Ancient Arabia: A brief history and time-line

1. Multiple Arabias

Ancient sources, in particular the Assyrian Annals and the Greek and Roman historians and geographers, defined ‘Arabia’ as anywhere inhabited by peoples called ‘Arabs’. They applied this term to populations with very different ways-of-life in a wide variety of areas, and it seems likely that only a combination of a recognizably common language and certain common cultural traits could have defined them all as belonging to the same group.
From the 8th century BC, the Assyrians and Babylonians recorded Arabs living (from east to west) in eastern Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Iran, settled in large numbers in Babylonia, in the Syrian Jazira (between the Tigris and Euphrates), on the slopes of the Anti-Lebanon mountains (between modern Lebanon and Syria), in north and north-west Arabia, and in Sinai. By the 6th century, the Achaemenid Persian empire recognized an Arab enclave in Gaza and its hinterland, and a century later Herodotus regarded ‘Arabia’ as being most of eastern Egypt, between the Nile and the Red Sea. Xenophon (c. 430–c. 354 BC) found ‘Arabias’ in northern Syria and northern and central Mesopotamia, while Alexander the Great (356–323 BC) encountered Arabs in the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains, Gaza, Sinai, the eastern Nile Delta, and eastern Egypt, as well as at the head of the Persian Gulf, and even in central Iran. His explorers also identified and defined the ‘Arabian’ Peninsula for the first time, and, by the Roman period, there were ‘Arabias’ in eastern Egypt and the delta, Sinai, southern Palestine (the Negev), the Beqa’ Valley of Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon, the whole of modern Jordan, southern, central and northern Syria, northern, central, and southern Mesopotamia, as well as the Peninsula. This does not mean that the total populations of any of these areas were considered to be ‘Arabs’, but that there were Arab populations in them of sufficiently significant size and importance to be recognized by outsiders. Thus, for instance, while in the early centuries AD there were quite considerable Arab communities in Southern Arabia (modern Yemen), and Graeco-Roman geographers mistakenly called it *Arabia Felix*, the majority indigenous populations in the kingdoms of that region did not regard themselves as Arabs.

The ways-of-life of these populations varied considerably. In many places they were sedentary farmers, in others they had self-governing cities, in others they formed merchant colonies within cities, in yet others they had extensive kingdoms (e.g. the Nabataeans and those in northern Mesopotamia), while others were nomads. Thus, from the early 1st millennium BC when we first hear of ‘Arabs’, they occupied increasingly large areas throughout the Fertile Crescent. As yet, we have no evidence of where they originated. The idea that it was necessarily from the Peninsula is an anachronistic misunderstanding, since the Peninsula only came to be called ‘Arabia’ par excellence from the late Hellenistic and Roman periods onwards. We do not know what, if anything, it was called by its inhabitants at that time and earlier.

In 64 BC Pompey made Syria into a Roman Province. However, the Nabataean kingdom which stretched from southern Syria to north-west Arabia and into southern Palestine, remained independent until AD 106 when it too was annexed by Rome and was renamed *Provincia Arabia*. After this, all the inhabitants of this Province were called ‘Arabs’ by the Romans and it gradually became necessary to find another name for the
nomads who had previously been called ‘Arabs’ but were not subjects of the province. For these, the term ‘Saracen’ (probably derived from a North Arabian word meaning ‘those who migrate to the inner desert’) was slowly adopted. However, the term ‘Arab’ continued to be used of settled Arabs in regions such as the Jazīra and northern Mesopotamia. Thus, in AD 195, Septimius Severus fought ‘Arabs’ in northern Mesopotamia and so assumed the honorific title Arabicus. Eventually, however, the term ‘Saracen’ was extended to all those who had previously been called ‘Arabs’, regardless of whether they were settled or nomadic. In the period after AD 106, it is therefore important to distinguish between events in the Province of Arabia, those in the Arabian Peninsula, and those affecting Arabs in other places.
2. The north, west, centre, and east of the Arabian Peninsula

What we call the ‘Arabian Peninsula’ has been inhabited since Palaeolithic times. Recent discoveries have shown that early hominids made their way out of Africa across the bed of the Red Sea (which was almost dry at that time) and through the Arabian Peninsula into Asia, as well as via the Levant into Europe. Successive climate changes meant that over tens of thousands of years, prehistoric Man survived by adopting different ways of life, as witnessed for instance by rock-drawings of cattle in what are now desert areas and of the hunting of dromedaries in the days before the animal was domesticated.

The landmass of the Peninsula slopes gently eastward from a mountain chain along the western (Red Sea) coast to the Persian Gulf. In the south-west and, to some extent the south-east, there are extensive mountainous areas which benefit from the twice-yearly monsoon rains, which, when conserved, permit permanent irrigated agriculture. This was the basis of the prosperity of ancient Yemen and also permitted the cultivation of the frankincense tree (Boswellia sacra) primarily in Dhofar (in the south of modern Oman). In the centre, north and south-east of the Peninsula, there are scattered areas where irrigated agriculture is possible (e.g. in parts of Najd, ‘Asīr, the Wādī al-Dawāsir, and Oman), and there are numerous oases across the Peninsula, some of them extremely large (e.g. al-Hasa [= Wāḥat al-Aḥsā’], Ḥā’il, Dūmat [Akkadian Adumatu, Biblical Dūmā, mediaeval Dūmat al-Jandal, modern al-Jawf], Tabūk, Taymā’, Dadan [Biblical Dedān, modern al-‘Ulā], and Yathrib [= al-Madīna]) where permanent settled populations have for millennia practiced agriculture, horticulture, and the cultivation of huge groves of date-palms, and at different periods have developed urban societies and even kingdoms.

From the 4th millennium BC onwards, the Peninsula lay between the two great powers of the ancient Near East: Egypt on the west and Mesopotamia (Assyria and Babylonia), and later Iran, to the north-east. Most of our knowledge of the Neolithic and Bronze Ages in Arabia comes from eastern Arabia, because it is here that it has been possible to undertake archaeological work for longest. Eastern Arabia lay between the civilizations of Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley and was on the trade-routes between the two. Its many prehistoric societies named after the sites where they were first identified (Ḥaffīt, Hīlī, Umm an-Nār, etc.) have left large monumental tombs with communal burials and distinctive repertories of artefacts. From the 4th millennium BC onwards, first the eastern coast of what is now Saudi Arabia and then the islands of Bahrain were known to the Sumerians and then the Babylonians as ‘Dilmun’. The earliest sources refer to it as a staging post for timber (and later, for metals) brought from far-off lands for use in Mesopotamia. In Sumerian mythology, it was regarded as a sort of earthly Paradise because of its abundance of fresh water. Between 2400 and 1700 BC over 170,000 large burial tumuli were constructed in the
north of the island. In the Oman Peninsula, known as Magan in cuneiform
documents, copper was mined, smelted and exported to Mesopotamia from
the third millennium BC onwards.

