

1. A Safaitic inscription by someone claiming to be a Nabataean. It reads: *l mn'm bn 'r' mnwt bn 'bgr bn 'tl h-nbty*. "By Mn'm son of 'rs-Mnwt son of 'bgr son of 'tl, the Nabataean." See CRAI 1996: 444-9.

# IV

## SOME REFLECTIONS ON EPIGRAPHY AND ETHNICITY IN THE ROMAN NEAR EAST

I would like to start by looking at some of the limitations of epigraphy as a source of information and at some of the general problems of studying ethnicity in the ancient world. I shall then discuss some particular problems in more detail using examples from Syria and Arabia in the Roman period.<sup>1</sup>

### I: L'ÉPIGRAPHIE SOURCE D'ERREURS?

P.-A. Février in his book *Approches du Maghreb romain* entitled one of his subchapters 'l'épigraphie, source d'erreurs?'<sup>2</sup> and made a very salutary appeal for what might be called a more 'archaeological' approach to epigraphic material. He stressed the importance of always looking at the whole object, i.e. not just the text as it appears on the page, as if it were a literary work, divorced from the shape and type of the stone, the technique and style of the carving and, most important of all, its context. This last means not just the physical surroundings, both when it is *in situ* and when it has been reused, but the social context on which a monumental inscription (and sometimes even a graffito) was intended to have an effect. Too often this is ignored by epigraphists who indulge in fantastic philological gymnastics, leaving far behind the vital question of 'who had to say what to whom?' in order for the changes which their statements assume, to have taken place.

As in other disciplines which deal with the past, the epigraphist's material has been sifted by time and chance and one of his most difficult tasks is to assess the distortions which this has produced. It is very important periodically to ask the questions 'how representative is the material that has survived from this area?' and, indeed, 'what is it representative of?', or 'what is the significance of the lack of material from another place?' So much depends not only on accidents of survival, but on the options available to individuals in antiquity and on

<sup>1</sup> Given that I come to this subject as a student of Semitic languages, I shall inevitably be concentrating on Semitic epigraphy, though, from time to time, I shall also trespass in the fields of Greek and Latin inscriptions. While I have borrowed the phrase 'the Roman Near East' in my title from Fergus Millar's book, I shall in fact be talking about epigraphy and ethnicity in geographical Syria and Arabia in the Roman period, and not specifically about the book. Finally, I should admit at the outset that this paper is full of questions and offers very few answers.

Note the following abbreviations in addition to the usual ones:

ARNA Nab Nabataean inscriptions in: J. T. Milik-J. Starcky in: J. V. Winnett-W. L. Reed, *Ancient Records from North Arabia* (1970).

C Safaitic inscriptions in *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars V. Inscriptiones Saracenicae continens. Tomus I. Inscriptiones Safaiticae* (1950-1951).

CIS ii Aramaic inscriptions in *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum. Pars II. Inscriptiones Aramaicas continens* (1889-1954).

CSNS V. A. Clark, *A Study of New Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Melbourne, 1979).

H Nabataean inscriptions in: J. F. Healey, *The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih. JSemSt Suppl. 1* (1993).

IGR III R. Cagnat-G. Lafaye, *Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes* (1906).

LPNab Nabataean inscriptions in: E. Littmann, *Nabataean Inscriptions from the Southern Hawran* (1914).

MNM Hismaic (Thamudic E) inscriptions in: J. T. Milik, *Liber Annuus 9, 1958-9, 330-358*.

MNT Nabataean inscriptions in: J. T. Milik, *AAJ 24, 1980, 41-54*.

RES *Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique, I-VIII* (1900-1968).

TIJ Hismaic inscriptions in: G. L. Harding-E. Littmann, *Some Thamudic Inscriptions from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* (1952).

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I (1989) 75.

choices made by them: the option of writing private documents on perishable or durable materials (e.g., papyrus as against potsherds), and the choices of whether to engrave or to paint public pronouncements, or whether to make them in writing at all. It is surely in such choices that we have to seek the reasons for the flowering and decline of the 'epigraphic habit' in southern Syria, or the extraordinary contrast between the epigraphic riches of western Arabia in the pre-Islamic era and the almost total absence of written documents from the eastern side of the peninsula at the same period. There are, of course, many other factors involved, but it is as well to remind ourselves of the crucial role which the availability and choice of writing materials in antiquity played in producing the archipelago of scattered documents, isolated in a huge lacuna of ignorance, which is now at our disposal.

Epigraphic material has the disadvantages both of archaeological data and of historical documents. Like archaeological data there is never enough of it and one is always having to extrapolate from too small a base, fill in the gaps, infer the monkey from two inches of tail, as Sir Arthur Evans is said to have done with a wall-painting at Knossos! True, inscriptions provide the actual words of the individuals and institutions of an ancient society, a priceless advantage over sherds and section-drawings, one might think. However, sherds and section-drawings are neutral, but like the historian, the epigraphist must always be aware that his material may be being economical with the truth, or even presenting an entirely false picture.

Thus, epigraphy, when it is not balanced by literary sources, can produce an extremely distorted picture of a society; more so, in some ways, even than archaeology without the written word. For epigraphy provides the illusion of direct contact with people in antiquity, and yet inscriptions are almost always, to some extent, public documents, more so in the case of monumental texts than of graffiti, but even with most graffiti—which generally represent self-expression rather than communication—the fact of their being left in a public place implies the assumption that they would be read by others. Without personal letters, diaries, imaginative literature, etc. it is more or less impossible to guess at the way a society known only from inscriptions perceived itself. In this, the alphabetic epigraphy of Syria and Arabia stands in stark contrast to the material in syllabic and alphabetic cuneiform, which is so rich in private and literary documents, and to regions like Egypt where climatic conditions have permitted the survival of huge numbers of documents written in ink.

However, the situation is not uniformly bad. From the early 1st millennium BC to the rise of Islam, the western two-thirds of the Arabian peninsula, from southern Syria to the Indian Ocean saw an extraordinary flowering of languages and scripts. Southern Arabia, ancient Yemen, produced one of the world's most elegant monumental alphabets and thousands of inscriptions in a variety of languages. From this region, where epigraphy was not so much a 'habit' as a mania, we have numerous, long, historical inscriptions and many others which deal with almost every aspect of public life, and some, such as *ex votos* and public \* confessions of sins, which touch on private life. In addition, in recent years, hundreds of short wooden batons and the stalks of palm-leaves have appeared, inscribed in a number of 'minuscule' scripts, and these are the equivalent of papyri and ostraca in other cultures, being the medium for school exercises, lists, contracts, receipts, guarantees, short messages, private letters, petitions to the gods, etc. Their content, painstakingly teased out, uses a vocabulary which is almost entirely unknown from the monumental inscriptions because of the difference in subject-matter, and is gradually giving us a glimpse of South Arabian daily life, to which we had no access before.<sup>3</sup>

In southern Syria and northern Arabia the situation was much more fragmented. In Northwest Arabia, a large number of different scripts developed to express several different ancient

<sup>3</sup> See J. Ryckmans *et al.*, *Textes du Yémen antique inscrits sur bois*, Publ. Inst. Orient. de Louvain, 43 (1994).

