration into the local population, eased the transition to Umayyad rule. Certainly the presence of the Jafnid elite, whose local standing is recorded on the house of Flavius Seos at al-Ḥayyat and elsewhere, may well have accustomed the population to Arab civic or military leadership; and it is also very unlikely that the Jafnids and their

divisions, the establishment of autonomous religious communities, the demise of Greek as a lingua franca and the rapid assumption of power by the Arabs were already under way in the late sixth century.'

[32] H. Gaube, *Ein Arabischer Palast in Südsyrien. Hirbet el-Baida* (Beirut, 1974), 135–6; see as well id., 'Die Syrischen Wüstenschlösser. Einige wirtschaftliche und politische Gesichtspunkte zu ihrer Enststehung', *ZDPV*, 95 (1979), 182–209, at 193–6 (al-Baida) and 205 (Jebel Seis). See the discussion in Sartre, *Trois études*, 185–6, who gives some credence (in 1982) to Gaube's suggestion.

[33] I. Shahid, 'Ghassānid and Umayyad structures', e.g. at 307: 'the Ghassānids . . . met with tribal chiefs, they developed settlements, and they played. I am therefore inclined to believe that the Umayyads, who were more like the Ghassānids than unlike them, engaged in all of these activities.'

[34] Even if in a much more measured way, Shahid, *Sixth Century*, ii/1, esp. 76–135, on 'historical geography'. Walmsley, *Early Islamic Syria*, 140–1, appears to accept Shahid's descriptions of sites such as Jabiya.

followers and those who invaded Syria and Iraq from north Arabia were complete cultural strangers.[35]

The nature of the evidence means that these hypotheses are all speculative, but it is worth taking a closer look at the question of the *quṣūr* raised by Shahid and Gaube—specifically in terms of the use made of some sites associated with the Jafnids, as well as the Naṣrids, to whom we will turn first. For the Naṣrids the information is very poor, and little is known from pre-Muslim Arabic sources about what use if any was made of places like al-Ḥīrah or al-Khawarnak, a palace-like structure said to have been built in the fifth century as a desert retreat.[36] The establishment of the *miṣr*, or garrison settlement, of Kūfah so close to al-Ḥīrah probably had a negative effect on al-Ḥīrah's prosperity, with Kūfah providing a new focus for political and cultural activities in the area. Talbot Rice noted what he believed to be some seventh-century churches at al-Ḥīrah, but little else is known.[37] When the ʿAbbāsids shifted the political focus of the Islamic world away from Syria and towards Iraq, this situation might have changed, but the growth of Baghdad, in Bosworth's opinion, would have intensified the decline of al-Ḥīrah.[38]

For al-Khawarnak our ignorance is almost total, but, according to later tradition, it was re-used by the ʿAbbāsids, who renovated and enlarged the structure.[39] Like al-Ḥīrah, the site has not been excavated or surveyed properly, and the specifics of its usage are unknown. So little is known that the French explorer Massignon, visiting the site in 1907, could not be sure whether he had even identified the correct site, but his description of the location he saw provides a small clue. He noted that 'elle surveille, à l'orée du désert, un district jadis plus irrigué.' Such emplacement at the confluence of the desert and cultivated areas is typical of the later *qūsūr*. It is also worth mentioning that Massignon did think that another site in the region, al-Okhaydhir, was also built by the Naṣrids. The published

[35] Cf. the comments about the 'north Arabian cultural universe', Ch. 4 n. 132; see Foss, 'Syria in transition', 258–63; the idea of the 'Arabs before the Arabs' is a central part of P. Pentz, *The Invisible Conquest: The Ontogenesis of Sixth and Seventh Century Syria* (Copenhagen, 1992). Pentz argues (e.g. at 27–8) that the 'conquerors' were already settled in Syria. Pentz's argument is essentially one for continuity between the 6th and 7th centuries.

[36] According to al-Ṭabarī, i. 851.

[37] See Ch. 2 n. 122.

[38] Bosworth, 'Iran and the Arabs', 608; cf. B. Spuler, *Iran in früh-islamischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1952), 7.