In Oman, a sophisticated irrigation system called the *falaj* was
developed in the Iron Age and the technology was later exported to Iran,
where these tunnels were known as *qanat* [= *qanāh*]. The *falaj* brought
water from springs via underground tunnels to the fields and settlements,
making possible extensive agriculture in areas with little seasonal rainfall.

The domestication of the dromedary which seems to have taken place
in south-east Arabia around 1200–1100 BC, provided sources of rich milk
products as well as beasts of burden and means of transport for settled
people and for nomads.

In the last centuries BC and the early centuries AD a number of states
flourished on the east coast of the Peninsula, among which the great trading
city of Gerrha (exact site unidentified) was the most famous. Gerrha
dominated the trade between the Indian Ocean, Mesopotamia, Yemen, and
— via the Nabataeans — the Mediterranean. Several of these states minted
their own coins and these show that some were ruled by women.

In the north and centre of the Peninsula, sedentary life was mainly
concentrated in large oases. While agriculture and the cultivation of the date
palm formed the basis of their economies, by the second millennium and
possibly even earlier, some (e.g. Taymāʾ) had developed into urban centres,
probably as a result of their positions on the trade routes. At Qurayya, in the
north-west, pottery has been found which seems to link it with the copper-
mining site of Timnaʿ in the Wādī ʿAraba (the southern extension of the
Dead Sea Valley) which was controlled by the Egyptians in the 2nd
millennium BC. By the first millennium BC, the oases in the north and
north-west of the Peninsula had become pivotal in the trade in frankincense
and spices brought overland from Southern Arabia to Egypt, the
Mediterranean (at Gaza), the Levant, Syria, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia.
Already in the 8th century BC, a caravan of the people of Taymāʾ (in North
Arabia) and Sabaʾ (in South Arabia) was ambushed by the Assyrian
governor of Suḥu on the Euphrates for trying to avoid paying tolls.

Anxious to control the northern end of this trade, the rulers of Assyria
and Babylonia launched repeated attacks against the populations (both
settled and nomadic) of North Arabia, many of whom were ruled by
priestess-queens based in the oasis of Dūmat (mediaeval Dūmat al-Jandal,
modern al-Jawf). So important was this trade that by the mid-6th century
BC, Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon (555–539 BC), chose to reside in
Taymāʾ for the major part of his reign (probably 552–543 BC), having
already conquered five other major oases on the trade route from the south,
including Dadan (Biblical Dedân) and Yathrib (modern al-Madîna). In Dadan, which was the site of two successive kingdoms (Dadan and Liḥyān), Minaean merchants from South Arabia, who were the major dealers in frankincense, founded a trading station. By the first century AD, the Nabataeans — nomadic Arabs who had settled in southern Jordan in the 3rd century BC and had taken control of the northern end of the trade route — ruled the whole of the north-west of the Peninsula and had established a city, Ḥegrā (mediaeval al-Ḥijr, modern Madāʾin Ṣāliḥ) some 20 km north of Dadan.

In the centre of the Peninsula, on the north-west edge of the ‘Empty Quarter’, another oasis site called Qaryat Dhāt Kahl (modern Qaryat al- Faʾw) flourished between the 2nd century BC and the 5th century AD. It was the capital of the Arab tribes of Kinda, Madḥij and Qaḥṭān. Excavations there have revealed an extraordinarily rich and luxurious way of life, with wall-paintings, exquisite glass, bronze and stone statuary, decorative textiles, and large numbers of inscriptions. Luxury goods were imported from the Mediterranean world, Egypt, the Levant, Mesopotamia, India, South Arabia and other places. Its prosperity was based on its strategic location on the major trade route from Southern Arabia to the Persian Gulf. Although it was within the cultural orbit of the Minaeans and Sabaeans, it developed an independent artistic style and periodically asserted its political independence.

Besides these settled cultures, there were nomadic tribes in most parts of the Peninsula from at least the 4th millennium onwards. These tribes would have lived in a symbiotic relationship with the inhabitants of the oases since each population could provide important goods needed by the other: the nomads provided the sedentaries with meat, animal transport, leather, wool and milk-products, and in return the oasis dwellers could provide, vegetables, flour, dates, wood and metal-products. Both communities were involved in, and profited from, the south-north overland trade and therefore had a vested interest in the preservation of peace.

When the Nabataeans settled in southern Jordan in the 3rd century BC, they made their capital at Reqem, called by the Greeks Petra. Even as nomads, they had been renowned for their expertise in constructing hidden cisterns in the desert to provide water throughout the year, and when they settled they became great hydrological engineers and their conservation of the seasonal rainfall enabled them to put large areas under irrigated cultivation. The well-ordered urban society of Petra aroused the admiration of the Greek philosopher Athenodorus, who lived there for some years. The Nabataeans dominated the northern end of the incense trade route from Southern Arabia to the Mediterranean, and, as mentioned above, worked with the merchants from the eastern Arabian city of Gerrha in bringing spices and other luxury goods from India and beyond to the markets of the
Mediterranean world. From southern Jordan they expanded their kingdom until by the end of the 1st century BC it stretched from southern Syria to north-west Arabia and included Sinai and the Negev. In the mid 1st century AD, the last Nabataean king, Rabbel II, moved his capital from Petra to Boṣrā in southern Syria and when, on his death in AD 106, the Romans annexed the kingdom and named it *Provincia Arabia*, they retained Boṣrā as the capital. The new era of the Province was known both as the era of Boṣrā and of the Province, and continued to be used in official documents until the Islamic conquests (mid 7th century AD), and by Christians until much later.

The Roman and Byzantine empires ruled the Near East for over 600 years (from 64 BC to the Islamic conquests in AD 635–640), and throughout this period their policy was dominated by the conflict with Persia/Iran. The fluctuating border between these two superpowers ran through Armenia (in what is now eastern Turkey) and the Jazīra between the Tigris and Euphrates. Parts of this region consisted of rich agricultural land and parts were desert, and there were cities on both sides of both rivers. There was one or more settled Arab kingdoms in the northern Jazīra, and Arab communities, both settled and nomadic, further south. These were constantly caught up in the conflict between Rome and Persia.
In AD 224, the Sasanian dynasty overthrew the Parthians and took power in Persia, which from now on was called Iran by its rulers. From the mid 4th century onwards the Sasanians employed the Arab Nasrid (sometimes called ‘Lakhmid’) kingdom, with its capital at al-Ḥīra (in what is now south-western Iraq) to raid Byzantine territory; and, by the end of the 5th century, the Arab Jafnids (of the tribal confederation of Ghassān) had settled in southern Syria and the Province of Arabia, and were being used in the same way by the Byzantine side. However, the relationship between the Jafnids and the Byzantine state was constantly disturbed by theological problems because the Jafnids held firmly to Miaphysite Christianity and resisted all attempts by the state to impose the Chalcedonian Christology upon them. Religion was much less of a problem between the Zoroastrian Iranian state, which had little missionary zeal, and the Nasrids who mostly remained pagan, apart from the last king who adopted Nestorian Christianity.