North Arabian dialects—forms of a language related to Arabic but distinct from it—which are identifiable by the use of the definite article *h-*, rather than *ʾl-*. These dialects were not only spoken but written, both by the sedentaries in the oases (such as Taymā and Dedān, the seat of the kingdom of Liḥyān), and by the nomads, who developed many different scripts (subsumed under the labels ‘Safaitic’ and ‘Thamudic’) and who left tens of thousands of \* graffiti on the rocks of the desert. In addition, from at least the 6th century BC, Aramaic was \* also used in North Arabia and, under the occupation of the Babylonians, Achaemenids, and Nabataeans, it gradually became the language and script of prestige texts.

This, however, is not the whole story. From the 5th century BC to the 6th century AD another North Arabian language, using the definite article *ʾl-*, makes sporadic appearances in the epigraphic record throughout the peninsula and beyond—eastern Egypt, central Arabia, northern Yemen, the Oman peninsula, north-west Arabia, the Negev, and northern and \* southern Syria. This language has been called Old Arabic (on the model of Old English, Old French, etc.) since it appears to be an ancestor of the Arabic known from later periods. Until shortly before the rise of Islam, it appears always in the scripts of other, more prestigious languages (Sabaic, Dedanitic, Aramaic, Greek), and the texts are often in a mixture of Old \* Arabic and the language normally associated with the script. This suggests that, until a relatively late period, Old Arabic was a purely spoken language and so did not have a script of its own. The story of Old Arabic and the development of the Arabic script is a fascinating example of the interplay of language and ethnicity. But it falls outside the chronological limits of this paper, and I have discussed it in some detail elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

The distinction between the ancient North Arabian languages (using *h-*), which were written, and Old Arabic (using *ʾl-*), which was a purely spoken language, is one which seems to have reflected communal self-perceptions and which acquires increasing importance from the fourth century AD onwards, as a culture which was self-consciously ‘Arab’—i.e. it called itself ‘Arab’—and which used Old Arabic as its language comes more and more into our view.

It is very important to remember this, because all too often the terms ‘nomad’, ‘Arabic- \* speaker’ and ‘Arab’ have been treated as synonymous in works on the Roman period and Late Antiquity. It should not need to be said that labels applied by members of one community to those of another often do not reflect the self-perception of the community so labelled. Thus, Josephus consistently, and Diodorus and Strabo sporadically, refer to the Nabataeans as ‘Arabs’, but the latter never refer to themselves in this way in the documents which have survived, nor are they so described in the contemporary Semitic inscriptions. Similarly, neither the settled nor the nomadic peoples who wrote the ancient North Arabian dialects called themselves ‘Arabs’, at least in the tens of thousands of inscriptions which have come down to us. It is therefore highly misleading for modern scholars to refer, for instance, to the nomads east of the Ḥawrān either as speaking ‘Arabic’ or as being ethnically ‘Arab’.

I am struck by the similarities between the situation in northern Arabia and that in Roman North Africa as described by D. J. Mattingly and R. B. Hitchner in a recent article. They write:

There are several distinct Libyan alphabets now known, suggesting regionalized dialects and traditions, and Libyan inscriptions are attested from the mid-first millennium B.C. to post-Roman times. The variation in the alphabets would seem to indicate that literacy did not spread from a single point of contact (Carthage-Numidian relations say), but that separate evolution occurred in Tripolitania, Numidia, and the Sahara, reflecting local choices and

\* <sup>4</sup> In: C. Robin (ed.), *Civilisations de l’Arabie préislamique* (forthcoming) and id., *JSemSt* (forthcoming).

aspirations. Moreover, the occurrence of Libyan graffiti might suggest that literacy was not an élite monopoly, but more widespread in African society. In fact the élite may have shown more of a tendency to employ Punic and later Latin as their written language to show off their status.<sup>5</sup>

On almost every level, there are at least superficial parallels between the situation described here and that in northern Arabia. The separate evolution of many different, but related, alphabets, widespread literacy on a popular level, the use of imported languages for prestige documents, and so on. It would be interesting to know whether these situations are paralleled in other regions and what caused this explosion of literacy, and why it eventually disappeared. The reasons suggested in two very interesting recent articles for the appearance and disappearance of the 'epigraphic habit' in Greek and Latin throughout the empire, do not, unfortunately, seem to be applicable to the Semitic inscriptions of the Near East, particularly those of the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>6</sup>

However, despite all this epigraphic activity, North Arabia produced a much more limited range of monumental inscriptions than the South. The Nabataean, for instance, are very largely tomb inscriptions dealing with property-law, construction texts, brief dedications, etc. \* In addition there are large numbers of graffiti consisting mostly of names, and a few papyri which are mainly legal documents. Much, of course, can be gleaned from these but there is no point in pretending that they tell us much about Nabataean society or the self-perceptions of its members. For that we are still dependent on the patchy and partial accounts of Diodorus, Strabo, and Josephus. Thus even a respectably large corpus of inscriptions backed up by archaeological discoveries and the accounts of outside observers, can leave us almost entirely ignorant about the internal workings of a society and the self-perceptions of its members. I shall return to the Nabataeans later.

Ironically, we know much more about the daily life and personal emotions of the nomads on the edge of the Ḥawrān whose only remains are brief informal texts—entirely personal documents—which they scratched on rocks in the midst of the desert, where there can have been little realistic expectation that they would ever be read. There are a few which consist solely of a prayer, and some which serve as grave markers at cairns. But the vast majority were not messages or in any sense communications, but were written simply as a way of passing the time. Again, I shall be returning to these shortly.

There is an important distinction to be made here between, on the one hand, monumental inscriptions and urban graffiti, and, on the other, non-urban graffiti—that is, informal texts written in places where there could be no great expectation of their being read. Formal, monumental inscriptions, carved by a professional mason, usually tell us little about the language(s) habitually used by the titular 'author' of the text. They are for public consumption and many different factors will have governed the choice of the language or languages in which they are couched. Among these, prestige must always have been an important consideration. How many village churches in the depths of the English countryside contain monuments to dead squires in Latin, a language which none of the congregation could read and which the squire himself had probably long since forgotten? Similarly, it is dangerous to assume from the wealth of Greek formal inscriptions throughout Syria that the population in general spoke (let alone, read) Greek, rather than (or, even, as well as) Aramaic or another Semitic language. To return to Février's point, it is essential to look at each inscription within its context and part of that context is the interplay of written and spoken

<sup>5</sup> JRS 85, 1995, 172.

<sup>6</sup> See E. A. Meyer, JRS 80, 1990, 74–96 and G. Woolf, JRS 86, 1996, 22–39.

languages, and of degrees, and different types, of literacy. Many may have written their names, genealogies and tribal and/or village affiliations in Greek, or Nabataean or Sabaic without being able to understand a continuous text in that language, whether written or spoken. Thus both monumental inscriptions and graffiti are uncertain guides as to the languages of their authors or their communities.