[39] See s.v. 'Al-Khawarnak', *EI*^{2}, 1133.

pictures show an imposing and impressive structure, but little is known about its connection to the Naṣrid dynasty.[40]

With this in mind, we may return to the Jafnids, and at the outset it is worth restating that there is no direct evidence for the 'Ghassānid' nature of many of the buildings that were once thought of as such. This restricts the number of sites we can discuss, but, nevertheless, some of the sites where traces of the Jafnids can be reliably detected were indeed used by the Umayyads in some form or another. Qaṣr al-Ḥayr al-Gharbī, the Roman monastery near Palmyra, which acknowledged al-Ḥārith in its lintel inscription, became an Umayyad *qaṣr*.[41] The site of Reṣāfa also continued to be used in the seventh and eighth centuries. The evidence for specific links between Jafnid and Umayyad uses of the site is speculative, but the caliph Hishām is said to have used the city as a summer retreat or temporary residence, although what use (if any) he made of the al-Mundhir building outside the north gateway is unknown. Excavations at the site have shown that a mosque was added to the north side of the basilica of St Sergius during Hishām's reign, and Hishām is also said to have developed the kind of poetic court culture which is identified with the Jafnids and Naṣrids.[42] At Jebel Seis, the graffito is an indication of Jafnid activity there, and this too became the site of an Umayyad *qaṣr*. Seis offered a focal point for people living in this desolate landscape and from time to time the volcanic crater could hold considerable amounts of water.[43] The water cisterns found at many Umayyad

[40] L. Massignon, *Mission en Mésopotamie (1907–1908)* (Cairo, 1910), 36–7. See most recently on this structure B. Finster and J. Schmidt, The origin of desert castles: Qasr Bani Muqatil, near Karbala, Iraq', *Antiquity*, 79 (2005), 339–49, suggesting, at 348, continuities between the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods.

[41] There is no evidence to support Shahid's claim, *Sixth Century*, ii/1, 206–9, that the site was a 'Ghassānid fortress' built by the Jafnids.

[42] Hishām's palace is not excavated as yet, but the excavator of Reṣāfa, Ulbert, has analysed what he believes to be an Umayyad residence near the site and thinks that Hishām's palace is somewhere south of the city walls. See Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 175, and T. Ulbert, 'Ein umaiyadischer Pavillon in Resafa-Ruṣāfat Hišām', *DaM*, 7 (1993), 213–31. The evidence for court poetry at Reṣāfa from Arabic sources is discussed by D. Sack, *Resafa. Die Grosse Moschee von Resafa-Ruṣāfat Hišām* (Mainz, 1996), 133–54, and for the dating of the mosque, *ibid*. 47–9.

[43] Cf. K. Brisch, 'Das omayyadische Schloss in Usais. Verfläufiger Bericht über mit Mitteln der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft unternommene Grabung (Erste Kampagne Frühjahr 1962)', *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo*, 19 (1963), 141–87, at 186. When I visited Jebel Seis in June 2007, the outer crater was full of water and the ground around the Umayyad *qaṣr* offered

sites would have provided a resource for nomadic pastoralists and agriculturalists alike, providing irrigation for the agricultural developments at the *quṣūr*. The control of water supplies was, as well, a necessary and integral function of Roman military sites, which were located in marginal land throughout the Near East.[44]

It would be unwise to suggest simply that the Umayyads used such sites because the Jafnids did, because this implies a conscious intention on the part of the Umayyads to imitate the Jafnids, and there is no evidence that this was the case.[45] On the other hand, there are some potential reasons why such sites would be attractive to the Umayyads, and, in many ways, these were probably the same reasons that made them popular with the Jafnids. For Reṣāfa these were most likely the power of the shrine of St Sergius (which, as Elizabeth Fowden notes, was undoubtedly not lost on the Muslims) and the location of Reṣāfa itself. The city was far from the centre of political life in Damascus for the Umayyads, and suitably distant from the political machinations of Roman power, for the Jafnids. It was a place in-between, usefully located at a geographical and conceptual midpoint linking western Syria and Mesopotamia.[46]

Of interest as well is the communicative potential of sites where *quṣūr* were founded. At present there is no exact consensus on the function and nature of many of the *quṣūr*, but part of the debate has focused on the very plausible suggestion that they were well-sited to maintain communication with the disparate groups that made up Umayyad Syria.[47] As discussed in Chapter 2, the location of the

good support for plants and birds. It is easy to imagine that this place offered an important if seasonal water supply.

