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Literacy and Identity in Pre-Islamic Arabia

ASHGATE
VARIORUM

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On Saracens, the Rawwāfah Inscription and the Roman Army*

The first secure examples of the term *Saracen*¹ are generally said to occur in the early second century AD, in two passages in Ptolemy, but in neither place does he use it as a generic term for Arabian nomads.² The earliest example of the latter usage appears to be in Syriac, in *The Book of the Laws of Countries* by Bardaisān of Edessa (AD 154–222), written down by one of his pupils in the late second or early third century, where he refers to the *Ṭayyāyē* and *Sarqāyē*.³ However, it does not become common until the fourth century,⁴ after which it is almost universal among Greek and Latin writers. The earliest full ‘description’ of Saracens is found in Ammianus Marcellinus, who makes it quite clear that, for him, the term referred to

* This is a revised and expanded version of an article first published in French as “Quelques réflexions sur les Saracènes, l’inscription de Rawwāfa et l’armée romaine”. Pages 93–101 in H. Lozachmeur (ed.), *Présence arabe dans la Croissant fertile avant l’Hégire*. Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1995.

¹ In this article, I use the English word *Saracen* as shorthand for Greek Σαρακηνός and/or Latin *Saracenus*.

² Ptolemy places a *region* which he calls Σαρακηνή in Sinai, ‘beside Egypt’, west of the ‘Black Mountains’, which he says extend from the Gulf of Pharan to Judaea (*Geography* V.17.3). Elsewhere, in the interior of ‘Arabia Eudaimon’ (VI.7.21) ‘next to the mountainous regions situated towards the North’ (Ziegler 1998: 103), he places a *tribe* which he calls Σαρακηνοί, along with the Θαδίται, and the Θαμυδινοί. It is possible that there is a more ancient reference in Dioscorides’ *De Materia Medica* 1.67 (mid-first century AD), where all MSS bar one have δένδρου σαρακηνικοῦ, and the one exception has δένδρου σαραβικοῦ. In view of this, it is difficult to understand why Wellmann (1907: 60) emended the text to δένδρου Ἀραβικοῦ, followed by Beck in her recent translation (2005: 48), rather than retaining the majority reading σαρακηνικοῦ. Dioscorides places the plant in Sinai, and if σαρακηνικοῦ is the correct reading, it seems likely that it is named after the region of Σαρακηνή which Ptolemy, in the following century, mentions as being in this area (V.17.3). It has also been suggested that Pliny’s *Araceni* and *Arreni* (*NH* VI.32.157) are corruptions of *Saraceni* (Moritz 1920: 2388; Mordtmann 1934: 155b), but there seems no basis for this beyond the vague similarity of the names.

³ Drijvers 1965: 50–51, line 11; and most recently Krannich and Stein 2005: 225, § 39. On the compositional history of the work see Drijvers 1966: 60–76. Eusebius (AD 260–339) quotes this passage in his *Praeparatio Evangelica* (c. AD 313) VI.10 (Gifford 1903: §277c, 4). Mordtmann (1934: 156a) claims that Bardaisān refers to Ṭayyāyē and Sarqāyē as ‘the representatives of the independent nomadic Arab tribes’. However, in this passage Bardaisān is painting ‘with a broad brush’ huge geographical areas inhabited by barbarians, and it is surely more likely that Ṭayyāyē and Sarqāyē here are simply the generic terms for Arabian nomads in the Persian and Roman spheres of influence, and so (in theory) covering the whole of the Middle East, rather than specific tribes whose *dīras* would not be sufficiently vast to serve his purpose.

⁴ See, for instance, a Latin inscription from north-eastern Jordan dated AD 334 (Iliffe 1941: 62–64 = *L’Année épigraphique* 1948: 54, no. 136); Ammianus Marcellinus XIV.4.1–7; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*: Pescennius Niger VII.8; Aurelian XI.3, XXVII.4, XXVIII.2, 4, XXXIII.4, XLI.10; etc.

nomads,⁵ though at a later stage it came to be used of all Arabs, and in the Middle Ages of all Muslims, until it was partially superseded by the term ‘Turk’.

From St Jerome onwards there have been numerous attempts to find the origin of this term.⁶ I shall deal here with only a few of these, before suggesting a variation on one of them. This will lead me to discuss some aspects of the Rawwāfah Inscription and the presence of Arabian nomads in the Roman army.

C.C.R. Murphy sought the origin of the term *Saracen* in ‘the Aramaic root *srāk* [*sic*], meaning empty and (by metonymy) a desert’⁷ The semantic field of the root S-R-Q in Aramaic includes the meanings ‘to empty (of a receptacle)’ (*s^eraq*), and ‘hungry; empty; vain; idler; robber’ (*s^erīqā*), etc. However, in Aramaic, this root does not provide a word meaning ‘desert’, the common term for which is *madb^erā*. It therefore seems to me unlikely that it would have furnished the Greek and Latin term for ‘inhabitants of the desert, Arabian nomads’.

Like Graf and O’Connor, I am also not convinced by the suggested etymology from the Arabic root S-R-Q.⁸ Those who proposed it observed that the classical authors accused the Saracens of being thieves and brigands.⁹ But in Arabic, the verb *saraqa* means ‘to steal furtively’, and is not used of raiding, the form of theft most characteristic of Arabian nomads. In the Roman provinces of Syria and Arabia, there were thieves, bandits, and brigands of diverse origins, both sedentaries and nomads. In these conditions a word simply meaning ‘sneak-thief’ would surely have been too imprecise to become the common term for ‘Arabian nomad’.

On the basis of references in Ptolemy¹⁰ and Stephanus Byzantinus,¹¹ Mordtmann and others have suggested that the term *Saracen* derives from the name of a tribe, Ptolemy’s Σαρακηνοί. Proponents of this theory claim that the name of this tribe eventually came to be used as the generic term for all Arabian nomads by those living under Rome and writing in Greek and Latin, just as that of the tribe of Ṭayyi’ (*Ṭayyāyē*) was used by those in Mesopotamia and further east, writing in Syriac.¹² However, in contrast to the Ṭayyi’, to which there are numerous references in antiquity, no *tribe* with a name resembling Σαρακηνοί has been found in any text in any of

⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus XIV.4.1–7. The description contains many of the *topoi* used in the ‘ethnographic’ descriptions of barbarian peoples on the edges of the empire, but some elements coincide with what we know of Arab nomads in antiquity from other sources.

⁶ For discussions of most of these see Murphy 1945, Graf and O’Connor 1977: 60–64, and Shahīd 1984: 123–141.

⁷ Murphy 1945: 190. Despite describing it as an ‘Aramaic root’, Murphy in fact cites a post-Biblical Hebrew word ‘*srāk*’ (i.e. *s^erāq*) which means ‘barrenness, desert, unfruitfulness’ (Jastrow 1903: 1030a); cf. the Aramaic verb *s^eraq* ‘to empty’, and the adjective *s^erāqā* ‘unfruitful’.

⁸ See the references in Graf and O’Connor 1977: 63, n. 53.

⁹ See the references in Graf and O’Connor 1977: 64, n. 57.

¹⁰ See note 2 above.

¹¹ An author of the sixth century AD but known only from an *epitome* compiled some time between the sixth and tenth centuries. However, he quotes from the works of much earlier authors such as Ulpianus and Uranius (on whom see Retsö 2003: 491–493). See Mordtmann 1934: 155b on his references to the Saracens.

¹² This is also the view of Shahīd (1997: 27–28), and Hoyland (2001: 235, 255 n. 5).

the ancient Semitic languages.¹³ Thus, one is forced to ask whether such a tribe could have been of sufficient importance and so widely known that its name became the generic term for Arabian nomads, while leaving no trace in our Semitic sources.