An interesting case in point is that of the Himyarites, who ruled South Arabia from the fourth to the sixth centuries. They wrote all their monumental inscriptions, and indeed their graffiti, in Sabaic, the language of the kingdom which had preceded them and which they had conquered and which had had enormous prestige throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Yet, from the mistakes and inconsistencies in their Sabaic inscriptions, it would seem that the Himyarites must have spoken an entirely different language and it appears that, like Old Arabic in the North, this was regarded as a purely spoken vernacular which, normally, 'could not be written', rather as many people used to regard the spoken Arabic dialects—i.e. you spoke a dialect but wrote Classical or literary Arabic. When, in exceptional circumstances, someone wanted to write these spoken languages, it seems to have been for very specific reasons. There are two examples, from opposite ends of the Peninsula. One is a 27-line hymn to the sun-goddess, which, though in the Sabaic script is not in the Sabaic language. It is carved on a rock-face outside the sanctuary of the sun-goddess at the important Himyarite site of Qāniya. The sun-goddess was the tutelary deity of the Himyarites and, from its context, it appears probable that the unknown language of this hymn is that spoken by the Himyarites. The other example is a 6-line inscription on a rock-face near the shrine of the deified Nabataean king, Obodas, at Avdat in the Negev. The text is in the Nabataean script and language, except for two lines of Old Arabic verse (written in the Nabataean script) which are embedded in it. In both cases, it seems possible that these texts were parts of the ancestral liturgies of the peoples involved, traditionally maintained by oral transmission, but which one individual, in each case, had written down, in a borrowed script, for his own reasons. The liturgy, being sacred, probably could not be translated into the 'written language', Sabaic or Nabataean Aramaic respectively, and so was simply transcribed in the scripts of these languages.<sup>7</sup>

At present this can be no more than speculation, but it raises interesting questions about the relationships between ethnic self-perception and the use of spoken and written languages, as well as the choice of languages used for public display.

## II: ETHNICITY

I should begin by defining what I mean by 'ethnicity' in the context of the ancient Near East. I am using the term to refer to the social community or communities of which persons feel themselves to be members and/or to which they are considered by others to belong. The two are, of course, not necessarily coterminous.

Ethnicity is thus primarily a matter of perception—of how one perceives oneself and how one is perceived by others.<sup>8</sup> It is seldom, if ever, simple and there are always overlapping levels of membership of different groups.

The development of surnames in England provides a good example of this. A whole class of surnames is derived from the places where people lived or from which they came. A man who lived in a small settlement to the east of a village called Wolford might be known locally

<sup>7</sup> On the Qāniya inscription, see C. Robin, *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 61, 1991, 122–5. On the 'En'Avdat inscription see, most recently, M. Kropp, *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 24, 1994,

165–74.

<sup>8</sup> As Fergus Millar has so succinctly put it, 'ethnicity ... is an ascription, or self-ascription, rather than a mere fact' (*Journal of Jewish Studies* 38, 1987, 157).

as 'John Easton', but if he went to Oxford, thirty miles away, would probably be called 'John Wulford' and if he settled in Scotland might well be known as 'John English'.

The same principle applies to members of tribal societies, whether settled or nomadic.<sup>9</sup> Thus both mediaeval Arab, and modern western, scholars have been frustrated by the bedouins' apparently 'flexible', not to say confusing, use of the terms for the hierarchical divisions of tribes. The truth is that, while we envisage social groups in terms of a pyramid or family tree—tribe, sub-tribe, clan, family, etc.—the bedouin do not. Self-identification by different levels of social group is appropriate in different circumstances. A member of the Rwala tribe of the 'Anēzah confederation (in Syria and Arabia), may describe himself as a RweII or 'AnēZI when in Amman or Damascus, or among members of a very distant tribe, but nearer to home might use his branch of the Rwala, sub-branch, or so-called 'vengeance-group', or simply his patronym, depending on the degree of knowledge he knew or assumed his audience possessed. The choice is of course instinctive rather than analytical and the different 'levels' are more like overlapping circles than watertight, hierarchical categories.

The situation becomes even more complex with tribes among the sedentaries. For here, an individual has the choice of identifying himself by his tribe (or one of its divisions) or by his village, or region, or, of course, by the political entity under which he happens to live. It is important to emphasize that the 'tribe'—that is a social group bound together by biological or mutually accepted genealogical links—is the fundamental social unit in the Near East, and has been as far back as we can tell. It exists among the sedentaries just as much as among the nomads, a fact which western scholars very often do not seem to understand, with the result that whenever they see a tribe they assume the presence of nomads. Thus, for example, there are a number of Greek inscriptions from the Ḥawrān in which individuals are identified by both their village and their tribe, thus Κώμης such-and-such Φουλῆς such-and-such.<sup>10</sup>

Needless to say, one person can, and usually does, belong at the same time to several communities of different types. It is particularly appropriate that we should use the term 'ethnicity' for these, since the word ἔθνος has meant at different times almost any sort of community: nation, province, class, tribe, order of priests, trade-association, etc. Similarly, professional associations in South Arabia and at Palmyra seem to have referred to themselves collectively as if they were genealogically based groups. This practice may well have been more widespread. For instance in Syriac, *bny* (literally 'sons of') plus a noun was commonly used as a collective for any group of people.<sup>11</sup>

Given that ethnicity is a matter of perception and that it can never be a single water-tight category, it seems to me that it is impossible to identify it with any hope of accuracy in an area of the ancient world, where documentary sources are relatively limited.

In this situation, epigraphy if carefully and subtly used can sometimes give us glimpses of perceptions of ethnic and communal identity, but equally, if used without a clear understanding of its limitations, it can indeed be 'une source d'erreurs'.

### III: EXAMPLES OF ERROR

I shall deal first with some of the ways in which epigraphy can inadvertently be used to produce confusions about ethnicity, and then turn to some examples of the insights which it can provide.

<sup>9</sup> Within the context of the Near East, I mean by 'tribe' a social group in which all relationships and responsibilities are perceived and expressed in genealogical terms.

<sup>10</sup> W. H. Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de Syrie* (1870) nos. 2265, 2393, 2396(b) [μη]τροκομίας.

<sup>11</sup> For Saba, see A. F. L. Beeston in: A.T. al-Ansary (ed.), *Studies in the History of Arabia*, I: Sources for the History of Arabia (1979) 117-8; for Palmyra, see CIS ii 3916/2, 2928/2, etc. *bny mzh* 'members of a caravan', RTP 301 *bny šyrt* 'members of a symposium'; for Syriac, see R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (1879-1901) 583-600.

Some epigraphists and, following them, historians, archaeologists, and others, have created ancient communities out of modern epigraphic labels. This is one result of the universal habit of extrapolating from the particular to the general, and shows that the strong tendency to make *ethnica* from terms which have nothing to do with ethnicity, affects not only the popular but also the academic mind. The use of the linguistic terms 'Aryan' and 'Semitic' as racial categories is only one, disastrous, example of what is an almost universal tendency: to associate all human artefacts, including languages and scripts, exclusively with particular groups of people. Once the term and the ethnic group are associated, it is inevitable that all sorts of misleading conclusions will be drawn about the one on the basis of features of the other. This is particularly hazardous when dealing with the pre-Islamic Near East where, as I have said, we know virtually nothing about how ethnicity was perceived or defined.