[44] For example, at Lejjūn, which is sited somewhat indefensibly in a valley to guard a spring, as well as al-Ḥumayma, where the site features an aqueduct and several subterranean cisterns and reservoirs, originally developed by the Nabataeans but enlarged during the Roman occupation of the site. See as well G. King, 'Settlement patterns in Islamic Jordan: the Umayyads and their use of the land', in A. Hadidi (ed.), *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, iv (Amman, 1992), 369–75, at 372.

[45] Cf. again Shahid, *Sixth Century*, ii/1, 377, on Reṣāfa: 'the caliph Hishām had been inspired by the fact that the Arab federates had, in pre-Islamic times, developed it as a veritable oasis and thus had prepared it for later Umayyad takeover.'

[46] E. K. Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 177–8; id., 'The lamp and the wine flask: early Muslim interest in Christian monasticism', in A. Akasoy, J. E. Montgomery, and P. E. Pormann (eds.), *Islamic Crosspollinations: Interactions in the Medieval Middle East* (Exeter, 2007), 1–28, at 11; King, 'Settlement patterns in Islamic Jordan', 375.

[47] For a useful summary of the literature, see D. Genequand, 'Umayyad castles: the shift from late antique military architecture to early Islamic palatial building', in

al-Mundhir building at Reṣāfa provided the Jafnids with a focal point from which they might display their connection to the Roman Empire as well as to those who lived on the steppe, simultaneously appealing to the different groups who provided legitimacy to their leadership. The al-Mundhir building identified the Jafnids with late Roman cultural and architectural norms, reinforcing their authority. This type of communication from a position of power was not unique to the site: John Oleson has suggested that the Roman fort at al-Ḥumayma fulfilled precisely this kind of function, serving as a daily reminder of Roman strength at a site which was, incidentally, home to a later *qaṣr*, and Whitcomb has argued recently that the Umayyad *amṣār* at places such as ʿAqaba were also visual representations of authority and power.[48] Like the al-Mundhir building, the Umayyad *quṣūr* communicated the wealth and status of their elite in physical terms through the construction of elaborate or impressive buildings, placing those who negotiated with tribal or junior political leaders in a position of strength.[49] King and Grabar both note in their arguments for this point that the *quṣūr* were particularly well-sited to reach the tribal groups which were politically important for the stability of the Umayyad regime.[50]

As places of 'encounter and communication', the *quṣūr* helped to disseminate a particular image of the elite, as well as to retain a connection to travel-routes, news, and contact with those who lived in or used the desert. They were also places where the Umayyad elite could withdraw from the pressures of political life, but not so remote that they would lose touch with the more populated areas. Numerous

H. Kennedy (ed.), *Muslim Military Architecture in Greater Syria: From the Coming of Islam to the Ottoman Period* (Leiden, 2006), 3–25, at 3–6.

[48] J. P. Oleson, B. J. Fisher, and M. B. Reeves, 'New dedicatory inscriptions from Humayma (ancient Hawara), Jordan', *ZPE*, 140 (2002), 103–21, at 120–1; Whitcomb, 'The Miṣr of Ayla', 287.

[49] Cf. Fowden, *Qusayr ʿAmra*, 288.

[50] Ibid. 277; King, 'Settlement patterns in Islamic Jordan', 370, noting the use made of *quṣūr* to 'retain close contact with the tribes whose support was necessary for the Syrian-based regime', and 371, 375, noting that the *quṣūr* were well-placed for contact with particular tribal groups understood to have been important for the Umayyads; see too O. Grabar, R. Holod, and W. Trusdale, *City in the Desert. Qasr al-Hayr East*, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), i. 156–65. Here Grabar suggests that Qaṣr al-Hayr East was well sited to 'solve internal political problems with tribes', as well as provide an additional link in the communications routes between Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, he suggests that its location favoured the control of nomads, by focusing their trading and political activities around the *qaṣr*.