It is particularly significant that there is no mention of a tribe of this name in the Namārah epitaph in which it is boasted that Mar' al-Qays conquered and ruled a number of famous Arab tribes.¹⁴ The Namārah inscription was carved in the early fourth century (AD 328), just as the term Σαρακηνοί was about to become common among classical writers; it was set up on the eastern desert borders of the empire, in exactly an area where one might expect to find a tribe so well-known to the Romans that they would use its name as a generic term for all Arabian nomads; and it recorded the career of a man who had spent his life among the Arabian tribes. Is it really conceivable that it would make no mention of a tribe of such importance? Similarly, if it was of similar importance to the Ṭayyi', why was it unknown to the Arab sources of the Islamic period which are full of information on Ṭayyi' and other contemporary tribes?

Philologically, the simplest and to my mind the most likely etymology for the term *Saracen*, is that which derives it from the North Arabian¹⁵ root S²-R-Q.¹⁶ It is almost always assumed, on the basis of the meanings of the root Š-R-Q in Classical Arabic, that such a derivation would imply that *Saracen* originally meant 'Easterner',¹⁷ and many have objected quite reasonably that this is an unlikely self-designation.¹⁸ However, many years ago, Alois Musil, who had an unrivalled knowledge of the Bedouin of Syria and North Arabia and who first proposed this derivation, pointed out that, in the Bedouin Arabic of these areas, the verb *šarraqa* is used with the meaning 'to migrate to the inner desert (which is known as *šerq*)', regardless of which direction is taken.¹⁹ It is worth quoting him at length:

In modern Arabia the term Arab denotes all who live under tents of black goat hair, therefore all nomads regardless of the location of their camps or of their occupation. Those Arabs who raise camels and dwell either constantly or at least half a year in the inner desert are called Bedw or Šerkijje [*scil. Šerqiyye*]. The

¹³ On Mordtmann's claims (1934: 156a) that the Bardaišān refers to *Ṭayyāyē* and *Sarqāyē* as 'the representatives of the independent nomadic Arab tribes' see note 3 above.

¹⁴ For the most recent treatment of the Namārah inscription, including a new and extremely accurate facsimile, see Bordreuil *et al.* 1997.

¹⁵ I use the term 'North Arabian' for the dialect bundle consisting of Ancient North Arabian [ANA] and Arabic, see Macdonald 2000: 29–30.

¹⁶ In S²-R-Q the first radical represents the North Arabian reflex of Proto-Semitic /š/. See Macdonald 2000: 45–46, and Appendix 1 here.

¹⁷ See for instance Moritz 1920: 2388–2389.

¹⁸ See the discussion in Graf and O'Connor 1977: 62–63, and references there. However, it may be noted that the name of the modern *Šarqiyyīn* tribe of the Emirate of Fujairah would seem to have exactly this meaning.

¹⁹ Musil 1926: 282. He explains that 'among the Bedouins *šerk* [*šerq*] denotes the interior of the desert as well as the east', and if the Rwala *šarraḳaw* [*šarraḳaw*] 'they usually proceed in a southerly or southeasterly direction; while the 'Amārāt, camping west of Babylon ... make their way to the west.' I have added in [] adaptations of his transliteration system to that used in this article.

latter word is derived from *šerk* [*šerq*], the term applied to the inner desert in central Arabia. Whoever marches through this region, whether he goes west, or east, or south, is referred to as *šarraḳ*, *tašrīž* [*šarraḳ*, *tašrīq*] (going into the inner desert).

From the word *šerk* in the sense of the inner desert is derived the classical name Sarakenoi, or Saraceni, just as the Biblical Bene Ʒedem is derived from *kedem* [*qedem*]. The Hebrew *kedem* refers to exactly the same region as does the Arabic *šerk*. “Bene Ʒedem” is therefore identical with “aš-Šerḳijje” or, as modern usage has it, “al-Bedw”.²⁰

The same root – in the IV Form, *š²rq* – is found regularly with exactly this meaning of ‘migrate to the inner desert (regardless of direction)’, in the Safaitic graffiti, which were carved mainly by nomads living on the borders of the provinces of Syria and Arabia.²¹ It therefore seems quite possible that, in the early centuries of our era, a word equivalent to the modern *šerḳiyye* could have been used in the settled areas, as well as in the desert, as a general term for ‘those who migrate to the inner desert’, i.e. ‘nomads’. After the creation of *Provincia Arabia* in AD 106, it was necessary to be able to distinguish between *Arabes* (the mainly settled inhabitants of *Provincia Arabia*) and the Arabian nomads on the edges of the empire. Since the general terms *nomades*/σκηνῖται could be applied to any migrant tent-dwellers, something more specific was required, and it would be natural to use the local word for the local (i.e. Arabian) nomads. Since Greek was the normal language of communication between the local people and the authorities in these provinces,²² this local term would have reached the authorities in a Greek form.

Shahīd has stated that ‘the Greek suffix *ēnos* is used to form ethnic adjectives from geographical names.’²³ While this is true, it is not exclusively so, and in Syria, Arabia, and elsewhere, the suffix was also used in other ways,²⁴ one of which was to form gentilics from Semitic tribal names. The *Θαμουδηνοί of the Rawwāfah inscription and Ptolemy’s Θαμυδηνοί (VI.7.21) are the most obvious cases in this context, but Ptolemy has many other names of tribes formed in this way,²⁵ and the Greek inscriptions of Syria in the Roman period provide many examples of such tribal names which are dependent on the word φυλή ‘tribe’ and which cannot be connected with the names of any known places.²⁶ On the other hand, it is difficult to find parallels for the use of this ending attached to words describing practitioners of a way-of-life, such as nomadism. I shall return to this below.

There is also the question of the origin of the *a* between the *r* and the *k* in the

²⁰ Musil 1927: 494.

²¹ See Macdonald 1992a: 4ff.

²² See Adams 2003: 264–268; and Kaimio 1979: 85, 129.

²³ Shahīd 1997: 28.

²⁴ See the list in O’Connor 1986: 616–617, n. 10.

²⁵ For instance, to take those in the ‘vicinity’ of his Σαρακηνοί: the Σιδηνοί (VI.7.4), Αὐῖδηνοί/Οὐῖδηνοί, (VI.7.21) Ληηνοί/Λαικηνοί (VI.7.22), etc., etc.

²⁶ See the list in Sartre 1982a: 79–82.

Greek and Latin forms. Tentatively, I would suggest the following, though this can be no more than an hypothesis. If the etymology I have suggested is correct, the Semitic word behind the terms Σαρακηνοί / *Saraceni* would have been a nominal formation from the root S²-R-Q of the pattern *faʿāl* or more likely *faʿʿāl* which is commonly used in Arabic and Aramaic for denoting occupational titles.²⁷ Thus **s²arāq* or **s²arrāq* would mean ‘one whose occupation it is to migrate to the inner desert’. Many of these formations have a ‘sound plural’ in Arabic, e.g. *najjārūn/īn* ‘carpenters’, *ṭabbāḥūn/īn* ‘cooks’. I would suggest that the term Σαρακηνοί meaning ‘Arabian nomads’ was originally taken into Greek in the plural, from a form such as **s²arāqīn* or **s²arrāqīn*²⁸ meaning ‘those who migrate to the inner desert’. With the addition of the Greek ending *οι*, this then became Σαρακινοί or Σαρακηνοί,²⁹ and from this the singular Σαρακηνός was formed. The apparent *-ηνοι* (< *-īn* + *-οί*) ending would have been interpreted as the gentilic suffix *-ηνοι*, and Σαρακηνοί (< **s²arrāqīn*) may even have been assimilated to the tribe of Σαρακηνοί mentioned by Ptolemy. Thus, the transition from occupational description to ethnonym would have been completed.³⁰

I emphasize again that this proposed development can be no more than a hypothesis, and that unfortunately we do not, as yet, have evidence of the intermediate forms. However, it seems to me to explain satisfactorily how the North Arabian root S²-R-Q meaning ‘to migrate to the inner desert’ *could have* provided the Greek and Latin word for Arabian nomads.