Language, and its expression in writing, is an artefact, as much as pottery, and can be transported and acquired just as easily. It is, thus, unwise to identify a community simply on the basis of a language or, even worse, a script, and to expect it to operate as a homogeneous unit. It is the epigraphic equivalent of the creation of 'the beaker people' on the basis of a type of pot.<sup>12</sup>

There are two major ways in which 'ghost' communities can be created out of epigraphic categories. An example of the first is 'Safaitic', a term describing the tens of thousands of informal inscriptions which nomads of the Roman period scratched on the rocks of the Syrian and Arabian deserts. The name is taken from a geographical region, the Şafā, a wild volcanic area south-east of Damascus, which, as luck would have it, is virtually the only part of the region to contain none of the inscriptions named after it! The label is therefore entirely conventional and in no way descriptive, and should refer solely to a script, of a particular, clearly definable, type and, by extension, to documents (in this case, inscriptions) written in it.

A further extension of the term is usually made to cover the dialect in which those texts containing more than genealogies appear to be written. However, this already introduces possibilities of confusion. For there is no necessary, exclusive, connection between a script and a language, and the Safaitic script could be used to express Old Arabic (which used *·l-* rather than *h-* for the definite article),<sup>13</sup> or ancient North Arabian *h-*dialects other than Safaitic, or indeed another, altogether different, language. The Safaitic inscriptions are written continuously, with no divisions between words and do not represent vowels of any sort, or diphthongs. Given the ambiguities created by this, and our ignorance of most features of the languages which may have been used, it is very unlikely that we would be able to recognize such a text unless it contained an obvious feature such as the *·l-* article. Already, therefore, we have entered an area which cannot be clearly defined, and we risk including in the 'Safaitic language' features which in reality belong to other tongues. There is, at present, nothing that can be done about this, and I am not suggesting that we use a different label for the language which we try to reconstruct from the Safaitic texts, for that of course would be to fall into the same trap and would cause yet more confusion. But it is important to remind ourselves every

<sup>12</sup> The 'Bell Beaker' is a type of pottery drinking vessel which has been found in third-millennium BC contexts in many parts of Europe, from Spain to Hungary and from Italy to Britain. The beakers are very often part of a rich and warlike assemblage accompanying single burials under huge mounds. On the basis of their wide distribution throughout Europe, archaeologists 'identified' a 'beaker people', but different scholars placed their origins as far apart as Spain on one side and eastern or northern Europe on the other. None of

these theories accounted for all the evidence, and the hypotheses became more and more convoluted until S. Shennan very sensibly pointed out that the beakers probably do not represent a single migrating 'people', but were part of a 'status kit, acquired through trade or exchange, by unrelated individuals of high status in many parts of Europe' (see The Macmillan Dictionary of Archaeology [1983] 56 s.v. [Whitehouse]).

<sup>13</sup> For examples see Macdonald in: Robin (ed.) op. cit. (n. 4). \*



so often of the limits of certainty and that an identity of name does not imply identical boundaries, i.e., in this case, that the so-called 'Safaitic' language could have been expressed in any script available to its speakers, and that the Safaitic script was capable of expressing more than one language or dialect.

Matters become much worse, however, the further the term is extended from the script to which it originally referred. The authors of the Safaitic texts have often been treated as a homogenous community and called 'les Safaïtes', the 'Safaitic bedouins', the 'Safaitic tribes', etc. and then, on the basis of the name (which, it should be remembered, was a 19th-century misnomer for the script) a connection has been assumed between this supposed community and the region called the Şafā. The pinnacle of this edifice of misconceptions was reached when a deity, Ζεὺς Σαφαθηνός, the sole evidence for whom consists of two brief dedications in Greek on an altar from Bostra, was assumed to be the chief divinity of this community.<sup>14</sup> In fact, of course, it is virtually certain that Σαφαθηνός refers to a place on Jebal Ḥawrān and not to the Şafā, let alone to the authors of these graffiti.<sup>15</sup> Yet the identification, first made in the 1890s, has been repeated for more than a century.

Most people would agree that it would be ludicrous to define an ethnic group simply on the basis of a script. Yet this is exactly what has been done. It is quite clear from the content of the inscriptions that the Safaitic alphabet was used by members of several, sometimes mutually hostile, communities. Moreover, since many of the inscriptions consist solely of names we cannot even be sure that the authors of all these texts were even speaking mutually comprehensible languages! Although the term 'Safaitic' is a modern invention with no basis in ancient usage, it has been stretched to create a 'ghost' community made up of people whose only definable common feature was to write a graffito in a particular script.<sup>16</sup>

The second danger is the opposite of this, when a language and/or script is named by modern scholars after an ancient political entity or ethnic group. Of course, this applies to many languages and scripts in the ancient Near East, though some, such as Akkadian and Aramaic, have eventually escaped the association with a particular ethnic group by virtue of becoming very widely diffused.

There are two different forms this danger can take. One is when the link between script and group is artificial or erroneous, as in the case of the term 'Thamudic.' This label was proposed at the beginning of this century, as an alternative to the equally misleading term \* 'Proto-Arabic'.<sup>17</sup> It refers to a *Restklassenbildung* (or category of 'left-overs') which covers all those ancient North Arabian texts which do not fit into any better defined category. Inscriptions in at least half a dozen quite distinct types of script from all over the peninsula are lumped together under this rubric, and the only thing they have in common is that they are \* not Safaitic or Dedanitic.<sup>18</sup> 'Thamudic' is simply a 'pending file' for texts which have yet to be properly classified and on which an enormous amount of work still needs to be done. From the beginning, the name was intended to be entirely artificial, but many writers have forgotten this and have assumed that this mixed bag of texts was the work of the historical tribe of Thamūd. The worst example of this is A. Van den Branden's attempt to write *L'histoire de Thamoud* on the basis of the so-called 'Thamudic' inscriptions.<sup>19</sup> One also reads frequently of 'Thamudic names', as if Thamūd represented a community or language, and worse still of 'Thamudic tribes'.

<sup>14</sup> See, most recently, M. Sartre, *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie*, XIII.1. *Bibl. arch. et hist.* 113 (1982) 72-5 no. 9001.

<sup>15</sup> See M. C. A. Macdonald, *ArabAEpigr* 3, 1992, 25-7.

<sup>16</sup> For a fuller discussion of this problem, see M. C. A. Macdonald, *Syria* 70, 1993, 377-82.

<sup>17</sup> See M. Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik*, II (1908) 25.

<sup>18</sup> See Macdonald art. cit. (n. 13) for the term 'Dedanitic' (formerly 'Dedanite' and 'Lihyanite').

<sup>19</sup> *Histoire de Thamoud*. Publ. université libanaise, sect. études hist., 6 (1960).

The second type of danger is more subtle and difficult to deal with. This is when there is a clear connection between a political and/or ethnic group and a particular script. The term 'Nabataean' is a good example of this. Just as we should not postulate the presence of 'Nabataeans' wherever a sherd of Nabataean pottery is found, it seems to me even more dangerous to assume that all inscriptions and graffiti in the script which we call 'Nabataean' are by people who thought of themselves as 'Nabataeans'.