The constant conflicts between the Byzantine and Iranian states so debilitated both sides that they were unable to resist the armies of the nascent Islamic state in the 4th decade of the 7th century. The Byzantines were unable to retain any of their eastern provinces south of Anatolia and, in a remarkably short period, the Islamic armies had also conquered the Iranian empire.

3. Ancient South Arabia

Unlike the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, south-west Arabia appears to have been a coherent cultural sphere, which — despite many outside influences and drastic internal changes — preserved its own cultural, political, and linguistic individuality from its historical beginnings until late antiquity. By the early first millennium BC, highly developed communities had appeared
in the arid deltas at the eastern fringes of the Yemeni central plateau. They used writing and had monumental architecture, and their economy was based on agriculture watered by the monsoons with at least two harvests per year. The most important among these communities were Sabaʾ, Maʾin, Qataban and Ḥaḍramawt. Their wealth — of which Graeco-Roman authors speak when referring to Arabia Eudaimôn or Arabia Felix — was based on the trade in frankincense and other spices, and on control of large stretches of the trade route to the markets in the north.

Our first detailed insight from within South Arabia itself into its political landscape in the 1st millennium BC is found in the lengthy Res Gestae (or ‘Deeds’) of the Sabaean rulers Yithaʾʿamar Watar and Karibʾil Watar. These are the earliest reliably datable historical records from South Arabia, and indeed from the Arabian Peninsula in general. These huge inscriptions were set up around 715 and 685 BC respectively, in the sanctuary of the principal Sabaean deity, ʾAlmaqah, at Ṣirwāḥ, close to the Sabean metropolis of Mārib. They tell of the Sabaeans’ defeat of their southern and northern neighbours and the consequent establishment of their hegemony in South Arabia.

The epigraphic evidence provides only limited information on the structure and organization of societies in ancient South Arabia. The most detailed data concern the situation in the Sabaean heartland around Mārib and Ṣirwāḥ. At the head of society was the so-called mukarrib who performed the role of mediator between the principal Sabaean god, ʾAlmaqah, and the people of Sabaʾ. He was responsible for the exercise of ritual duties such as the performance of the sacred marriage and the organization of ritual banquets for ʿAthtar, the only deity venerated by all South Arabian peoples. He was in charge of the performance of ritual processions in the large temple complexes, of certain sacrifices, and of the ritual hunt. The title mukarrib (‘unifier’) probably alludes to the central political task of the Sabaean ruler, namely uniting the South Arabian cities and tribes under Sabaean sovereignty through a far-reaching system of alliances. With the decline of Sabaean power in the 4th century BC, the title mukarrib passed to other kingdoms and was replaced in Sabaʾ by the term “king” (mlk).

When, in the 4th century BC, Sabaʾ eventually relinquished its hegemony, Qataban managed to extend its territory to the south-west as far as Bab al-Mandab (the straits where the Red Sea meets the Indian Ocean). Minaean merchants, who established a trading colony with its own administrative structures in Dadan (modern al-ʿUlā, in north-west Saudi Arabia), are also found in Egypt, the Levant, at Ctesiphon on the river Tigris in Mesopotamia, and even on the Greek island of Delos.

In 25 BC, the Prefect of the Roman Province of Egypt, Aelius Gallus, set out with an army of 10,000 soldiers towards South Arabia. According to the Greek geographer Strabo (64/63 BC–AD 25), when the Roman army
reached the Sabaean metropolis of Mārib they besieged it for six days but could not take it. Although we lack corresponding sources from the South Arabian side, this campaign may be connected with the final disappearance of the Minaeans, with the result that the overland trade in frankincense was taken over by the Nabataeans. We know that Nabataean merchants were in South Arabia after this from a Sabaic-Nabataean bilingual inscription found at Ṣirwāḥ which is dated to the third year of the Nabataean king Aretas IV, that is 7/6 BC.

Later, due to the increasing importance of the maritime trade with India, which had already been stimulated by the Roman occupation of Egypt, the balance of power shifted in South Arabia. The few natural harbours and their access points became especially important. By this period, or even earlier, colonizers from the Ḫaḍramawt had established the port of Samārum (also known as ‘Sumhurām’, modern Khor Rori) on the coast of Dhofar close to the region where frankincense was produced, while the harbour of Qāni’ west of modern al-Mukallā on the southern Yemeni coast, secured Ḫaḍramī access to maritime trade after the turn of the era.

From the 1st century AD onwards, the people of Ḫimyar in the southern highlands began to break away from Qataban and eventually emerged as a considerable power in South Arabian politics. Around the turn of the era, possibly as a result of Aelius Gallus’ campaign, a coalition was formed between Saba’ and Ḫimyar, and from this point onwards their rulers called themselves ‘kings of Saba’ and Dhū Raidān’, the latter referring to the royal place in the Himyarite capital, Ṣafār. This coalition was ended by the rise of tribes in the highlands of northern Yemen, which replaced the royal dynasty of Saba’ in Mārib during the 2nd century AD.

The 2nd and 3rd centuries AD are characterized by a series of wars between a number of different protagonists. After Qataban had been absorbed by Ḫaḍramawt, a final, ephemeral, Sabaean hegemony was created through a policy of large-scale expansion by the Sabaean king Sha’irum Awtar. His campaigns led him northwards to Qaryat al-Fa’w (see above). In the east of Yemen, he destroyed Shabwa, the capital of the Ḫaḍramī kingdom, and Qāni’, its port for trade with India. In the west he marched against the Abyssinians settled on the Red Sea coast of Yemen. In San’ā’, he built the castle of Ghumdān, the splendour of which, even in the 10th century AD, impressed the Yemeni historian and geographer al-Hamdānī.

Large numbers of inscriptions from the 3rd century AD, by both Sabaeans and Himyarites, mention the fierce wars conducted — with varying outcomes — by the Sabaean king Ilsharaḥ Yaḥḍib and his Himyarite opponents Shammar Yuхаṃmid and Karibʾīl Ayfaʾī. Although there was no one decisive battle, towards the end of the 3rd century the Himyarites eventually emerged victorious. By the beginning of the 4th century, Yemen was united under the Himyarite king Shammar Yuhaʾīsh. The Himyarites
composed their inscriptions in a southern Sabaic dialect, using the same script as their predecessors.

Around the middle of the 4th century AD, the first evidence of monotheism begins to appear in the Ancient South Arabian inscriptions. The deity invoked is ‘(god) the Lord of Heaven (and of the earth)’, later also called Rahmānan, ‘the merciful’. This was an epithet designating the Jewish God, as the phraseology in several religious inscriptions from the following period show. The Himyarite dynasty’s conversion to Judaism was at least in part a reaction to the increasing Byzantine influence in this region, and in particular the conversion to Christianity of the Abyssinian king ʿEzānā IV in Aksum. This adoption of different forms of monotheism gave an additional religio-political element to the conflict between the two powers on either side of the Bab al-Mandab: Ḫimyar and Abyssinia.