* * *

Graf and O’Connor attempted to derive the term *Saraceni* from the word *šrkt* in the Rawwāfah inscription³¹ which, following Milik, they translate by ‘federation’ and

²⁷ See Brockelmann 1908–1913, i: 360–361, §149: ‘eine in allen Dialekten sehr beliebte Steigerungsform zu *qatāl*. ... Die spezielle Anwendung bei Berufsamen ist ... erst unter aram Einfluß zustande gekommen.’

²⁸ Compare the word “Bedouin” in modern European languages which is said to derive from a colloquial Arabic plural *badawīyīn*. Even if there were case markers in ANA or Old Arabic – and there is no evidence of them – the oblique case in *īn* would be commoner than the nominative (*ūn*) and so more likely to be the basis for a loan, just as in modern European languages, descendants of, and loans from, inflected languages like Greek and Latin very rarely reflect the nominative of the original, unless they are ‘learned’ borrowings, e.g., at random, English ‘font’ < Latin *fons, fontis*, English and French ‘nation’ < Latin *natio, nationis*, etc.

²⁹ The pronunciation of η in *Koinè* Greek would of course have been close to, if not identical to, [i:], and the interchange of ι and η is commonplace. Thus, for instance, the form Σαρακινοί is found in one MS of Ptolemy VI.7.21 (see Ziegler 1998: 102).

³⁰ It is not possible at present to decide whether post-Biblical Hebrew *sarqī*, Talmudic Aramaic *sarqa’y*, *sarqā’ā*, *sarqayy*, and Syriac *sarqāyā* were borrowed from Greek Σαρακηνός and then underwent the normal Hebrew and Aramaic reduction of a short vowel in an open syllable (i.e. **saraqī* > *sarqī/sarqayy*), or whether they were direct loans from an ANA **s²arqiyy* (cf. Bedouin Arabic *šerqiyy*). See further Appendix 1.

³¹ For the site of al-Rawwāfah see Fig. 1. I am most grateful to Laïla Nehmé (UMR 8167 of the CNRS) for kindly allowing me to publish here some of her magnificent photographs of the site and

‘confederation’.³² Shahîd, however, as well as arguing against this etymology,³³ has claimed that ‘a close examination of this inscription revealed that the term *šrkt* was a misreading of *šrbt* (tribe)’.³⁴ This would indeed have been a very neat solution to the apparently odd parallel of *šrkt* in the Nabataean section with ἔθνος in the Greek. Unfortunately, however, it is untenable. There is only one *b* in the Nabataean part of the Rawwāfah inscription and that is in *‘bdt*, the word immediately preceding *šrkt* (see figure 2). It will be seen from the photograph on figure 2 that the *b* is a straight vertical line set on a more or less horizontal line which joins the following letter about a quarter of the way up the stem. By contrast, the *k* in the two examples of *šrkt* (figures 2 and 3, clearest on the latter) is a straight vertical with a short diagonal at its top, which joins the following letter at its base.³⁵

So, it is *šrkt* and its parallel ἔθνος that have to be explained.³⁶ Graf and O’Connor’s theory has received a very mixed reception. In general it has failed to convince Semitists, classicists, and many historians; and rightly so, since it is based on a number of misunderstandings.

First, one may ask whether it is likely that a generalized term for ‘Arabian no-

of the inscription. The Saudi Arabian Deputy Ministry of Antiquities and Museums has now removed the inscriptions from the site, and they are on display in the National Museum, Riyadh. I use the form of the name ‘Rawwāfah’ given in the *Official Standard Names Gazetteer for Saudi Arabia* (under Ar Rawwāfah). On the various spellings see Beaucamp 1979: 1472–1473.

³² In the *editio princeps*, Milik translated *šrkt* by ‘fédération’ without specifying what exactly he meant by this term (1971: 56), but it has generally been taken to mean a tribal confederation by, for instance, Bowersock 1975: 515. Graf and O’Connor suggest that *šrkt* ‘meant “association” in the politically specialized sense of “federation”’ (1977: 65), and though they write of ‘Thamudic confederates’ and ‘the Thamudic confederation’ (*loc. cit.*), they seem to be confusing a tribal confederation with an ‘Arabian political organization’ and even a ‘federal state’ (1977: 66), which are not at all the same thing. See also O’Connor 1986: 603, 605.

³³ Shahîd 1984: 128–131, 138–141.

³⁴ Shahîd 1997: 27 (already foreshadowed in Shahîd 1984: 141).

³⁵ In fact, of course, one would not expect *b* and *k* to have similar forms in the Nabataean script used in Arabia, and it is only very rarely that a writer gives them such forms by using a very archaic shape for *b* together with a later one for *k*. See for instance al-Ḍiyāb 2002: 311, no. 134 line 4 in the word *ktyb*, which is followed immediately by a ‘normal’ *b* in *b-yrh*, and Macdonald in press (a) for a discussion of this feature. The ‘normal’ shape of *b* in inscriptions of the first century AD and later is an arc joining the following letter some way above the base. See, for instance, the Turkmāniyyah inscription (CIS II 350) at Petra, a text in a calligraphic form of the script of comparable quality to that at Rawwāfah, though of almost certainly earlier date.

³⁶ It should be noted that both examples of *šrkt* and both examples of ἔθνος are damaged. In the first example of *šrkt* (see figure 2), the diagonals of the *š* are very faint and the bases of the *r*, *k*, and *t* are lost in a horizontal crack below the letters. Note that the stem of the *r* is crossed by a diagonal line (as are the other examples of *r* in the text). This is presumably a diacritical mark intended to distinguish it from *d*, even though the two letters are already distinguished by the forms of the flourishes at their tops. In the second example (see figure 3) the *t* has been completely destroyed by part of a modern graffito. The first occurrence of ἔθνος in line 2 of text A (see figure 4), is represented solely by two short verticals which Milik interpreted as the initial E, since it follows a word, in which only the tops of the letters survive, but which can be read as ΘΑΜΟΥΔΗΝΩΝ. In the second occurrence, in line 6 (text C, see figure 5), the lower halves of the letters of both ΘΑΜΟΥΔΗΝΩΝ and ΕΘΝΟΣ are missing, but enough can be seen to make Milik’s reading more or less certain.

mads' would be derived from a word meaning, not even 'tribe', but 'confederation'? Anything is possible of course, but, *prima facie*, it seems to me improbable. If we look at the modern nomads of the Middle East, the number of times they refer by name to the *confederation* to which their tribe belongs is minimal. For instance, it is very rare for a Bedouin of the Rwala tribe to identify himself as an 'Anēzī, i.e. a member of the 'Anēzah confederation of which the Rwala are part. Normally, it would only be if he were so far away that even the name 'Rwala' was unfamiliar to his interlocutors. The Arabic terms for the different levels within a tribal group are notoriously fluid, depending on context for their interpretation, and the modern Bedouin do not seem to have a specific term for 'confederation', but instead refer to it as a 'tribe' (qabīla, 'ašīra, etc.).³⁷ See the discussion in appendix 2, below.