Of course, the term 'Nabataean' carefully defined can be useful to distinguish a certain group of people, a certain style of architecture, a type of pottery, a form of the Aramaic script, and a dialect of the Aramaic language. However, in each case the limits of the definition are different, and in no case are any of them coterminous. Thus, the features of Nabataean fine ware are very distinctive and, whatever we call it, it is a clearly defined type.<sup>20</sup> The case of the script is quite different. Scholars have applied the term 'Nabataean' to texts in a variety of versions of the late Aramaic script, which are found in southern Jordan, northern Arabia, Sinai, Egypt, southern Palestine, southern Syria and elsewhere. Although these texts do indeed share common features and, to some extent, their geographical (though not their chronological) distribution more or less coincides with that of the Nabataean kingdom, they are clearly not all by subjects of the Nabataean king, and are unlikely all to have been by people who felt themselves to be ethnically 'Nabataean.' Thus, while it may be argued that the label is simply one of convenience which should not carry any ethnic overtones, it is, at best, extremely confusing. For though the subtly different late Aramaic scripts usually collected under this rubric are closely related, this cannot imply that those who used these scripts necessarily belonged to the same community. If one defines the core 'Nabataean' script as that used in and around Petra, the historic capital of the Nabataean kingdom, then one can see that there are indeed some texts in this script in Sinai, the Ḥawrān, northern Arabia, etc., but that not all the Aramaic texts in these areas are 'Nabataean'.

The danger in this type of label, where a category of languages and scripts has been named after a political entity and/or ethnic group, is that there is a tendency to assume that, unless there is very clear evidence to the contrary, all those who wrote in what we have defined as 'Nabataean', or are mentioned in the inscriptions, were necessarily politically or ethnically 'Nabataean'. Of course, one can say that the authors of those inscriptions which can be dated after Rome's annexation of the Nabataean kingdom in 106, could not have been 'Nabataean' in a political sense, but the Palmyrene inscription of 132 by a man who specifically describes himself as 'Nabataean' shows that the term remained in use as an ethnonym, for at least a generation afterwards.<sup>21</sup>

This, of course, raises the question of what were the criteria for considering oneself a Nabataean or being regarded as one. In all the Nabataean inscriptions the word *nbtw* is used only three times of a community,<sup>22</sup> in all the other occurrences it refers to the state in the titles of the king. Moreover, none of the inscriptions in which someone claims to be a 'Nabataean' are in the Nabataean language or script and they all come from outside the area of Nabataea.<sup>23</sup> This is to be expected, for one does not normally need to identify oneself as

<sup>20</sup> However, whether it can be regarded as an expression of 'the national ethos of the Nabataeans' (Parr in: P. R. S. Moorey-P. J. Parr [eds.], *Archaeology in the Levant. Essays for Kathleen Kenyon* [1978] 206) is quite another matter.

<sup>21</sup> CIS ii 3973, see below.

<sup>22</sup> In the phrase *hrm k-hlyqt hrm nbtw w-šlmw* 'inviolable according to the nature of inviolability of the Nabataeans and the Salamians' (H 1/3-4, H 8/8-9) and *{hr}m k-hlyqt hrmh dy*

*mhrm l-dwšr b-nbtw w-šlm(w)* 'inviolable according to the nature of the inviolability of what is inviolably consecrated to Dushara among the Nabataeans and the Salamians' (H 19/2-3).

<sup>23</sup> The only example connected to a Nabataean inscription is in the Greek part (but not the Nabataean) of the Nabataean-Greek bilingual from Cos (G. Levi Della Vida in: *Clara Rhodos* 9 [1938] 140 fig. 1); in Palmyrene: CIS ii 3973, in Safaitic: C 2820, CSNS 661, and M. C. A. Macdonald *et al.*, CRAI 1996, 444-9 nos. B1 and B2.

'English' when in England. What is significant is that these individuals felt 'Nabataean': in one case, as we have just seen, some 26 years after the kingdom had ceased to exist.

The Palmyrene inscription in question is a dedication in the Palmyrene language and script, by a cavalryman who describes himself as *nḥty rwḥy*, i.e. the Nabataean, the Rwhite (*Rwḥ* being a tribe known from Nabataean inscriptions at Umm al-Jimāl in northern Jordan). The text is revealing in several ways. Had the man omitted the word *nḥty*, his names and the formulae would have been counted as Palmyrene simply because they occur in an inscription in the Palmyrene script. In addition, this text would have been cited as an example of the worship by the Palmyrenes of the deity Šy<sup>c</sup>-l-qwm (otherwise known only from the Nabataean and Safaitic inscriptions). Such a distortion would be almost inevitable given the state of our ignorance and it serves to highlight the fallibility of our assumptions when using epigraphic documents.

A more puzzling example can be found in Safaitic. There are now three Safaitic graffiti by individuals who describe themselves as *h-nḥty* 'the Nabataean'. One of these is by a certain *Mn<sup>m</sup> bn ·rs<sup>2</sup>mnwt bn ·bgr bn ·ʕl* (pl. 16: 1).

With the exception of *·rs<sup>2</sup>mnwt*, all these names are quite well-attested in Safaitic texts but are only rarely found in Nabataean inscriptions. *·rs<sup>2</sup>mnwt* has not been found in any text in the Nabataean script, but is known from one other Safaitic inscription, though this is almost certainly by the same man. The text is a graffito in a very distinctive hand, unlike those of the inscriptions around it which have no unusual features. So, in contrast to a monumental inscription, the assumption would be that *Mn<sup>m</sup>* wrote the graffito himself. However, he uses the Safaitic definite article *h-*, rather than the Aramaic suffixed article, and employs Safaitic orthography which, unlike Nabataean, shows no long vowels or diphthongs. In fact, this is in every respect a perfect Safaitic text. Safaitic inscriptions can be written in any direction and tend to meander around the rock-face. Contrary to the invariable Nabataean right-to-left direction of writing, this text runs diagonally across the face from left to right. Given the choice of direction which Safaitic provides, it is difficult to believe that someone accustomed to writing in Nabataean would choose to write in the opposite direction.

In what sense then was this man a Nabataean? Many answers to this question are possible, but in the absence of additional evidence they can be no more than empty speculation. However, this inscription highlights some of the complexities of trying to extract information on ethnicity from epigraphic material and again reminds us of Février's point that an inscription must be looked at as a complete object, not simply as a text on a page, if we are to understand as much as possible of its import and minimize the risk of misinterpreting it

- \* To return to the dangers of using a label such as 'Nabataean' too 'flexibly'. The linguistic and historical content of the inscriptions which we call 'Nabataean' is usually ascribed to 'the Nabataeans' in general. Thus in the debate about whether the Nabataeans spoke Arabic or Aramaic, it is customary to cite the supposed Arabic loan-words in Nabataean. In doing so, most writers have assumed that, with the exception of texts like the Namāra inscription, which are blatantly in another language, all inscriptions in the alphabet which we call 'Nabataean', are in a single, undifferentiated language, and hence that features found in one text or group of texts can be attributed to the whole. As I have already explained, the label 'Nabataean' is given by modern scholars to a number of local varieties of the Aramaic script which are not necessarily connected with the Nabataeans as a people or a state. The thousands
- \* of texts from Sinai, in which the ethnicon or political label *nḥtw* never occurs, are a prime example of this. The texts written in these various Aramaic scripts may therefore be expected to show linguistic variations representing features of local dialects.