The epigraphic evidence, however, does not reveal whether there was a continuous conflict from this time on, or a particular aggravation of the situation during the 5th century. After several campaigns, Ḫimyar under its king Abikarib Asʿad managed to extend its sphere of influence into central Arabia, and to maintain its hold through its Arab proxies the kings of Kinda and the Bedouin confederation of Maʿadd.

In the first quarter of the 6th century AD, a major conflict erupted between Ḫimyar and the Abyssinians. We are fortunate to have information about this not only from Sabaic and Ethiopic inscriptions, but also from Syriac and Greek literary sources. Immediately before this, the Himyarite dynasty appears to have been pursuing a pro-Byzantine (and thus pro-Abyssinian) policy. This would explain the large numbers of Christian communities on the western coastal plain of Yemen, in the Himyarite capital Zafār, in Ḥaḍramawt, and in Najrān in the north, against which (and against their Abyssinian protectors) the Himyarite king Yūsuf Ashʿar (known in later Arab sources as Dhū Nuwas) took action at the beginning of the 520s. These military actions culminated in the siege and surrender of Najrān and the massacre of all the Christian inhabitants. Aided by the Byzantines, the Abyssinian counterattack, led by the Abyssinian Negus (king) Ella-ʿAšbeḥa in person, conquered South Arabia, putting an end to Himyarite rule. An Abyssinian, Abreha, established himself in the following years as the Christian ruler of South Arabia, but distanced himself to a considerable extent from the kings in Aksum. His reign, was marked by large building projects such as the last overhaul of the Mārib dam and the erection of a cathedral in the new capital, Ṣanʿāʾ. Abyssinian rule in South Arabia eventually ended in the 570s when the country was conquered by the Sasanians. It remained an Iranian province until AD 628 when its governor converted to Islam and declared his allegiance to the nascent Islamic state in al-Madīna.
4. Literacy in ancient Arabia

The art of writing was practised widely within the western-two thirds of the Peninsula. Arabia had its own family of alphabets (the South Semitic script family) descended from the Proto-alphabet of the second millennium, and which developed in parallel to the Phoenico-Aramaic alphabets of the Levant. Writing was used extensively not only by oasis-dwellers and in the states of South Arabia, but also, from the mid 1st millennium BC, by the nomads, who have left scores of thousands of graffiti on the desert rocks from southern Syria to the borders of Yemen. The South Semitic script family seems to be mentioned — as ta-i-ma-ni-ti (i.e. the script of Taymāʾ) — already in an inscription of the 8th century BC at Carchemish in what is now southern Turkey. In north-west and central Arabia, the languages of the inscriptions were Ancient North Arabian, a group of dialects related to Arabic, although Arabic itself appears to have remained a largely unwritten
language until the 5th century AD. Curiously, in eastern Arabia we have very few inscriptions, and these are in Akkadian, Aramaic, Greek, and South Arabian, with a handful (Hasaitic) in what may be an Ancient North Arabian dialect expressed in the Sabaic script.

The Ancient South Arabian languages attested in inscriptions from the geographical area which is now Yemen, were Sabaic, Minaic, Qatabanic, and Hadramitic. These stand apart linguistically from the languages known from the rest of the Peninsula. With more than 5,000 inscriptions spread over 1,600 years (from the late 10th century BC to the 6th century AD), Sabaic is the best attested and the longest documented language, not only of South Arabia but of the entire Arabian Peninsula. The documents, which are usually engraved on prepared stone surfaces, cover a wide range of topics and are written in an alphabet of 29 letters, the elegant geometrical forms of which were already fully developed by the 8th and 7th centuries BC. A “minuscule” version of the script, which has been known to scholarship since the 1970s, was incised on palm-leaf stalks and wooden sticks and used for day-to-day documents. The earliest of these known so far has been dated by 14C to between 1055 and 901 BC.

Further reading

For histories of north and central Arabia see:

For eastern Arabia, see

For south Arabia, see
5. Time-line

10th century BC  The earliest securely dated writing in an indigenous script in Arabia: a document carved on a stick in the South Arabian script, dated by 14C to between 1055 and 901 BC.

853 BC  First reference to an ‘Arab’. The annals of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC) record that ‘Gindibu the Arab’ brought 1000 camels to the alliance of kings against Assyria at the battle of Qarqar (central Syria).

Late 9th/early 8th century BC  Yariris, the regent of the city of Carchemish (now southern Turkey), boasts that he can read what is probably the script of Taymāʾ (perhaps meaning alphabets of the South Semitic script family).

8th century BC  The Neo-Assyrian governor of Suhu, on the west bank of the Euphrates, attacks a caravan of ‘the people of Taymāʾ and Sabaʾ’.

738 BC  Zabibe ‘Queen of the Arabs’, along with many kings of states in the Levant, Syria and southern Anatolia, sends tribute to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BC).

734–716 BC  The reign of Samsi ‘Queen of the Arabs’, of the tribe of Qēdār, based at the oasis of Dūmat.

734 BC  Samsi swears allegiance to Tiglath-Pileser III.

733 BC  Samsi, together with the inhabitants of the oasis of Taymāʾ, plus various Arab tribes, and possibly with the assistance of the kingdom of Sabaʾ, rebels against Tiglath-Pileser III, but is defeated. The Assyrians claim that 9400 of her soldiers
were killed and over 1000 taken captive along with 30,000 camels, 20,000 sheep, and 5000 measures of all sorts of spices. Samsi is allowed to remain queen, but an Assyrian official is placed over her.

**732–705 BC**
Assyrian officials in Syria write to the king at Kalḫu (modern Nimrud) about relations with Arabs in their provinces.

**716 BC**
Sargon II (720–705 BC) settles Arab tribes from North Arabia in Samaria.

**c. 716 BC**
Samsi, together with ‘Ita’amara the Sabaean’ and the Pharaoh of Egypt, sends gifts to Sargon II.

**703 BC**
Arabs living in walled towns and in villages in western Babylonia support Merodach-Baladan II, king of Babylon (722–710, and 702 BC), against the Assyrians, but are defeated and Basquanu, brother of Iati‘e, queen of the Arabs, is captured. Ancient North Arabian inscriptions (in the South Semitic script) are written in Babylonian cities probably at this period.

**From the 7th century BC**
Sabean colonists begin to settle in the region of Axum, Ethiopia.

**691–689 BC**
Te’elḥunu, queen of the Arabs based at Adumatu (Dūmat) and Haza’el, king of Qēdār, are defeated by Sennacherib, king of Assyria (705–681 BC). Dūmat is captured and Te’elḥunu is carried off to Assyria, along with the images of the gods of the Arabs. Tabūa, an Arab girl (possibly daughter of Te’elḥunu) is also carried off and is brought up at the court of Senacherib. Haza’el surrenders to Senacherib and a heavy tribute is imposed upon him.