Umayyad *quṣūr*, as well as the site tentatively identified by Massignon as al-Khawarnak, lie on the boundary between the marginal and agricultural lands and not deep in the desert where those who used them would lose contact with one or the other.[51] Ultimately, they were places where a mobile elite could be apart from, but close to, the areas which interested them, and which could facilitate contact with the diverse groups that continued to make up Umayyad Syria as they had made up Roman Syria.[52] Most, if not all of these aspects of the *quṣūr* arguably find parallels in what the Jafnids might have considered attractive about places such as Reṣāfa. They recall, too, the efforts of Aḥūdemmeh to focus the religious activities of the Mesopotamian nomads around areas of his choosing, and the efforts of the Rashīdīs to remain connected to Shammar.

The links between the similarity in purpose which Jafnid and Umayyad leaders were likely to have found for the same places represent a profitable way to explore themes of continuity and change, and it is tempting to extend this to other places like Jabiya, the supposed one-time Jafnid haunt and reputed location of the first major Muslim Arab military base in Syria. We do not know exactly where the site is, despite hypotheses from explorers such as Brünnow,[53] and the possibility that Jabiya was only associated with the Jafnids at some point much later cannot be discounted. However, the general region where it is sometimes assumed to be, at the edge of the Golan, would have offered numerous advantages to both the Jafnids and those who may have used it after them. A natural pivot between Palestine, Jordan, and major cities such as Damascus, it too offered a communicative point connecting marginal and fertile land where people might easily meet.[54] Alongside these similarities between possible Jafnid and Umayyad use of some of the same sites, there is also the broader continuity of architectural and conceptual aspects linking Roman and Umayyad Syria—the focus on the development of extensive water supply and

[51] King, 'Settlement patterns in Islamic Jordan', 369.

[52] Cf. Foss, 'Syria in transition', 256, on Qaṣr al-Hallabat, in modern Jordan, approximately 50 km from Bostra: 'Standing in isolation, it has no implication for urban settlement of the region but reflects instead a new development, the installation of a governing class with considerable mobility, content to establish bases away from the cities but easily accessible to the steppes and desert.'

[53] Shahid, *Sixth Century*, ii. 96–105, discussing Brünnow's speculation about the site's location. See as well Sartre, *Trois études*, 179.

[54] Foss, Syria in transition', 251–5.

control networks at remote desert sites such as al-Ḥumayma, for example, or the similarity between the *amṣār* and late Roman defensive works in Jordan.[55] The Arabian precursors of the *quṣūr* discussed by Genequand, located at places such as Qaryat al-Fāw, suggest too that once again the establishment of the Umayyad desert castles represents in part an integration of existing forms alongside a reworking and adaptation of what they encountered in seventh-century Syria, and within these broader processes, the Jafnids played a small role.[56]

The place of the Jafnids in linking Roman and Umayyad Syria is also reflected by their development as political units. From the perspective of creating a political force capable of challenging the Roman Empire, Islam may have helped to weld the warring and disparate tribes of Arabia together to a new degree; but it is at the same time quite clear that Arab political groupings were developing well before the emergence of Islam. Furthermore, these clusters—the Jafnids and Naṣrids, as well as the Ḥujrids, in the late fifth and early sixth centuries—seem to have been capable of maintaining a position of leadership over the largely anonymous smaller, less powerful groups. The Jafnids maintained a family dynasty with support from Rome for over three generations, and while we do not know how many groups of people formed those who supported the Jafnids, the extension of Jafnid influence from Jebel Seis to Reṣāfa, and possibly south to Medina, is an indication of their range of power and control.

Could these units have provided a model for the Muslims? Like the situation for the *quṣūr* discussed above, there is no unequivocal evidence either way. Reflecting on the Jafnids, Whittow provocatively asked whether or not they should be seen as creating a paradigm for the unification of the 'military potential of the tribes with the resources of the settled world'.[57] To see them as the ancestors of the

[55] Whitcomb, 'The Miṣr of Ayla', 287, noting the similarity between the *miṣr* at ʿAqaba and the legionary forts of Lejjūn and Udruḥ in southern Jordan.