Approximately 28 supposed Arabic loan-words have been identified in Nabataean inscriptions,<sup>24</sup> although four of these words could also be of Aramaic origin. If we look at where these loan-words are found, we see that all but four occur in texts in North Arabia, i.e. at Ḥegra and Rawwāfa.<sup>25</sup> Not only that, but three of the four exceptions are found in two inscriptions at Petra, the long five-line text over the entrance to the 'Turkmaniyya' tomb and the Bab al-Sīq triclinium inscription.<sup>26</sup> The final exception, is the word *l*, loosely translated as 'tribe', and this is found only in texts in geographical or other proximity to the Safaitic graffiti, in which it is the normal word for all forms of social group from family to nation.<sup>27</sup> 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. This means that much of the long-standing argument over which language the Nabataeans spoke has been based on a faulty premise because an epigraphic label has been carelessly extended, with the result that several different ethnic and linguistic communities have been treated as a homogeneous whole.

The confusions caused by this are particularly clear in several recent onomastic studies, which have assumed that ethnicity can be established on the basis of names. I have discussed this problem at some length elsewhere,<sup>28</sup> so here I shall only draw attention to some of the problems and illustrate them with a few brief examples.

The very widespread use of onomastics to identify ethnicity is based on three fundamental assumptions, all of which, I would maintain, are incorrect. The first is that names contain linguistic information and that this represents the language used by their bearers. Of course, names, like all words, contain some linguistic information, but, as A. F. L. Beeston wisely remarked many years ago, in a synchronic perspective a name (whatever its etymology) means only the person who bears it.<sup>29</sup> Most names current at any one time are far more ancient than the society in which they are used and their etymologies are usually obscure to all but philologists. Even in societies such as the Arabic-speaking Islamic world, where partly because of the extraordinary conservatism of literary Arabic, the etymology of many names is still apparent, it is very doubtful whether etymological 'meaning' plays any part in the choice of names. I suspect that the name 'Muʿāwiya' is relatively uncommon more because of the bad press which the Umayyad Caliphate has traditionally received than because it means literally 'a bitch in heat that howls after the dogs'!

It is commonly held that the vast majority of the names which occur in the 'Nabataean' inscriptions, are linguistically 'Arabic'. From this it is then argued that the Nabataeans must have spoken Arabic, and used Aramaic purely as a literary language. This is not an argument upon which I want to enter at the moment because it is not strictly relevant to my theme and there is far too little evidence to decide the issue. However, as I have just pointed out, the

<sup>24</sup> See, most recently, Macdonald art. cit. (n. 13).

<sup>25</sup> I exclude from this count words found in the Namāra inscription, which is in Old Arabic, and JSNab 17, which is in Arabo-Aramaic.

<sup>26</sup> The words are *sryh* and *gb*. Both texts are unusual in the Petra corpus. The 'Turkmaniyya' (CIS ii 350, see now J. F. Healey, The Nabataean Tomb Inscriptions of Mada'in Salih. JSemSt Suppl. 1 [1993] 238-42) has many features of the Ḥegra texts and is the only inscription of its type in Petra, while the Bab-al-Sīq triclinium text (RES 1432) is in a notably 'non-Nabataean' form of the Aramaic script, much closer to the Hebrew square script.

<sup>27</sup> LPNab 43 (from Umm al-Jimāl, *mn ·l rwḥw*), LPNab 44

(from Umm al-Jimāl, *dy mn ·l šlmw*), ARNA Nab 130 (from the Wadī Sirḥān, *dy mn ·l qmyrw*), J. T. Milik, Syria 35, 1958, 244 no. 6/3-4 (from Madaba, *dy mn ·l mrt*), MNT 2a (from north-eastern Jordan, and linked with Safaitic inscriptions on the same stone, *dy mn ·l mlt*). Cf J. T. Milik in: P. J. Parr *et al.*, BALond 10, 1971, 57-8 = 'CIS ii 3642a' (from Rawwāfa, *dy mn rbtw / φυλης Ρωβαθου*) and M. R. Savignac, RBi 42, 1933, 417 no. 8 (Iram: *dy mn [y]ff[d]w*).

<sup>28</sup> Syria 70, 1993, 377-82 and M. C. A. Macdonald, Personal \* Names of the Nabataean Realm. A Review Article, JSemSt (forthcoming).

<sup>29</sup> JSemSt 22, 1977, 51.

argument from the 'language' of the names is misguided. Moreover, if one examines the situation more closely it becomes clear that those names which are indisputably Arabic in language, rather than Aramaic (i.e. those which contain the article *ʿal*, the word *ʿibn* rather than *br* for 'son of', or the *ʿafal* nominal formation), are very largely confined to the texts from Sinai. It should also be noted that the vast majority of inscriptions in which these 'Arabic' names occur are graffiti, consisting almost entirely of names, with the words *br*, *šlm*, *dkyr*, and *b-ṭb* used more or less as ideograms, to judge by the very stylized ways in which

\* they are often written, in contrast to the rest of the text. But on those occasions when these graffiti do contain statements, these are always expressed in Aramaic, not Arabic. I can only say that it seems unlikely to me that those writing graffiti in the desert would habitually do so in a literary language rather than their language of normal use.

\* Secondly, we have already seen the dangers of treating the epigraphic categories established by modern scholars as if they were coterminous with ancient ethnic groups—the idea that all 'Nabataean' inscriptions were written by Nabataeans or that the inscriptions which we call Safaitic and Thamudic represent the work of homogeneous communities. It is a short step from such a belief to the assumption that the names which have been found only, or principally, in the Nabataean or Safaitic inscriptions, are 'Nabataean' or 'Safaitic' names, that is names which were exclusive to a particular community and which can be used to identify its members wherever they are found. Thus it has been common practice to divide the Semitic names transliterated in Greek inscriptions into Nabataean, Palmyrene, Safaitic, etc. and draw demographic conclusions from their number and distribution.<sup>30</sup> There undoubtedly were a few names which were peculiar to particular communities,<sup>31</sup> though almost certainly at the level of family or village, rather than broad-sweep categories, such as Palmyrene or Thamudic, even if these were valid categories. The problem is that our information is so fragmentary that we have little chance of discovering which names they were. Even names so apparently diagnostic as the Nabataean basiliophoric compounds (e.g., *ʿbd-ḥrtt* or *ʿbd-ʿbd*, etc.) are also borne by the authors of some Safaitic and Hismaic (formerly Thamudic E) graffiti, or their ancestors.<sup>32</sup> Does this mean that these inscriptions were written by Nabataeans or by people whose parents had had some official dealings with the Nabataeans, or was it just fashion? We cannot possibly know.

Thirdly, and allied to this, is the idea that adjacent communities were in some way in watertight compartments and that fashions in name-giving in one group would have no influence on another. Like many others, M. Sartre made the mistake, discussed above, of taking the names in all the Nabataean inscriptions as a single group, rather than confining himself to those in the Aramaic inscriptions from the Ḥawrān. But even had he done so he would have been in difficulties. For we have only a handful of Aramaic inscriptions from this

\* region compared with some 20,000 Safaitic inscriptions, consisting very largely of names, from an adjacent area. This alone would render futile the sort of statistical comparisons he attempted. Thus both the end—the attempt to make a community out of an epigraphic category—and the means—comparative onomastics—are misconceived and can only be misleading.

<sup>30</sup> See, for extreme examples, M. Sartre, *Bostra. Des origines à l'Islam. Bibl. arch. et hist.* 117 (1985) 141–52, and A. Negev, *Personal Names of the Nabatean Realm. Qdem* 32 (1991) *passim*.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the name *khs'mn* found in a handful of Safaitic inscriptions by members of the same family, and nowhere else.