**685 BC**
Karibilu (Karib’il Watar bin Dhamar‘ali), king of Saba’, sends a gift (nāmurtu) to Senacherib who places it in the foundation of the Bīt Akītu (New Year festival) temple.

**685 BC**
The great inscription of Karib’il Watar in the temple to ’Almaqah at Širwāḥ records his victory over the king of Awsān and his allies as well as the destruction of his palace and capital in Wādī Markha. Qataban and Ḥaḍramawt form an
alliance with Saba’. The king of Nashshān in the Yemeni Jawf is defeated. Najrān (north of Yemen and a focal point on the frankincense trade-routes) is conquered. Saba’ becomes the dominant power in South Arabia. The upper storey of the Salḥīn palace in Mārib is built.

681–676 BC
Esarhaddon king of Assyria (680–669 BC) restores the images of the gods to Dūmat and makes Tabūa queen of the Arabs, in place of Te’elhunu. He confirms Haza’el as king of Qēdār, imposing an extra tribute upon him. Haza’el dies, and Esarhaddon confirms the succession of Haza’el's son, Iauta’, in return for a heavy extra annual tribute of 10 minas of gold, 1000 choice jewels, 50 camels and 1000 bags of spices.

676–673 BC
Esarhaddon suppresses a rebellion against Iauta’.

673–669 BC
Iauta’ rebels against Esarhaddon but is defeated and the images of the gods are again taken from Dūmat.

671 BC
Arab tribes in Sinai help Esarhaddon's troops to cross Sinai and to invade Egypt.

668 BC
The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (688–631 BC) returns the image of the deity ‘Atar-samain to Iauta’ king of Qēdār.

Before 652 BC
Iauta’ and his wife Adiya, ‘queen of the Arabs’, attack Assyria's vassal states in Transjordan. They are defeated and Adiya is captured. Iauta’ takes refuge with Natnū king of the Nabaioth (south of Taymā’) but eventually gives himself up to the Assyrians. Ashurbanipal replaces Iauta’ as king of Qēdār by Abiyata’ son of Te’ri.

651–648 BC
Abiyata’ supports Shamash-shum-ukín king of Babylon (667–648 BC) against Ashurbanipal, who, however, defeats them in Syria.

After 646 BC
Ashurbanipal attacks and defeats the Arab tribes of Qēdār and Nabaioth in central Syria.

Mid-7th century BC
The Sabaean mukarrib, Yada’il Dhariḥ, builds a wall around the principal sanctuary of ‘Almaqah, the god of the Sabaean kingdom, at Mārib, and the temple of ‘Almaqah at Širwāḥ.
c. 600 BC  First Greek references (in Sappho) to frankincense, using a word of Semitic origin.

6th century BC  The first reference to ‘Arabs’ in South Arabia occurs in a Minaic inscription, though it is unclear from the context whether it is the name of a people or a word for ‘nomads’.

599–598 BC  Under Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 BC), the Babylonian army plunders Arab nomads in Syria.

552–543 BC  Nabonidus, last king of Babylon (555–539 BC) conquers 6 important oases in north-west Arabia, including Taymāʾ and Dadan whose kings he kills. He sets up his residence in Taymāʾ for 10 years (probably 552–543 BC).

c. 550 BC  The records of an unnamed Sabaean mukkarrib, probably Yithaʿʾamar Bayyin son of Sumuhuʿalī Yanūf, mention a war against Qataban, a campaign against the Minaeans and their kingdom of Maʿīn, as well as the siege of Yathill in the north of the Yemeni Jawf, the heartland of the Minaeans. Towers and gates were added to the city wall of Mārib. The northern and southern sluices of the great dam at Mārib were built. The rise of Qataban and Maʿīn.

540 BC  A king of ‘Arabia’ (in northern Mesopotamia) brings 100 chariots, 10,000 horsemen and a large number of infantry armed with slings to join the kings of Greater Phrygia, and Cappadocia in support of Nabonidus against Cyrus the Great (559–530 BC), who defeats them. The Arabians and ‘Assyrians’ put up the strongest fight ‘because they were on their own land’, and are massacred.

539–331 BC  All the ‘Arabias’ known at the time are ruled by the Achaemenid empire. But the Arabs in southern Palestine, centred on Gaza, within the 5th satrapy, are the only people in the empire (apart from the Colchians in the far north and the Ethiopians in the far south) not to pay taxes, but instead to give an annual ‘gift’ to the treasury of 1000 talents (c. 30 tonnes) of frankincense.

525 BC  Arabs in Sinai assist the Persian king Cambyses (530–522 BC) in his invasion of Egypt.
c. 520 BC  Darius I (521–486 BC) sends Scylax of Caryanda on a voyage of exploration from the Indus to Egypt in which he travels along the southern coast of the Peninsula and up the Red Sea, noting that the Kamaran Islands (at the southern end of the Red Sea) are inhabited by ‘Arabs’. The information gathered by Scylax was incorporated, rather inaccurately, in a map by the Ionian geographer Hecataeus.

from the 5th century BC  Qatabanian dominance of South Arabia until the second half of the 2nd century AD.

mid 5th century BC  Herodotus describes ‘Arabia’ as being in eastern Egypt between the Nile and the Red Sea.

after 445 BC  ‘Geshem (Gashmū) the Arab’, probably an official in the Arab area in southern Palestine which was semi-autonomous under Achaemenid rule, together with officials from other parts of the same satrapy, clashes with Nehemiah over the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

410 BC  Pharnabazus, Persian satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia, sends the Phoenician fleet to support Sparta in a war against Athens, but at a crucial moment withdraws it ‘on receiving information [probably false] that the king of the Arabs [probably based at Gaza] and the king of the Egyptians had designs upon Phoenicia.’

401 BC  Xenophon encounters Arabs living in central Mesopotamia.

c. 400 BC  Ma‘īn and Ḥaḍramawt become independent of Saba’.

343 BC  Minaean merchants working in Egypt flee from the invading Persians and safely reach the Minaean capital Qarnaw, north of Mārib, in the Yemeni Jawf.

332 BC  Alexander III, the Great, (336–323 BC) attacks Arab peasants in the Anti-Lebanon mountains during his siege of Tyre.

332 BC  Alexander attacks Gaza, which is defended by the Persian governor with the help of many Arabs, one of whom is said to have wounded Alexander.
He then sweeps on into north-eastern Egypt where he conquered ‘the greater part of [this] Arabia’.

326 BC
Alexander sends Nearchos on a voyage of discovery from the mouth of the Indus to the head of the Persian Gulf and the Greeks become aware for the first time of the eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula.