[56] Genequand, 'Umayyad castles', 7–8, 25: 'a clear line of continuity can be followed from the Roman military architecture of the second to fourth centuries AD, to the Umayyad period.' Genequand notes too 'a very important intermediary provided by some presumably sixth century *villae* or palaces'. It is here that Khirbet al-Baida might fit in, suggesting that Gaube was conceptually right, even if his assessment of the site as 'Ghassānid' is very much open to debate. Genequand notes as well (p. 25) the ways in which the *quṣūr* adapted late Roman domestic architectural forms, and then, through innovation, turned them into a 'pseudo-military form'.

[57] Whittow, 'Rome and the Jafnids', 224.

Muslim armies and the Umayyad caliphs is perhaps a little too bold, and the key point I wish to stress here is that the political development of the tribes of Arabia under Islam was preceded by several centuries by the political development of the tribes in contact with the Romans, the Sasanians, and also with the kingdom of Ḥimyar. At the same time, however, the ability of al-Ḥārith and al-Mundhir to maintain the primacy of their family and their political prosperity as long as they did rested on precisely this kind of skill in using the resources of centre and periphery. Certainly, too, within the debate which examines how the Umayyads incorporated the politics and culture of the time, we need to recognise the significance of the fact that there was a long history of Arab political development in the region which could be traced back as far as the days of Nemāra and Ruwwāfa; and so, as an Arab political elite, the Umayyads were, to some extent, in familiar territory.

CONCLUSION

It would be an overestimation of the prominence of the Jafnids and any of their surviving members in the mid-seventh century to suggest that they were singled out for imitation by the Umayyads, but it is useful to think of what the Arab invaders of the mid-seventh century found in Syria. What they encountered was an Arab minority that had been integrated into the villages, steppe, and most probably the cities of Syria, for some time. This was a society that had already known Arabic-speaking elites, and where Arabs were relevant to numerous points of cultural, religious, and political life. Inasmuch as the newcomers adopted and synthesised various aspects of late antique culture, it seems likely that those places that were useful to the Jafnids or the local Roman elite were attractive to the Umayyad elite for precisely the same reasons. Despite the reduction in their power, the Jafnids and those like them, such as the mysterious phylarch Sharaḥīl, were, and had been, functioning parts of the late antique landscape. So it is within this general framework, where some of the things that had prospered, declined, or stayed the same in Roman Late Antiquity, continued to do so after the Romans lost control of Syria, that we might best understand the contribution of the Jafnids to the strands of continuity that flowed between the sixth and seventh centuries.

The Jafnids and the Naṣrids were 'between empires' not just in the sense of being between Rome and Sasanian Iran, but also in the sense of being between these two empires and the Umayyad caliphate which followed. Throughout this study, I have repeatedly emphasised their connection to some of the most central and important aspects of life in the ancient world—its religion, its politics, and its culture. I have also tried to show that both of these groups were relevant to a Near Eastern world which continued to change and develop after the arrival of Islam. In many respects, the political development of the Jafnids, intimately bound up with Roman power, was a crucial factor for any ability to play a role as late antique elites, or as patrons of poetry and culture, or their ability to visit the capital on state visits or take a leading role as allies on military expeditions. This essential fact validates the importance of the Roman- and Sasanian-dominated world of Late Antiquity to our understanding of the many ways in which Arab identity was evolving before the arrival of Islam.

For the future, much remains to be discovered and excavated. If the site of Jabiya can be located, there is the exciting possibility that we might find out more about the elusive Jafnid building programmes, if indeed they existed, and understand more about the ways in which the Jafnids integrated themselves into the Roman Empire. If it could be definitively proved that the Jafnids built more than the isolated examples we can be certain of, our understanding of their place in Late Antiquity would be substantially changed. For the moment, however, the site's presumed location in a highly sensitive area of the Middle East, close to the Golan Heights, will most likely continue to hamper efforts to find and survey it, and it is highly unfortunate that the situation in Iraq will also prevent archaeologists from finding out more about the Naṣrid capital or sites such as al-Khawarnak. Still, there are promising possibilities: excavation of the 'palace' of Hishām at Reṣāfa might tell us more about the continuities between Roman or Jafnid and Umayyad uses of the site, and while the Arabic sources have played a minor role here for reasons set out in the introduction, a future careful analysis of these very problematic works alongside the extant non-Arabic literary sources, and particularly the growing body of general archaeological material for Syria, might provide new avenues of exploration.