This fluidity also existed in antiquity, but in a different way. For, whereas today there are a number of terms which appear to be used interchangeably for different levels of social group (ša'b, ḥayy, qabīla, bdīda, 'ašīra, faḥd, baṭn, etc.), in antiquity a single word, 'l, was used indiscriminately for all levels from family to nation. This is the only word for social group in the Taymanitic, Hismaic, Hasaitic, and Nabataean inscriptions, and by far the commonest in Thamudic B and Safaitic.³⁸ In Taymanitic, Hismaic, Hasaitic, and Safaitic, affiliation to social group is frequently given,³⁹ but to the best of my knowledge no separate word for confederation has yet been found. So, even if the concept of a tribal 'confederation' existed in the second century AD, it would almost certainly have been designated by the word 'l, and if it was designated by a separate word such as *šrkt*, it is difficult to see how such a word would be in sufficiently common usage to develop into a general term for 'Arabian nomads'. After all, it would have to have had general currency with this meaning in a Semitic language, such as Aramaic, Ancient North Arabian [ANA], or Old Arabic, before it was adopted into Greek and Latin.⁴⁰

Secondly, it is philologically very unlikely that the word *šrkt* would appear in Greek as Σαρακηνοί. Although there are a few exceptions, Semitic /k/ is regularly transliterated into Greek by χεῖ not κάππα. Had *šrkt* been a word in common use in the languages with which Greek-speakers came into contact – and it would surely have had to have been widespread for it to have become a general term for 'Arabian nomads' – one might have expected an occasional aberrant spelling with κάππα but the norm would have been the transcription with χεῖ. However, as far as I know, a spelling *Σαρακηνος has never been found.

Another problem is the final *-t* in *šrkt*. O'Connor says 'it may be worth noting that we assume the usual lenition of feminine singular *-t*.'⁴¹ But this is a false assumption. In the second century AD, the final *-t* on feminine nouns and adjectives,

³⁷ See, for instance, Henninger 1943: 134–135, and the large number of references he cites.

³⁸ There are a handful of instances of the word 'hl in Safaitic and Thamudic B, but the difference between 'l and 'hl is not clear from the contexts. Today *ahl* can refer to a family or to a confederation, depending on context. See Henninger 1943: 135; and compare Musil 1928: 47–48 with 49–50.

³⁹ Less often in Thamudic B, and Nabataean, but there are a number of cases in each.

⁴⁰ See Appendix 2.

⁴¹ O'Connor 1986: 617, n. 10.

nouns of unity, some broken plurals, etc. was clearly pronounced, in all positions, in ANA⁴² and, as far as we can tell, in Old Arabic. The first graphic evidence of the dropping of final [t] in pause in Arabic (i.e. *tā' marbūṭah*) is in the Jabal Usays graffito of AD 528, where it is represented by *-h*.⁴³ This is obviously far too late to support O'Connor's argument. Moreover, in Aramaic, which is an equally – perhaps more – likely vector for the Semitic word behind Σαρακηνοί, the [t] would have been present in the emphatic and construct states, which are far more common than the absolute in which it would be absent, and are therefore far more likely to have furnished a loan.

However, at the root of Graf and O'Connor's proposed etymology of the term *Saracen* is their unquestioning acceptance of Milik's translation of *šrkt* as 'fédération'. Laila Nehmé's excellent photographs (figures 2 and 3) show that the reading *šrkt* is almost certainly correct, and it was clear from the first that it was intended to be the parallel term to ἔθνος in the Greek text. But if ἔθνος in the Greek had been used in the sense of 'nation' (as Milik translates it), 'tribe', or 'confederation', then *šrkt* would be a very curious word to use as its equivalent.⁴⁴ For the Arabic root ŠRK means 'to share, to enter into an agreement or partnership voluntarily for a common purpose'.⁴⁵ It does not imply the sort of group into which one is born, and of which one is therefore an involuntary member, such as a nation, people, or tribe. Even interpreting *šrkt* as 'confederation' does not get round this problem. For analogy with the Bedouin of the present and recent past – which is the only guide we have – shows quite clearly that, whatever the political realities of tribal politics in Arabia, they are always perceived and expressed in genealogical terms (see appendix 2). Thus a tribal confederation is a group into which one is considered to have been 'born', not a voluntary association one has joined. The word *šarika* is used by the Bedouin of today, but it refers to share-cropping agreements with the sedentaries which, as one would expect, are thought of as partnerships entered into voluntarily. Thus, whatever the Θαμουδιωνῶν ἔθνος / *šrkt tmwdw* referred to, it is unlikely to have been a tribe or a confederation, and was almost certainly a more restricted and specialized group.

⁴² See Macdonald 2004: 498.

⁴³ Before the Jabal Usays inscription, there are no examples of final /t/ in pause (i.e. in positions where it would not be pronounced in Classical Arabic) in the 'pure Old Arabic' texts (see Macdonald 2000: 50) known so far. By contrast, there are several examples of final /t/ in pause represented by *t* in 'Undifferentiated North Arabian' texts (see Macdonald 2000: 54–57), e.g. *mdknt* in Ja 2122 (possibly third century BC, see conveniently Robin 1991: 115), the tribal name *'hknt* in Ghoneim AfO 27, 1980, fig. 10 (possibly third century BC, see Robin 1991: 114), and the name and patronymic in the tomb inscription of *M'wyt bn Rb't* (possibly first century AD, see Robin 1991: 121). There is thus no evidence for the 'lenition' of final [t] in ANA or Old Arabic before the sixth century AD.

⁴⁴ Already in 1979, Sartre had commented that the term 'fédération employé par Milik, s'il traduit bien *šrkt*, ne convient guère à *ethnos*' (1981: 84). Graf (1997: xii) has claimed that I am 'in essential agreement with [his and O'Connor's] interpretation of *šrkt* as "confederation".' This is a misunderstanding of pp. 96–98 of the original French version of this paper (see note *), where I clearly said the opposite.

⁴⁵ Lane 1541b–1543b.

What then is the meaning of *śrkt*, and indeed of ἔθνος, in the Rawwāfah inscription? I would tentatively suggest the following. In a famous inscription found in the village of Tarba in the Jabal al-‘Arab in southern Syria, we read that it was set up in honour of a Roman governor, whose name is now lost, by people who describe themselves simply as οἱ ἀπὸ ἔθνους νομάδων.⁴⁶ To take the last two words literally as meaning ‘nations [even ‘tribes’] of nomads’ produces a singularly vague self-description, particularly in a context where one might imagine that the donors would want the governor to recognize, and reward, their action. As I have pointed out elsewhere,⁴⁷ it is also a very strange self-designation. For nomads do not perceive or describe their identity in terms of whether they are nomads or sedentaries, anymore than a group of farmers would set up an inscription in which they called themselves a ‘nation of sedentaries’. The ancient nomads of the desert east of the Hawrān (and elsewhere), like the modern Bedouin, expressed their identity, not in terms of their way-of-life, but by their membership of various levels of genealogically-based groups, as we know from the tens of thousands of Safaitic graffiti they carved. Just as a modern Bedouin identifies himself by his genealogy and his membership of such-and-such a sub-tribe or tribe, so in all the Safaitic, Hismaic and Thamudic inscriptions, which consist very largely of self-identifications, no word for ‘nomad’ has yet been found. Instead their authors identify themselves by their genealogies and their membership of social groups of varying size.⁴⁸

As is well-known, the term ἔθνος implies a group of people united in some way, and does not have to mean ‘nation’ or ‘tribe’. It has been used of orders of priests⁴⁹ and trade-associations,⁵⁰ and could surely be used of a military unit.⁵¹ There is an interesting parallel to this in Pseudo-Hyginus’ *De munitioibus castrorum*, a work which is probably to be dated to the reign of Marcus Aurelius, i.e. the very period of the Rawwāfah Inscription, or possibly somewhat earlier.⁵² Pseudo-Hyginus uses the term *natio* (the literal Latin equivalent of Greek ἔθνος) for military units drawn from particular ethnic groups.⁵³ It should be noted that he includes Palmyrenes

⁴⁶ Wadd 2203 = IGRR III.1254.

⁴⁷ Macdonald 1993: 375.

⁴⁸ Macdonald 1993: 352–354, 370–371, 375–376.