325 BC
Alexander sends three other naval expeditions to try to circumnavigate the Peninsula, one of which identified for the first time in Greek geography that Southern Arabia was the true source of frankincense.

312 BC
The Seleucid king, Antigonus ‘the One-eyed’, attacks the Nabataeans, a nomadic Arab tribe in southern Jordan involved in the northern end of the incense trade.

3rd century BC
The Nabataeans settle in southern Jordan, southern Palestine and parts of the Nile Delta, eventually expanding their kingdom to the Ḥawrān in the north and to north-west Arabia in the south. They develop highly sophisticated water-conservation systems and irrigation agriculture, as well as profiting greatly from the trade in luxury goods from southern and eastern Arabia.

3rd/2nd century BC
The Greek geographer Eratosthenes describes the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains and the Beqa’ plain as being inhabited by Ituraeans and Arabs, and the eastern foothills of the Anti-Lebanon as ‘the Arabian mountains’.

218 BC
In the struggle between the Seleucids and the Ptolemies for possession of the Levant, the Arabs of the rich agricultural land of north-west Transjordan and the city of ‘Rabbatamana of the Arabs’ [Biblical Rabbat Banī ‘Ammōn, modern Ḍammān] help the Seleucid king, Antiochus III.

3rd–1st century BC
A series of queens, with the throne-name of ‘Abiel’, issue coins (imitations of Alexander the Great's coinage) on the north-west coast of the Persian Gulf, probably Bahrain. Their name and patronyms are written in Aramaic.
2nd century BC  
Agatharchides of Cnidus describes the west coast of the Arabian Peninsula.

2nd century BC  
A kingdom of Hagar in the north of the Peninsula mints coins (imitations of Alexander the Great's coinage) in the name of a king named Ḥarethat. The name and title are written in the Ancient South Arabian script.

168 BC  
At the time of the Maccabees, Jason, the Hellenizing Jewish High Priest, flees to the Nabataean king, Aretas I, who, however, imprisons him.

166 BC  
At the beginning of the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid state, the Nabataeans support the leaders of the Jewish national party (Judas Maccabaeus 164 BC, Jonathan 160 BC).

153 BC  
Alexander I Balas seizes the Seleucid throne. He sends his young son, Antiochus [VI], to be educated by ‘Imalkoue [or Iamblikhos, or Malkhos] the Arab’, probably in northern Syria.

145 BC  
Alexander Balas is deposed and seeks protection in an ‘Arabia’ probably around Ḥimṣ in central Syria, but the Zabadaioi Arabs there cut off his head and send it to Ptolemy VIII of Egypt.

141–139 BC  
The Arab kingdom of Characene (Mesene) is established at the head of the Persian Gulf and lasts until AD 222.

110 BC  
The theoretical starting date of the Himyarite era which was used in South Arabia sporadically from the 2nd century AD, and universally from the mid-4th to the mid-6th century.

before 100 BC  
Himyar establishes its independence from Qataban.

1st century BC (?)  
The earliest text which may be in a form of the Arabic language, a 10-line funerary stele written in the Sabaic script is set up at Qaryat Dhāṭ Kahl (modern Qaryat al-Fa’w) in central Arabia.

93 BC  
The Jewish leader Alexander Jannaeus attacks the Nabataean king, Obodas I, who inflicts a crushing defeat upon him.

87 BC  
The Seleucid king of Syria, Antiochus XII, attacks the (Nabataean?) Arabs who defeat him
at the battle of Qana [= Qanawāt ?] (in southern Syria), where Antiochus is killed.

c. 85 BC
The Nabataean king Aretas III gains possession of Coele (i.e. southern) Syria and Damascus.

83 BC
Tigranes the Great, king of Armenia (died c. 55 BC), invades Syria and by 80 BC has ended the Seleucid kingdom. He rules the north of Syria, while the south is divided between the Ituraeans and the Nabataeans. He moves Arab nomads into the Amanus region (at the north-east corner of the Mediterranean).

83–80 BC
The Jewish ruler, Alexander Jannaeus, conquers large areas of northern Transjordan from the Nabataeans.

72 BC
Tigranes takes Damascus from the Nabataeans.

69 BC
Tigranes is supported by Arabs from northern Syria and from ‘the Sea of Babylon’, i.e. the head of the Persian Gulf, but these are defeated by the Roman general Lucius Licinius Lucullus.

after 67 BC
‘Azizus the Arab’ crowns a Seleucid pretender, Antiochus XIII, in Antioch, with the support of Sampsigeramus, the Arab king of Arethusa and Emesa [modern Ḥims].

67-65 BC
The Nabataean king, Aretas III, sides with the Jewish ruler Hyrcanus in his struggle against his brother Aristobulus II, defeats Aristobulus and besieges him on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

66/65 BC
Pompey’s general Afranius (died 62 BC), followed by Pompey himself, subdues and receives the submissions of the Arabs around Mount Amanus, of the king of Osrhoene, of a certain ‘Alkhaudonios, the Arab who also attached himself to the stronger party’, and of the Ituraeans.

65 BC
Pompey’s general, Scaurus, having completed the conquest of Syria enters Judaea, sides with Aristobulus and forces Aretas III to withdraw. Scaurus then withdraws to Damascus, and Aristobulus pursues Aretas, inflicting a crushing defeat upon him.
64 BC  Pompey declares Syria a Roman Province and marches on Petra, but has to divert his forces to Judaea because of the hostility of Aristobulus.

62 BC  Pompey sends Scaurus against Petra, but Aretas buys him off. Pompey, however, boasts of the subjugation of Aretas and mints coins celebrating it.

47 BC  The Nabataean king, Malichus I, provides Julius Caesar with cavalry in the Alexandrian War.

46–44 BC  Arabs in Syria support the insurrection against Rome which Caecilius Bassus started in Apamea of Syria.

40 BC  The Nabataean king, Malichus I, sides with the Parthians, led by Pacorus and the Roman defector Labienus, when they invade Syria and Palestine, and when the Parthians are defeated in 38 BC by the Roman general Publius Ventidius Bassus, Malichus is punished by the Romans with the exaction of a large tribute.

Between 37 and 34 BC  Marcus Antonius gives the children of Cleopatra VII (51–30 BC) parts of the Judaean, Ituraean, and Nabataean kingdoms in southern Syria, and ends the Ituraean kingdom.

32 BC  Malichus I sends troops to support Marcus Antonius at the battle of Actium. However, because the Nabataeans were not paying tribute for the part of their kingdom given to Cleopatra’s children, Marcus Antonius orders Herod the Great to invade the kingdom. In 32/31, after initial strong resistance from the Nabataeans, Herod is successful.

25–24 BC  The Praefectus Aegypti, Gaius Aelius Gallus leads an expedition to Southern Arabia. The Nabataeans provide 1000 auxiliaries and, as a guide, Syllaeus a high-ranking politician and close associate of the Nabataean king, who was later accused of deliberately misleading the expedition.