<sup>32</sup> The names *ʿbd-ḥrtt* and *ʿbd-ʿbd* are found in Hismaic

(G. M. H. King, *Early North Arabian Thamudic E. Preliminary Description Based on a New Corpus of Inscriptions from the Hismā Desert of Southern Jordan and Published Material* [unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1990] 272 and 574 respectively) and the latter in an unpublished Safaitic text from near H5/Şafawt, Jordan. See also *ʿbdmīk* in the Safaitic inscription AAS 23, 1973, 205 (Arabic section) no. 17751a and *ʿbdmīk* (for \**ʿbd-mnk* ?) and *ʿbds'qit* in Hismaic (MNM 7 and TII 311 respectively).

In fact, of course, as at most periods, there seems to have been a general pool of names with, at the outer edges, names which were very seldom used outside a particular community and, at the centre, a huge number which, possibly in slightly different forms, were more or less common to a number of different groups.

#### IV: THE USES OF EPIGRAPHY

So much for some of the *liaisons dangereuses* between epigraphy and ethnicity. However, if we accept its limitations and ask the sort of questions to which it is able to give answers, epigraphy can sometimes provide insights into various forms of community in antiquity. I doubt if it can ever define them comprehensively, but it can give occasional clues to the self-perception of individuals and groups.

A series of such clues concerns the perception of ethnicity in a military context. In the Safaitic inscriptions, ethnicity is generally expressed as membership of a genealogically based social group. This can be of any size from family to tribe. The affiliation is expressed in one of three different ways: by listing the forebears back to a recognizable eponymous ancestor, by the *nisba* or gentilic, e.g., *h-dfy* 'the Ḍaifite', or by the expression *q- ·l*, i.e. 'he of the lineage of' plus the name of the group.

We know that the Romans raised auxiliary units from among the nomads of the provinces of Syria and Arabia, though we know very little more about these bodies. There is a hint in a Greek inscription from Jebal Ḥawrān that these units were sometimes given the name of the tribe from which they were drawn.<sup>33</sup> If this is correct, there would have been the possibility of expressing ethnicity in a military context, by claiming membership of such a unit. This is, in fact, exactly what we find in a Safaitic inscription (Ms 64), albeit so far unique, in which a man describes himself as *qrb bn ·bgr b-mšrt ·l ḡmrt frs'*, that is 'qrb son of ·bgr a horseman in the [auxiliary] unit of the ·l ḡmrt'. Note that the literal translation is 'qrb son of ·bgr in the unit of the ·l ḡmrt, a horseman', i.e. the military affiliation comes in exactly the position of the normal tribal marker, *q- ·l ḡmrt*.

It is instructive to compare this with a rough Greek graffito from al-Namāra which reads Μεσαμερος ἰππεύς Κυρ(ηναϊκῆς) γένος(ς) Ναβας.<sup>34</sup> I should say immediately that there is no justification for the common assumption that the last word means 'Nabataean', which in Greek always appears with a *tau*, (i.e. Ναβαταίος) as would be expected. Instead, it is probably the name of the man's immediate kin-group representing a name such as *Nḇ* or *Nb-*, etc., as already suggested by H. I. MacAdam.<sup>35</sup> However, the interest of this text is the contrast it presents with the Safaitic graffito. For here the man's unit (presumably the III *Legio Cyrenaica*) is a normal Roman unit, unconnected with his ethnic group and he gives first his professional affiliation and then his kin. At present, we have only these examples and until more appear it is impossible to say whether they indicate a significant difference in self-perception or are simply the result of chance, whim, or syntax.

It is in this context that I think we should look at the Rawwāfa text. This is a Nabataean-Greek bilingual inscription in honour of the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, thus dating to between 166 and 169. It was set up on a small temple in the desert of north-west Arabia, on behalf of a group which is described in the Greek as Θαμουδηνῶν ἔθνος and in the Nabataean as *srkt tmwdw*. It is generally accepted that this refers in some way to the famous Arabian tribe of Thamūd, but the meanings of ἔθνος and *srkt* in this

<sup>33</sup> Waddington op. cit. (n. 10) 2236 from Rama: Οδαιναθφ Σουσαδου στρατηγησαντι Αουιδηνῶν κε φυλακησαντι ...

<sup>34</sup> Waddington op. cit. 2271 [IGR III 1257].

<sup>35</sup> Studies in the History of the Roman Province of Arabia: the Northern Sector. BAR Int. Ser. 295 (1986) 111, 145.

context are still disputed. In a recent paper,<sup>36</sup> I have suggested that the terms Θαμουδιηῶν ἔθνος and *šrkt tmwdw* refer not to an ethnic group, for which the word *šrkt* would be a most unsuitable term, but to an auxiliary army unit drawn from the Thamūd tribe. The word *šrkt* is clearly a loan-word from Arabic, and this interpretation would fit very well within the semantic field of this root. It would also be a perfectly acceptable usage of the word ἔθνος, or so I am informed, and presents an exact parallel to the Latin term *natio* used for these units by Pseudo-Hyginus at precisely this period.

If I am correct, this inscription (and the temple) were set up on behalf of an ethnically based auxiliary unit, similar both to that mentioned in the Safaitic inscription, and possibly to the *Equites Saraceni Thamudeni* and the *Equites Thamudeni Illyriciani* of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, some two and a half centuries later.<sup>37</sup>

It will be painfully clear by now that epigraphy can offer few solutions to the difficulties of discerning ethnicity in the ancient Near East, but it can sometimes add new and interesting dimensions to the problem. I said at the beginning of this paper, that in epigraphy one all too frequently has to infer the monkey from two inches of tail. But once we have restored the monkey, we should try not to forget that the original, fragmentary picture may not have been of a tail after all, but of part of the trunk of an elephant!

<sup>36</sup> In: H. Lozachmeur (ed.), *Présence arabe dans le Croissant fertile avant l'Hégire*. Actes de la Table ronde internationale Paris, le 13 novembre 1993 (1995) 93–101.

<sup>37</sup> *Notitia Dignitatum* Or XXVIII 17 and XXXIV 22 respectively.

There are now 96 examples of *ds<sup>2</sup>r* (78%), still 24 of *ds<sup>2</sup>r* (19.5%), and still 3 of *ds<sup>2</sup>ry* (2.5%).