⁴⁹ OIGS 90, line 17 (second century BC).

⁵⁰ *P.Petrie* III.32 (f), line 2, and see commentary pp. 67–68, and *P.Köln* VI.260, line 3 (both third century BC).

⁵¹ Sartre has already implied this à propos of Wadd 2203 ‘l’expression οἱ ἀπὸ ἔθνους νομάδων désigne sans doute des soldats recrutés parmi les nomades’ (1982b: 124). See also Sartre 2001: 785–786, n. 233; 2005: 490, n. 237.

⁵² See Birley 1988a [first published 1952]: 8–9 (‘it seems possible to assign the tract with some confidence to the middle years of the reign of Marcus Aurelius’); Speidel 1975: 206 (‘Since the discovery of the inscription AE 1956, 124 at Diana Vetera/Numidia, however, it [*scil.* Pseudo-Hyginus] can be used with confidence, since that text assigns it unequivocally to the years A.D. 170–175...’, but see Frere 1980: 54 on this). For other views, see Lenoir 1979: 111–133 (the reign of Trajan); Frere 1980 (the reign of Domitian), and Miller and DeVoto 1994: 62 (c. AD 110). These earlier dates would in no way rule out the hypothesis put forward here. See Birley’s suggested reconciliation of the varying dates in Birley 1988b [first published in 1982], summarized in 1988a: n. 9.

⁵³ Pseudo-Hyginus, *De munitioibus castrorum* §29, and §§19, 43. See also Speidel 1975: 206–208. I am most grateful to Roger Tomlin for alerting me to this reference, and for his very helpful

among these, and that he assumes that some of the *nationes* will have camels, which suggests that these may have been drawn from among the nomads.⁵⁴

Speidel has some very interesting speculations on the nature of the *nationes*, which it is worth quoting at length:⁵⁵

Hyginus (§19; 43), speaking of *symmacharii et reliquae nationes*, was aware of two categories of *nationes*:

- 1) allies (*symmacharii*)
- 2) *nationes*, named, but without any further description.

... the *nationes* listed here [in Pseudo-Hyginus §29] clearly correspond to a somewhat regular form of national unit.... They may be the *exercitum gentibus imperatum* of the conjecture in Hyginus' §2, i.e. not free allies, and therefore more structured along Roman lines. The term 'regular *nationes*' thus might suit them best.

The other category of Hyginus' *nationes*, the *symmacharii*, are very difficult to define. Inasmuch as they differ from the regular *nationes* they might be a motley of units: provincial militias, free, or treaty-bound temporary allies, contingents imposed on defeated enemies, turn-coat prisoners-of-war, mercenaries, etc, groups that might or might not become permanent or regular units. There is little doubt that the term *nationes* used for both categories several times by Hyginus (§19; 29; 43) belonged to the technical army language. MOMMSEN'S objection against this inference was that the word *nationes* does not occur on inscriptions; however, there was little occasion for it, since military inscriptions usually list units individually, not collectively, and least of all these rather different national units. Epigraphically, therefore, the *symmacharii* and *reliquae nationes* are likely to appear as *numeri*, *vexillationes*, *milites*, *equites*, etc.

The importance of this is that the ethnic units, whether qualified by one of the terms discussed, or just by their ethnic name,⁵⁶ might differ far more from each other than has been assumed up to now. ...

... Each unit must be judged on its own in such matters as origin, recruitment, composition, strength, organization, command, pay, conditions of service, permanence, status, tactical function, etc. ... While some groups of them, such as the regular *nationes*, certainly shared some common characteristics, other units, even of the same tribes, may have followed quite different patterns and played vastly different roles

If, therefore, the word ἔθνος in the Tarba and Rawwāfah inscriptions means a unit

advice. Naturally, he is in no way responsible for the results.

⁵⁴ Pseudo-Hyginus §29.

⁵⁵ Speidel 1975: 206–208.

⁵⁶ As with the *nationes* listed by Hyginus (§29) *Palmyreni, Gaesati, Daci, Brittones, Cantabri*, and, if I am correct, the Θαμουδινηών ἔθνος / *šrkt tmwdw* of the Rawwāfah inscription.

similar to the *natio* in Pseudo-Hyginus, it could explain the apparent vagueness of the term ἔθνος νομάδων, for this would be the title given to a unit by a military bureaucracy made up of sedentaries for whom the tribal affiliations of the unit's members were of less interest than the fact that they were nomads who could provide particular skills. This would also help explain the phrase παρε[μ]βολῶν [v]ομάδω[v] in another Greek inscription⁵⁷ which must surely mean 'squadrons of nomads', rather than 'campements nomades' as it has been translated.⁵⁸ The attitudes behind such names of units would be similar to those behind the names of their modern equivalents such as the 'Arab Legion' or the 'Desert Patrol'.

Contact with the areas under Roman control is mentioned quite often in the Safaitic inscriptions, though usually in vague and (to us) enigmatic terms.⁵⁹ However, the phrase παρεμβολῶν νομάδων is paralleled in one Safaitic text, by a man who describes himself, not simply by his tribal group, but as 'a horseman in the squadron of the tribe of 'mrt' (*b-ms'rt 'l 'mrt frs'*). The word which I have translated 'squadron' is *ms'rt* which occurs a number of times in Safaitic and up to now has been translated as 'camp' on the basis of Syriac *mašrītā*, despite the fact that this has never given very satisfactory sense. However, *mašrītā* can, of course, also mean 'troop' or 'squadron', and in this it is an exact parallel to Greek παρεμβολή which it translates, in both senses, in the Syriac versions of the Bible.⁶⁰

Thus, if ἔθνος in the Rawwāfah inscription means a military unit, the Greek equivalent of *natio* in Pseudo-Hyginus, the interpretation of *šrkt* becomes much clearer. For the meaning 'to share, to enter into an agreement or partnership voluntarily for a common purpose' is eminently appropriate for such a body. I would therefore suggest that Θαμουδηῶν ἔθνος and *šrkt tmwdw* in the Rawwāfah inscription do not refer to a 'nation' or 'confederation' of Thamūd, but to a military unit bearing the name of, and presumably originally drawn from, this tribe.

* * *

Milik read the final word of the Nabataean text as *wrmšhm*, and there is support for this on Nehmé's excellent photograph (figure 6). He interpreted *rmš* from Arabic *ramaša bayna* 'to make peace between', regarding it as an Arabic loan word in Nabataean Aramaic. However, the problem with this interpretation is that here *rmš* is not followed by *bayna* but by the enclitic third person plural pronoun *-hm*. This makes the translation 'and made peace between them' impossible. Milik himself recognized this problem and tried to get round it by suggesting that here the verb was 'transitif, donc à la 2e conjugaison (Pa'el), dans son emploi causatif'.⁶¹ But

⁵⁷ PUAES III. 752. It is the gravestone of a στρατη[γ]ός παρε[μ]βολῶν [v]ομάδω[v], which the editors translate by "general of (the) armies of (the) nomads".

⁵⁸ For instance, by Sartre 1982b: 124. See Macdonald 1993: 374–375.

⁵⁹ See Macdonald 1993: 328–334.

⁶⁰ For a fuller discussion see Macdonald 1993: 374.

⁶¹ Milik 1971: 57.

no such form of the root R-M-Ş with this meaning is attested in either Arabic or Aramaic. The Arabic lexica explain *ramaşa bayna ʿl-qawm* by *ʿaşlaḥa* [*al-ʿamr*] *bayna ʿl-qawm* ‘he rectified [the circumstances] between the people or party’, or ‘he made peace / an agreement / reconciliation / harmony between the people or party.’⁶² Consequently, a hypothetical causative of this verb, with the 3rd person plural enclitic pronoun, would have to mean ‘he caused them to be peacemakers (between two other parties)’. Even in this case, *bayna* and an indirect object would be needed, and it is exactly these which are missing in this inscription.