12–9/8 BC  Herod the Great makes war on the Nabataeans.

9 BC  Aretas IV (probably a usurper) becomes king of Nabataea. The emperor Augustus disapproves, but is eventually persuaded not to intervene.
7/6 BC A Nabataean-Sabaic bilingual inscription dated to year 3 of the Nabataean king Aretas [IV] is set up in the temple of ‘ Almaqah at Sirwäh, not far from the Sabaean capital Mārib.

c. 5 BC Syllaeus is executed at Rome.

after 4 BC Aretas IV provides troops to Varus, the legate of Syria, in his expedition against the Jews, following the death of Herod the Great.

First half of the 1st century AD

Saba’ conquers Ma‘īn.

c. AD 25 The Qatabanian capital Timna’, is destroyed by the armies of the kingdom of Ḥaḍramawt.

AD 36/37 Herod Antipas marries one of the daughters of Aretas IV, but divorces her in order to marry Herodias, the wife of his half-brother. This insult, together with border disputes, leads to a war in which Aretas defeats Herod Antipas.

c. AD 36/37 Saint Paul escapes from Damascus despite the guards placed at the gates by the ethnarch of king Aretas IV.

AD 40 Malichus II (Mankū, in Nabataean) succeeds Aretas IV.

mid 1st century AD Malichus [II] the king of the Nabataeans, Karib’il Watar Yuhan’im [I] king of Saba’ and Dhū Raydān, and Il’azz Yalit king of Ḥaḍramawt are mentioned in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, a maritime handbook, written in Greek, which describes the sea-route from Egypt to India, with details of all the ports on the way and the goods which can be exported to them and bought at them. It provides valuable information on the western and southern coasts of the Arabian Peninsula at this period.

AD 58/67–122 The composition of six Nabataean legal papyri which were among the documents belonging to Jews who fled from the village/district of Mahōzā at the south-eastern end of the Dead Sea to a cave on its western edge during the Second Jewish Revolt (led by Bar-Kokhba) AD 132–135.

AD 67 Malichus II provides the future Roman emperor Vespasian with 1000 cavalry and 5000 infantry,
mainly archers, when the latter is suppressing the First Jewish Revolt.

c. AD 75
Pliny the Elder mentions Zafār, the capital of Ḣimyar, and describes the length of the frankincense route from Timnaʿ (capital of Qataban) to Gaza on the Mediterranean.

AD 106
The Nabataean king Rabbel II dies and the Romans annex the Nabataean kingdom naming it Provincia Arabia, with its capital at Boṣrā, in southern Syria.

From AD 111
The Roman emperor Trajan orders the construction of a road, the Via Nova Traiana, from Boṣrā to the Red Sea at Aila (modern al-ʿAqaba).

AD 114–115
After his victory against the Parthians in Armenia, Trajan received the submission of Abgar VII of Edessa and the chief of the Arabs of Singara (modern Sinjar, in the Syrian Jazīra).

AD 117
Trajan lays siege to Hatra in an area (in the Iraqi Jazīra) called ʿArab, but fails to take it.

c. AD 120
A detachment of the Legio VI Ferrata is stationed on the largest island in the Farasān archipelago off the coast of Yemen, and sets up a Latin inscription.

AD 121
A Greek document from Dura Europos on the middle Euphrates mentions an Arabarchēs (‘ruler of Arabs’) in that area, subject to the Parthian King of Kings, Vologases II. Later a Greek document of AD 133/134 and another of AD 180 are said to be written in ‘Europos at Arabia’.

Between AD 126 and 130
The governor of the Province of Arabia, Sextius Florentinus, is buried in an elaborate tomb at Petra.

AD 132–135
The Second Jewish Revolt, into which Jews, and possibly others, from the neighbouring Province of Arabia are drawn. The governors of the Provinces of Syria and Arabia are apparently involved in its suppression since afterwards they receive the ornamenta triumphalia.
AD 144  A detachment of the Legio II Traiana Fortis and its auxiliary troops are stationed at the port on the largest island in the Farasan archipelago off the coast of Yemen, and set up a Latin inscription to the emperor Antoninus Pius.

AD 163–165  Lucius Verus and Avidius Cassius wage what the emperor Marcus Aurelius describes as ‘that Arabian and Parthian war’ in the Jazīra between the Tigris and Euphrates.

2nd half of the 2nd century AD  Qataban is annexed by Hadramawt.

AD 164–169  A temple, probably for the worship of the god ‘Iḥ, is built at Ruwāfah, a small site in north-west Arabia, by a military unit levied from the Arab tribe of Thamūd under the auspices of two successive Roman governors of the Province of Arabia (Quintus Antistius Adventus and Lucius Claudius Modestus). It is furnished with a dedication in Greek and Nabataean Aramaic to the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, and another in Greek recording the completion of the temple, as well as a separate inscription in Nabataean.

AD 175–177  The ‘chief citizen’ (primus civitatis) and people of the former Nabataean city of Ḥegrā (modern Madāʾ in Ṣāliḥ, in north-west Arabia), set up a Latin inscription dedicated to the emperor Marcus Aurelius recording the restoration of the city walls by the (previously unknown) governor of the Province, Iulius Firmanus, and a centurion of the Legio III Cyrenaica.

AD 187  While he is governor of Syria, Septimius Severus marries Iulia Domna of the Arab priestly ruling family of Emesa (modern Ḥimṣ, in central Syria). She, with her sister Iulia Maesa, her niece Iulia Mammæa, and her descendants, remain a major force in Roman politics until AD 235.

AD 190-275  The first invasions of South Arabia by the Abyssinians, who settle in the Tihāma, along the Red Sea coast of Yemen, and intervene on behalf of a succession of different parties in the wars between the South Arabian polities.
AD 193  
Septimius Severus becomes Roman emperor.

AD 195–204  
The Province of Syria is split into two provinces and the northern Ḥawrān is added to the Province of Arabia.

AD 195  
Septimius Severus attacks the Osrhoenians, Adiabenians and the ‘inner’ Arabs i.e. (those of the Jazīra, within the Roman empire). As a result, he takes the titles Parthicus, Arabicus and Adiabenicus.

AD 199  
Septimius Severus attacks Hatra, with its many ‘Arab’ subjects, but fails to take it.

Early 3rd century AD  
First evidence of Christianity in Boṣrā, the capital of the Province of Arabia.

AD 200  
Septimius Severus attacks Hatra again and lays siege to it, but again fails to take it.

AD 218–222  
Elagabalus, from the ‘Arab’ city of Emesa (modern Ḥimṣ, in central Syria) reigns as Roman emperor.

c. AD 200  
The kingdom of Ḥaḍramawt reaches the height of its power.