- p. 74b, n. 154: This is now Ma‘ani and Sadaqah 2002: 253, 255, no. 2.
- p. 75a, n. 158: ‘Macdonald, The Form of the Definite Article’: see the Addendum to p. 68a, n. 61: above.
- p. 76a: n. 164: ‘Macdonald MCA. Ancient North Arabian’ now = Macdonald 2004.
- p. 76a–b, n. 169: see the discussion of the possible historical and cultural context of this text in I: 98–9.
- p. 76b, n. 171: My interpretation in this note of *b’rm* as *bi-’iram* ‘in/at Iram’, in line 2 of the Old Arabic inscription at Jabal Ramm, is quoted by Christian Robin (2006: 338, and n. 64) who says he owes it to Daniele Mascitelli. The latter had approached me in 2001, largely because he had read my ‘Reflections on the Linguistic Map ... (i.e. III), and he spent a week with me working on and discussing his doctoral thesis. He later consulted Christian Robin (Mascitelli 2006: 13, 168, n. 112) and must have passed on this interpretation which Robin later attributed to him, inadvertently overlooking the fact that it had already been in the public domain for six years.
- p. 78a, n. 202: For an interesting discussion of the context of JSNab 17 see Nehmé 2005: 171–2.
- p. 78a, n. 205: See now Macdonald 2004: 520, §9.
- p. 78a, n. 209: Christian Robin has now made an interesting (though, to my mind, not entirely convincing) case for the inconsistent but widespread use of *matres lectionis* in Sabaic (2001: 570–77). See the very full discussion of the representation of vowels in the Sabaic script in Stein 2003: 41–5.
- pp. 78b–79a, n. 225: Following the publication of Stein 2007, I would no longer doubt that the features represent a Sabaic dialect, rather than ‘contamination of standard Sabaic by elements of one or more other languages’.
- p. 79b, n. 236: See VIII: 9–11.
- p. 79b, n. 238: The work cited is now Macdonald and Nehmé 2000.

#### IV. Some reflections on epigraphy and ethnicity in the Roman Near East

- p. 178, 10 lines from the bottom: for ‘hundreds’ now read ‘thousands’. On these inscribed palm-leaf stalks and sticks see now Stein 2005; and in press.
- p. 179, line 5: for ‘tens of thousands’ reads ‘scores of thousands’.
- p. 179, lines 6–8: See now Macdonald 2008b.
- p. 179, line 12: ‘northern Yemen’ and ‘the Oman peninsula’ should now be deleted, see the Addenda and Corrigenda to III: 55b and 54a above, respectively.
- p. 179, line 16: ‘Aramaic’: this now applies only to the Nabataean Aramaic script, see the Addenda and Corrigenda to III: 54a above.



- p. 179, line 16: 'Greek': see the Addenda and Corrigenda to I: 102, and n. 166, above.
- p. 179, lines 16–17ff.: On Old Arabic, see III: 48–57, and Macdonald 2008a.
- p. 179, n. 4: The article cited as in 'Robin (ed.) *Civilisations ...* = III here. The article cited as 'JSemSt. (forthcoming)' was 'The Form of the definite article in Classical Arabic: Some Light from the Jahiliya', see the *addendum* to III: 68a, n. 61, above.
- p. 179, paragraph beginning 'It is very important': On this see now VI.
- p. 180, lines 17–18: Nabataean papyri: see now Yadin et al., 2002 and Yardeni 2001.
- p. 181, lines 6ff.: On the so-called 'Himyaritic language' see the Addendum to I: 98, n. 155, above.
- p. 183, n. 13: The work cited is III here.
- p. 184, line 12 from bottom: *Restklassenbildung*, see the Corrigenda to III: 65b, n. 30, above.
- p. 184, line 8 from bottom: for 'Dedanitic' read 'Dadanitic', see III: 33..
- p. 186, lines 13ff.: see MacDonald, Al Mu'azzin, and Nehmé 1996: 444–9.
- p. 186, last paragraph: see now also Macdonald 2003a: 39–40, 48.
- p. 186, line 3 from bottom: However, there is now one interesting inscription from Sinai which reads *dkyr kl nbty btb* 'May each Nabataean be remembered for good' (Nehmé 1999: 154–5, no. 4)
- p. 187, n. 28: A Review Article, JSemSt (forthcoming) = Macdonald 1999.
- p. 188, lines 8ff.: 'But on those occasions ...': I should have noted that there are four occurrences in the nearly 4000 inscriptions from Sinai, in which the Aramaic passive participle *dkyr* is replaced by its Arabic equivalent, *mdkwr* (CIS ii 1331; Negev 1977a: 56, no. 219),<sup>10</sup> *mdkr* (CIS ii 1280),<sup>11</sup> *mdkryn* (Negev 1977b: 222, no. 3). However, the syntax and the other words in the conventional formulae in these four graffiti remain Aramaic, and nothing but the form of the participle distinguishes them from the thousands of other 'Nabataean' Aramaic graffiti in Sinai.
- p. 188, paragraphs 2 and 3: See also II: 306ff., 377–82; and Macdonald 1999: 254–6, and *passim*.
- p. 188, 5 lines from bottom: For 'some 20,000' now read 'some 28,000'
- pp. 189–90: Rawwāfa: see VIII: 9–14.

## VI. 'Les Arabes en Syrie' or 'La pénétration des Arabes en Syrie'

- p. 304, third paragraph and n. 3: 'The term «Arab »': There is in fact more evidence than I thought when I wrote this. See now Macdonald forthcomingb.

<sup>10</sup> In CIS ii 2768 the reading is doubtful on both the copies published in CIS.

<sup>11</sup> The letters *mdkrw* below CIS ii 1312 have no context.

M.C.A. Macdonald

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Literacy and Identity in Pre-Islamic Arabia

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**ASHGATE**  
**VARIORUM**

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# CONTENTS

Preface	vii–viii
Acknowledgements	ix
PART 1: LITERACY, LANGUAGE AND SCRIPTS	
I Literacy in an oral environment <i>Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard, eds P. Bienkowski, C. Mee and E. Slater. New York/London: T &amp; T Clark International, 2005</i>	49–118
II Nomads and the Ḥawrān in the late Hellenistic and Roman periods: a reassessment of the epigraphic evidence <i>Syria 70. Paris, 1993</i>	303–413
III Reflections on the linguistic map of pre-Islamic Arabia <i>Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy 11. Copenhagen, 2000</i>	28–79
PART 2: ANCIENT ETHNICITY	
IV Some reflections on epigraphy and ethnicity in the Roman Near East <i>Mediterranean Archaeology 11. Sydney, 1998</i>	177–190
V Arabians, Arabias, and the Greeks: contact and perceptions <i>Published in Italian as 'Arabi, Arabia e Greci. Forme di contatto e percezione', in I Greci: Storia Cultura Arte Società. 3. I Greci oltre la Grecia, ed. S. Settis. Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2001, pp. 231–266</i>	1–33
VI 'Les Arabes en Syrie' or 'La pénétration des Arabes en Syrie': a question of perceptions? <i>La Syrie hellénistique (Topoi, Suppl. 4). Paris: De Boccard, 2003</i>	303–318

## PART 3: ASPECTS OF THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT ARABIA

VII	Was the Nabataean kingdom a 'Bedouin state'?	102–119
	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina Vereins 107. Tübingen, 1991</i>	
VIII	On Saracens, the Rawwāfah inscription and the Roman army	1–26
	<i>Published in French as 'Quelques réflexions sur les Saracènes, l'inscription de Rawwāfa et l'armée Romaine', in Présence arabe dans le Croissant fertile avant l'Hégire, ed. H. Lozachmeur. Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1995, pp. 93–101</i>	
IX	Trade routes and trade goods at the northern end of the 'incense road' in the first millennium B.C.	333–349
	<i>Profumi d'Arabia. Atti del Convegno, ed. A. Avanzini. Rome: 'L'Erma' di Bretschneider, 1997</i>	
	Addenda and Corrigenda	1–23
	Index	1–36

This volume contains x + 420 pages
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