However, *Lisān al-ʿarab* does give a transitive meaning for *ramaşa*, viz.: ‘to seek, desire, ask, for (something)’.⁶³ The form in the text would then be the *maşḍār* (verbal noun), *ramş^{an}*, and *wa-ramş-hum* would mean ‘and at their request’. This would give a translation of the end of the Nabataean section as follows: ‘by the efforts ... Antistius Adventus, the governor [*lacuna* of approximately 10 letters] and at their request.’ I would suggest that these small changes to the interpretation make much better sense of the inscription.

* * *

It has always seemed to me a very curious action for a tribe of nomads to build a beautifully constructed temple⁶⁴ in the middle of the desert, and to dedicate it to the Roman Emperors. It is also difficult to envisage the circumstances in which a Roman provincial governor, based in Bosra, would be called in to make peace between warring sections of a tribe in an area of desert hundreds of kilometres away from the productive part of the province, as Milik’s interpretation of the final word would require.⁶⁵

On the other hand, the construction of a temple under the auspices of the provincial governor, with a dedication to the emperors, which would be inexplicable in a tribe unconnected with the Roman state, would be a perfectly reasonable action on behalf of a military unit in the service of Rome. Indeed, the temple would be a symbol of the unit’s incorporation into the imperial system, in which the worship of the local deity, presumably *ʿlh*,⁶⁶ was deliberately associated with its allegiance to Rome.

If this interpretation is correct, there would be an interesting parallel to the

⁶² *Lisān* 7: 43b; see also Lane 1714c s.v. *şalaḥa* IV.

⁶³ *Lisān* 7: 43b where *ramaşa ʿl-şayʿ* is glossed as *ṭalaba-hu*, *lamasa-hu*.

⁶⁴ On the form and construction of the temple see Parr, Harding, and Dayton 1968–1969: 215–219.

⁶⁵ Milik is anyway wrong in his assumption that nomadic or semi-nomadic societies ‘étaient d’ordinaire en état de guerre entre elles’ (1971: 57). This is a misunderstanding born of a very widespread assumption among anthropologists and historians that nomads were incurably aggressive, which is based on misinterpretations of the ancient evidence and early modern ethnographic data.

⁶⁶ Another inscription from the same site, to which Milik gave the siglum CIS II 3642a, records that a priest of *ʿlh* built a sanctuary (Milik 1971: 57–58). This is also now on display in the National Museum, Riyadh. An excellent photograph of it was published in *An Introduction to Saudi Arabian Antiquities* (Riyadh: Department of Antiquities and Museums, 1975): 92.

building of the temple at Rawwāfah by an ethnic unit of the Roman army. This is a Latin inscription from Micia/Dacia Apulensis dated AD 204⁶⁷ which records that the ethnic unit of *Mauri Micienses*, together with their prefect, restored the *templum deorum patriorum* which had fallen into disrepair. The combination of the standard phraseology *pro salute dd nn inuictissimor(um) Imp(eratorum)*... and the dedication of a temple to their native ancestral gods, makes a striking parallel with the texts at Rawwāfah.⁶⁸

There remains the possible objection that if the Rawwāfah Inscription is a dedication on behalf of a Roman military unit then one would expect it to have been framed in Latin rather than Greek. In his fascinating book *Bilingualism and the Latin Language*, J.N. Adams has countered in great detail the ‘persistent misconception ... that Latin was the “official” language of the [Roman] army’.⁶⁹ Fergus Millar also emphasizes ‘the centrality of Greek as the primary language of communication throughout the Roman Near East.’⁷⁰ Adams says of the army’s attitude to the choice of whether to use Greek or Latin in official documents in Greek-speaking areas, ‘the policy is subtle and not at all doctrinaire.’⁷¹ Elsewhere, he summarizes his detailed analysis of language use in the Roman army in the East as follows:

We have questioned the common belief that Latin was in a sweeping sense the ‘official’ language of the army. ... Greek is constantly used rather than or as well as Latin in documents which are formal or official in content. The same type of document may appear now in Latin and now in Greek, and it is necessary therefore to allow a certain amount of discretion in language choice to record keepers, scribes and others in military communities. ... Latin was available to confer particular authority on the user or to symbolise Roman military identity in the most potent way or to underline under special circumstances the Romanness of the institution. In other words it was capable of use as a super-high language ... if the user felt that such symbolism was appropriate to the circumstances. The need felt to symbolise Romanness or power will have depended on the attitudes of the participants in a particular transaction and on other extraneous circumstances which we cannot know, and for that reason it is not possible simply to list mechanically documents which had to be in Latin as against those which could be in Greek. Language choice has to be seen as dynamic rather than mechanical, in the sense that it was related to the relationships being negotiated on particular occasions between writer/speaker and addressee.⁷²

⁶⁷ *L'Année Épigraphique* 1944, no. 74. See Speidel 1975: 209.

⁶⁸ It is true that there are also differences. This temple of the Mauri was not in their native land but in an area in which they had long been stationed. Whether there was a similar temple in Micia, the region from which the original members of the unit were presumably drawn, is not known. The fact that the Rawwāfah inscription is in Greek while the Dacian one is in Latin, does not seem to be significant given the language use of the army in these two areas of the empire (see below).

⁶⁹ Adams 2003: 599.

⁷⁰ Millar 2006: 224.

⁷¹ Adams 2003: 633.

⁷² Adams 2003: 760–761.

It is therefore not particularly surprising that the inscription at Rawwāfah is in Greek. As Glen Bowersock has said ‘The Rawwāfah text comes from a temple, and in a region where Greek was the imperial language outside of legionary quarters. It would naturally be used for the dedication of a temple along with the local Semitic language.’⁷³ Adams suggests that in Egypt:

In their relationship to the emperor it would seem that soldiers felt impelled to adopt a Latin-speaking persona. There must have been pressure to symbolise the Romanness of the institution to which they belonged when addressing the supreme Roman authority.⁷⁴

However, in the Provinces of Syria and Arabia it would seem that even this pressure could vary, and there are numerous dedications to the emperor(s) by military personnel, in Greek⁷⁵ rather than Latin.

Speidel has suggested that in the mid-third century new cavalry units, called simply *equites*, began to be drawn from the old *nationes*.⁷⁶ If my hypothesis is correct, it is possible therefore that the **natio thamudenorum* (= Θαμουδηνῶν ἔθνος = *šrkt tmwdw*) may eventually have given rise to the *Equites Saraceni Thamudeni* and the *Equites Thamudeni Illyriciani* mentioned in the *Notitia Dignitatum*.⁷⁷

⁷³ Personal communication (23rd February, 2007). This may well explain why the Rawwāfah inscription, out in the desert of the former Nabataean kingdom, is in Greek, while the military construction inscription from the centre of Ḥegrā is in Latin (al-Talhi and al-Daire 2005), as are those set up by units of the Roman army on the island of Farasān al-Kubrā, at the southern end of the Red Sea (see Villeneuve, Phillips, and Facey 2004, and the improved reading, plus a second inscription, in Villeneuve 2005–2006). In his study of *The Romans and the Greek Language*, Kaimio observes that in ‘inscriptions that are connected with public works’ in the eastern provinces ‘the dominant language is clearly Latin’, as at Ḥegrā, though there is still a minority of such texts in Greek. ‘The situation seems to be the reverse of that which applies to the honorary inscriptions, in which Latin fell into disuse outside the Roman colonies in the second century A.D.’ (1979: 82–83). Farasān, like Dacia, was well outside the area where Greek was the vehicular language, so it is to be expected that the military inscriptions there would be in Latin. Unfortunately, at present the original contexts of the Ḥegrā and Farasān inscriptions are unclear.

⁷⁴ Adams 2003: 615.