One of the key aims of this study has been to provide a more nuanced picture of the Jafnids, in particular, by treating their relationship with Rome from a number of different angles, and by the use of

comparative evidence and a theoretical framework that might help us to understand their uneven power relationship with the Roman Empire. I hope that I have shown that the Jafnids and Naṣrids are deeply relevant to the study of Late Antiquity, even if they never were of central importance for the political and military concerns of their patrons, as some suggest. They also continue to be extremely relevant to the study of state–tribe, centre–periphery and empire–client relationships, and hold interest beyond the disciplines of history and classics through their evident susceptibility to anthropological, sociological, and political analysis. Many of the conclusions I have drawn here are speculative and open to criticism and discussion. This is partly a consequence of the sources, but it is, nonetheless, my fervent hope that this study will go some way towards stimulating further consideration over the place of the Jafnids, Naṣrids, and others within the wider historical debates about the ancient world, Late Antiquity, and the growth of Arab identity before—and after—Islam.[58]

[58] To some extent this has already begun, with the impending publication of Robin and Genequand (eds.), *Regards croisés de l'histoire et de l'archéologie sur la dynastie Jafnide*, the proceedings of a conference held in Paris (Nov. 2008) entirely devoted to the history of the Jafnids.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

ACO	Schwartz, E. (ed.), *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* (Strasbourg, 1914).
CAH 14	Cameron, Averil, Ward-Perkins, B., and Whitby, M. (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, xiv: *Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, AD 425–600* (Cambridge, 2000).
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* (Turnhout, 1953–).
CHI	Yarshater, E. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, iii/i: *The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods* (Cambridge, 1983).
CIS	*Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum* (Paris, 1881–).
CSCO	*Scr. Syr. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Scriptores Syri* (Leuven and Paris, 1903–).
Documenta	Chabot, J.-B. (ed.), *Documenta ad origines Monophysitarum illustrandas* (Leuven, 1952).
DPA	Brünnow, R., and von Domaszewski, A., *Die Provincia Arabia: auf Grund zweier in den Jahren 1897 und 1898 unternommenen Reisen und der Berichte früherer Reisender*, 3 vols (Strasbourg, 1904–9).
EI^2	*Encyclopedia of Islam*, 12 vols (2nd edn, Leiden, 1960–2005).
Fragmente	Jacoby, F. (ed.), *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Leiden, 1923–).
GCS	*Die Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig, 1987–2000; Berlin, 2001–).
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae* (Berlin, 1825–).
IGLS	Jalabert, L., Mouterde, R., et al. (eds.), *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* (Paris, 1929–).
PAES	Butler, H. C., Littman, E., Magie, D., and Stuart, D. R., *Syria: Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904–1905 and 1909*, 4 vols (Leiden, 1907–49).
PG	Migne, J.-P. (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca* (Paris, 1857–66).
PL	Migne, J.-P. (ed.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina* (Paris, 1841–1905).
PLRE	Jones, A. H. M., Martindale, J. R., and Morris, J. (eds.), *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1971–92).

PO	*Patrologia Orientalis* (Paris, 1907–66; Turnhout, 1968–)
Ry	Ryckmans, G., 'Inscriptions sud-Arabes (dixième série)', *Le Muséon*, 66 (1953), 267–317.
SC	*Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris, 1929–).
SEG	*Supplementum epigraphicum graecum* (Leiden and Amsterdam, 1923–).
Syn. Or.	Chabot, J.-B. (ed.), *Synodicon orientale* (Paris, 1902).
T&U	von Harnack, A. (ed.), *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin, 1882–).
Wadd	Le Bas, P., and Waddington, W. H. (eds.), *Inscriptions grecques et latines recueillies en Grèce et en Asie Mineure*, 3 vols (Paris, 1853–70).

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