⁷⁵ See Kaimio 1979: 82: in ‘honorary inscriptions erected to Emperors or the Imperial family by eastern cities ... Greek is the dominant language.’ To take only a few examples of inscriptions roughly comparable to that of Rawwāfah: IGRR III 1128 [= PUAES III 652] an inscribed lintel from the Tychaion at Aere/al-Šanamēn dated AD 191. It is a dedication to the Emperor Commodus recording that a centurion, probably of the III Legion Gallica, completed the precinct of the Tychaion using money raised by taxes. PUAES III 155, from Šalkhad, was set up in AD 169–170, i.e. shortly after the Rawwāfah inscription, in honour of Marcus Aurelius by the Consular Legate of Syria, Avidius Cassius. IGRR III 1261 [= Wadd 2212 = AAES III 380a] set up c. AD 171 in Nela/Meshannaf by the same Consular Legate and a centurion. IGRR III 1117 [= Wadd 2526], from Phaena/Mismiah, a dedication to the emperor by a centurion of the VI Legion Flavia Firma. See also IGRR III 1113, 1116, AAES III 358, 392, etc.

⁷⁶ Speidel 1975: 222ff.

⁷⁷ Seeck 1876: 59, Or XXVIII.17: *Equites Saraceni Thamudeni*; 73, Or. XXXIV.22: *Equites Thamudeni Illyriciani*. See Speidel 1975: 223ff., 228–230.

Appendix 1: Arabian and Aramaic sibilants

Mordtmann states that the post-Biblical Hebrew form *sarqī* in the Talmud derives from a North Arabian⁷⁸ root S¹-R-Q (rather than S²-R-Q). However, this is based on the assumption that the North Arabian and Hebrew words are *cognates* (Biblical Hebrew /s/ = North Arabian etymological /s¹/). But it is surely much more likely that the Hebrew word is borrowed from the Aramaic forms *sarqayy*, *sarqāyā*⁷⁹, which, I have suggested, were themselves loans from North Arabian.

In Talmudic Aramaic, as in most Aramaic dialects (with the exception of Nabataean)⁷⁹, the sound shift /š/ > /s/ had taken place by the early centuries AD, and in Post-Biblical Hebrew (in contrast to the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible) a similar shift also occurred sporadically, probably under the influence of Aramaic pronunciation. On the other hand, in ANA (and Arabic up to the ninth century) it is clear that etymological /s/+š/ (= ANA /s¹/, later Arabic *sīn*) was pronounced as something approaching [ʃ], and that etymological /š/ (= ANA /s²/, later Arabic *šīn*) was pronounced as something approaching [ʃ] or [ç].⁸⁰ Thus, the sound of North Arabian /s²/ would not have resembled that of either of the phonemes represented by *semkath* or *šīn* in Talmudic Aramaic and those who first wrote it down in Aramaic had to choose between two approximations.

It should be remembered that any loan from North Arabian to another language in the early centuries AD would have been an *oral* not a written one. The ANA alphabets were used largely by nomads⁸¹ and would have been of little interest to sedentaries in the Roman Near East, while Old Arabic was a purely spoken language until the fifth, or even the sixth century, and was only written on exceptional occasions, in scripts normally used for other languages.⁸²

I would suggest that since the sound of North Arabian /s¹/ was close to (if not identical to) that of Aramaic *šīn*, it would be natural to represent North Arabian /s²/ by the only alternative, *semkath*. If it was a learned borrowing, say by Rabbis, there may even have been an awareness that *semkath* in Aramaic also represented the etymological phoneme /š/ — which had fallen under /s/ — the cognate of North Arabian /s²/ . No doubt, the apparent similarity to post-Biblical Hebrew *s^erāq* “barrenness”, would also have seemed to support this spelling.

⁷⁸ Mordtmann 1934: 156b. On the dialect bundle ‘North Arabian’ (= Ancient North Arabian and Arabic), see Macdonald 2000: 29–30. I have used the signs s¹ and s² to avoid confusion, since the pronunciation of the phonemes represented in Arabic by *sīn* and *šīn* changed some time after the ninth century AD (see Macdonald 2000: 45–46). /s¹/ is the reflex of Proto-Semitic /s/ + /š/ and is represented in the Arabic script by *sīn*. /s²/ is the reflex of Proto-Semitic /š/ and is represented in the Arabic script by *šīn*.

⁷⁹ See Macdonald 2000: 45, fig. 5.

⁸⁰ See Macdonald 2004: 499.

⁸¹ The only ANA alphabets used habitually by sedentaries were Taymanitic, which had died out well before the Roman period, and Dadanitic, the dating of which is at present impossible see, Macdonald in press (b), but which was anyway geographically too remote to be relevant.

⁸² See Macdonald 2008: 464–466.

Appendix 2: Confederations and *ḥilf*

Much of the discussion of the word *šrkt* in the Rawwāfah inscription has centred around the words ‘fédération’⁸³ and ‘confederation’,⁸⁴ without any definition of the meaning of such terms in the context of the ancient nomads of Arabia, or indeed of the modern Bedouin.

The term ‘confederation’ is used by Western scholars to describe a supra-tribal social group containing a number of tribes. In practice, there are two types. In one, such as the ‘Anēza or the Āl Murra, the links between the tribes within the confederation are expressed in terms of descent from a common ancestor, regardless of the actual process by which the groupings came about.⁸⁵ In the other, such as the Ḍaḡfir, each element ‘retains a tradition of its original connection with some other group within the Arabian peninsula.’⁸⁶

The modern Bedouin do not seem to have a specific term for either type,⁸⁷ referring to a confederation simply as a tribe or tribes (*qabīla*, etc.), and membership of it simply as *beni ‘ammeh* (also *beni al-‘amm*, *beni‘am* or *ben‘ame*),⁸⁸ a term used of ‘blood relationship’, referring to the phrase *ibn al-‘amm* (literally ‘paternal first cousin’), the term also used for the smallest kinship group within which every member is jurally responsible for the actions of every other.⁸⁹ This genealogical term is even extended to some forms of temporary alliances between unrelated tribes, when they bestow on each other the ‘right of kinship’, *ḥaqq al-beni‘am*.⁹⁰ Thus, even the second type of confederation, in which the constituent tribes are not considered to share a common ancestor, is referred to by terms (*qabīla*, etc.) which *do* imply genealogical relationships.

The *agreement* by which tribes come together in a temporary or indefinite alliance, pact, or confederation can be known today, as it was in late antiquity, as *ḥilf* (literally ‘covenant’).⁹¹ But, *contra* Shahīd,⁹² while a *ḥilf* agreement may ultimately

⁸³ Milik’s translation of *šrkt* (1971: 56).

⁸⁴ Graf and O’Connor 1977: 65.

⁸⁵ ‘For practical, everyday purposes the only supra-tribal grouping that is recognized is the confederation and this is thought of in genealogical terms’ (Lancaster 1981: 24). See also Musil, ‘all the tribes and all the clans of the ‘Anēze, in the opinion of the Rwala, have a common father and therefore are their *beni al‘amm*, their paternal cousins’ (1928: 46).

⁸⁶ Ingham 1986: 33.

⁸⁷ See, for instance, Lancaster ‘there is no word in general use for “confederation”; the Rwala refer to the Aneze confederation either by name or as “the tribes of the Aneze” ‘ (1981: 28); see also note 93 below on the Ḍaḡfir.

⁸⁸ Musil 1928: 46–47. Note that the variation between ‘amm and ‘am in these terms is taken from Musil.

⁸⁹ See Musil 1928: 46–47. However, see Lancaster 1981: 28–30 on some of the complexities in the use of this term.

⁹⁰ Musil 1928: 47.

⁹¹ See Tyan 1979 for a discussion of the different types of *ḥilf* in the pre-Islamic period, and Ingham 1986: 34–35 for an example of its operation today. As far as I know, we have no record of the word before the seventh century AD.

⁹² Shahīd 1984: 139. O’Connor (1986: 617, n. 11) tries to counter Shahīd’s suggestion by point-

result in the formation of a confederation, it is not itself the normal term for a ‘confederation’.⁹³

Shahîd has also suggested that if *šrkt* had meant ‘confederation’ its Greek parallel would have been something like *συνμαχία*.⁹⁴ It will be obvious that I do not believe that *šrkt* means ‘confederation’, any more than Shahîd did, but nor do I agree with the assumption behind Shahîd’s suggestion, *viz.* that the Greek text is a translation of the Nabataean. Indeed, the fact that the Greek word *ναός* has been borrowed into the Nabataean text as *nws*, and especially that Greek *κοσμοκράτορες* has been rendered in the Nabataean text by a participial phrase *mtm[ky]n̄ l̄-[k]l̄ [ʾ]l̄[m*’ (‘those who hold firmly the whole world’), would surely suggest that the translation was in the other direction.⁹⁵ It also seems to me very doubtful that those who commissioned the Greek text would have been interested in the technical distinction between a tribe and a confederation.

Appendix 3: Supposed examples of *šrkt* / *s²rk* in other ancient Semitic languages

Milik mentioned⁹⁶, and later discussed,⁹⁷ a supposed example of *šrkt* in a Hatran graffito from Assur. However, no photograph of this text was ever published, and Milik constructed his reading from ‘la traduction, assortie de quelques citations de mots et de phrases araméennes’ by a process of trying to ‘second-guess’ what the original editor might have seen on the stone. On top of this, he then arbitrarily restored (as a *k*) a letter which the original editor had been unable to read (all this with no photograph or facsimile) and produced the word *šr[k]t* which he translated ‘thiase’. O’Connor described this as ‘a breathtaking tour de force’ and accepted Milik’s reconstruction.⁹⁸ I would echo the adjective, though not the noun, and would question the value of such an exercise, which certainly does not provide evidence

ing out that the root Ḥ-L-F is not widely attested in Ancient South Arabian. This is hardly surprising since *ḥilf* is basically an institution of nomadic communities, while the vocabulary in the dictionaries of Ancient South Arabian he was consulting comes entirely from the monumental inscriptions of a settled society.

⁹³ Note that while Ingham writes that ‘ḥilf (“confederation”) ... can be used to describe a composite tribe like the Dhafir or to describe larger political confederations crossing tribal boundaries such as the Dhafir–Shammar–‘Awāzīm pact for mutual defence against raiding’, a few lines later he reverts to the normal usage writing that ‘the Dhafir “tribe” gibīla is composed of the following “tribes” gubāyil’ (1986: 34–35).

⁹⁴ Shahîd 1984: 139–140.

⁹⁵ This would suggest that, in this case, the Nabataean is a more or less faithful translation of the Greek, rather than the more common type of bilingual consisting of ‘“complementary” versions’ in which ‘the drafter gave different types of information to the different categories of readers’ (Adams 2003: 250).

⁹⁶ Milik 1971: 57.

⁹⁷ Milik 1972: 338–339.

⁹⁸ O’Connor 1986: 609.

of ‘*šrkt* in a Hatran text from Parthian Assur’.⁹⁹

O’Connor was also misled by Jamme into thinking that a word **s²rk* occurs in a Safaitic inscription recorded by Littmann at al-‘Īsāwī, in southern Syria (LP 407).¹⁰⁰ This was achieved by Jamme’s emending a *y* in Littmann’s copy to a *k*, for no apparent reason except to create this word. This text was re-found, photographed, and will be republished, by the Safaitic Epigraphic Survey Programme which has made a comprehensive record of the inscriptions and rock-drawings at al-‘Īsāwī, and it is clear on the original that the letter is a *y*, not *k*.

By contrast, in his treatment of ISB 58, Jamme was correct to read the final word as a *šbk* as against Oxtoby’s *šrk* (*b* and *r* are clearly distinguished in this text), but wrong in reading the previous word as *s²n* rather than *bn*.¹⁰¹ The final sentence of the text clearly reads *w ḥḍr b-s²fr mdbr bn s²bk* which surely means ‘and he camped in an area of permanent water¹⁰² on the edge of the inner desert among numerous wells,¹⁰³ an appropriate description of the area of the Wādī Miqāt, where this text was found, which runs along the border of the basalt *ḥarra* and the limestone inner desert, the *ḥamād*, and has numerous water-sources.

Abbreviations

AAES III	Greek and Latin inscriptions in Prentice 1908.
CIS II	Aramaic inscriptions in <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i> . Pars II. <i>Inscriptiones aramaicas continens</i> . Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1889–1954.
IGRR III	Greek inscriptions in Cagnat and Lafaye 1906.
ISB	Safaitic inscriptions in Oxtoby 1968.
Ja 2122	Inscription published in Jamme 1967: 181–183.
Lane	E.W. Lane, <i>An Arabic-English Lexicon, Derived from the Best and Most Copious Eastern Sources</i> . London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–1893.
<i>Lisān</i>	Muḥammad b. al-Mukarram Ibn Manzūr, <i>Lisān al-‘Arab</i> . (15 volumes). Bayrut: Dār Ṣāder / Dār Bayrut, 1955–1956.
LP	Safaitic inscriptions in Littmann 1943.
OIGS	Greek inscriptions in Dittenberger 1903–1905.
<i>P.Köln</i> VI.260	Papyrus in Gronewald <i>et al.</i> 1987.
<i>P.Petrie</i> III.32	Papyrus in Mahaffy and Smyly 1905.
PUAES III.	Greek and Latin inscriptions in Littmann, Magie, and Stuart 1907–1921.
Wadd	Greek and Latin inscriptions in Waddington 1870.

⁹⁹ O’Connor 1986: 608.

¹⁰⁰ O’Connor 1986: 609–610.

¹⁰¹ Jamme 1971: 284.

¹⁰² Cf. Arabic *ḥaḍāra*, see Macdonald 1992b: 29 and 39, n. 62.

¹⁰³ Cf. Arabic *šibāk*, plural of *šabakah*, see the descriptions in Lane 1498a–b.

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Figure 1. The site of al-Ruwāfah, from the east-north-east. The temple is right of centre. (Photograph Laila Nehmé).



Figure 2. The words *dy 'bdt šrkt tmwdw qdmȳ* in the Nabataean section of the Rawwāfah inscription. (Photograph Laila Nehmé).



Figure 3. The words ...*wḏw qḏmṯ šrkt-ḥm l-mḥw*' in the Nabataean section of the Rawwāfah inscription. (Photograph Laïla Nehmé).



Figure 4. The first occurrence of ἔθνος in the Rawwāfah inscription. Parts of lines 1, 2, and 3 of section A. In line 1 (upper) Milik read ... ΩΣ ΤΩΝ ΘΕΙΟΤΑΤΩΝ Κ In line 2, in which only the tops of the letters survive, he read]Ν ΘΑΜΟΥΔΗΝΩΝ Ε[ΘΝΟΣ In line 3, he read the letters ΝΤΟ as part of the name [Κ]ΟΙΝΤΟΥ. (Photograph Laïla Nehmé).



Figure 5. The second occurrence of ἔθνος in the Rawwāfah inscription. Line 5b of the Nabataean (above), in which Milik read ... *'ntstys 'dwnṯs hgmwn'*.... Line 6 of Part C (below), in which Milik read ... *ϞΝ ΘΑΜΟΥΔΗΝΩΝ ΕΘΝΟΣ* (Photograph Laïla Nehmé).



Figure 6. The final word (*w^o-rmṣ^o-hm*) in the Nabataean section of the Rawwāfah inscription. (Photograph Laïla Nehmé).