First quarter of the 3rd century AD  
The king of Saba‘, Shaʿirum Awtar, launches two expeditions against the capital of the Arab tribe of Kinda, Qaryat Dhāt Kahl (modern Qaryat al-Faʿw, on the north-west edge of the Empty Quarter). In another expedition, he conquers Ḥaḍramawt, destroying its capital, Shabwa.

AD 224  
The Sasanian dynasty overthrows the Parthians and takes power in Iran.

AD 230–240  
Origen calls two Church Councils in the Province of Arabia.

AD 241  
The Sasanian King of Kings, Shāpūr I, captures Hatra.

AD 244  
Marcus Iulius Philippus Araps (‘the Arab’), from Shahbāʿ in the Ḥawrān (southern Syria), becomes emperor. The sobriquet Araps refers to his origins in the Province of Arabia.

Mid 3rd century AD  
A gravestone in Nabataean and Greek is set up at Umm al-Jimāl (northern-eastern Jordan) to the memory of Fahru son of Sulay, the tutor of
Gadhīma king of the Arab tribe of Tanūkh which had moved from Baḥrain and settled on the Euphrates.

c. AD 250

The Sabaeān king Ilsharah Yaḥdib II and his brother Yaʿzil Bayyin campaign against the Abyssinians in the western coastal plain, against the city of Najrān in the north, and against the Himyarite kings Shammar Yuḥaḥmid and Karibʾil Ayfaʾ.

AD 253–260

The Sasanian King of Kings, Shāpūr I, overruns the whole of Roman Asia Minor, Syria (including Arabia in the Jazīra), and the Province of Arabia, defeating the Roman army and capturing the emperor Valerian I in 259.

AD 262

Odainathus, king of Palmyra, expels the Sasanians from Syria (including ‘Arabia’ in the Jazīra) and the Province of Arabia, and invades Mesopotamia reaching the Sasanian capital, Ctesiphon.

AD 267

Odainathus is murdered and is succeeded by his son Vaballatus, though the real power is wielded by Odenathus’ widow Zenobia.

AD 269–270

Zenobia abandons the Mesopotamian conquests and initiates the conquest of Egypt and Asia Minor. Vaballatus declares himself emperor and takes as one of his titles Arabicus Maximus, probably referring to the expulsion (by his father) of the Sasanians from the ‘Arabia’ in the Jazīra. Note, however, that there is no evidence that Odenathus, Zenobia or Vaballatus saw themselves, or were seen by others as ‘Arabs’.

AD 272

The emperor Aurelian defeats Zenobia and takes Palmyra.

c. AD 280

The Himyarite king Yasirum Yuḥanʾim and/or his son Shammar Yuḥarʾish finally conquers the Sabaeān kingdom.

AD 293

The Sasanian King of Kings, Narses (AD 293–302), erects an inscription in Middle Persian and Parthian at Paikuli (Kurdistan) listing the rulers who paid homage to him, among whom is an ʾAm[rw] Lhmʾdyn ml(ka) / ʾAmrw Lhmyšn mlka, which is probably the earliest reference to the
Arab Nasrid dynasty (of the tribal group of Lakhm) ruling in southern Iraq.

**AD 298**

Peace is established between Rome and Iran leaving the Jazīra as far east as the Tigris in the hands of the Romans.

**By AD 298**

The Roman emperor Diocletian extends the northern border of the Province of Arabia almost to Damascus, and north-west roughly to the River Jordan at the latitude of Tyre. At the same time, all the territory which had belonged to Arabia south and south-west of the Wādī al-Ḥasā (at the latitude of the southern end of the Dead Sea), was now included in the Province of *Palaestina Salutaris*.

**end of the 3rd century AD**

The Himyarite king Shammar Yuhar‘ish conquers Ḥaḍramawt and unites South Arabia in a single kingdom.

**By the end of the 3rd century AD**

The nomadic Arab tribe of Ṭayyi‘ had moved from northern Arabia into Mesopotamia. Its name soon became the normal term (Ṭayyāyē) for ‘Arab nomads’ in Syriac literature.

**early 4th century AD**

A large part of the Arab tribe of Kinda, which had taken part in the Himyarite conquest of the kingdom of Ḥaḍramawt, establish themselves in the west of Wādī Ḥaḍramawt.

**AD 325**

The list of those attending the First Council of Nicaea includes five bishops from the Province of Arabia.

**AD 326**

The Sasanian King of Kings, Shāpur II, launches an attack which crosses the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula from the oasis of al-Ḥasā [al-Aḥsā] in the north-east to Yathrib (modern al-Madīna) in the west.

**AD 328**

Mara‘ al-Qays son of ‘Amrw, ‘king of all [the country called] ‘Arab’ and possibly the second Nasrid king, is buried near a Roman fort at a watering-place called al-Namāra in the Syrian desert. His five-line epitaph, written in the Arabic language using the Nabataean script,
describes his achievements, including the conquest of a number of powerful Arab tribes and even an attack on the South Arabian city of Najrān in the realm of king Shammar Yuharʿish, the founder of the Himyarite empire.

c. AD 345
The Abyssinian king Ḥzānā IV converts to Christianity.

c. AD 350
The ecclesiastical writer Philostorgios reports on the first Christian and Jewish missionary activity in South Arabia. Churches are built in Ṣafār and other parts of the kingdom. From this point onwards almost all the Ancient South Arabian religious inscriptions are monotheist, and pagan temples start to be abandoned.

2nd half of the 4th century AD
The first epigraphic evidence for the breaking of the Mārib dam.

c. AD 358
The Province of Palaestina is divided into three and the southern area formerly part of Provincia Arabia becomes Palaestina Tertia.

AD 363
The emperor Julian (‘the Apostate’, AD 361–363) invades the part of Mesopotamia under Iranian control, with Saracens (nomadic Arabs) taking an active part on both sides. According to the rhetorician Libanius of Antioch, Julian was killed by a Saracen.

AD 373–378
Unidentified Saracens attack and massacre Christian hermits in the vicinity of Mount Sinai. At the same time, other Saracens try to defend the monastery of Rhaithou (also in Sinai) from an attack by the Blemmyes (from the Sudan) who, however, defeat them and massacre the monks. However, more Saracens from Pharan (also in Sinai) attack the Blemmyes as they return to their ships and annihilate them.

c. AD 375–378
Mavia (Arabic Māwiya), queen of those Saracens who had been allies of the Romans, attacks and devastates the border regions of the Provinces of Phoenicia, Arabia, and Palestine as far as Egypt. She and her tribesmen are only persuaded to withdraw on the promise that, Moses, a Christian hermit, would be consecrated as their bishop.
When this was done, he proceeds to convert many Saracens to Christianity. Mavia marries her daughter to Victor, the Roman Magister Equitum of Oriens, a match requiring special dispensation from the emperor.

**AD 378**

During the siege of Constantinople by the Goths, the emperor Valens (AD 364–378) brings in Saracen troops who terrify the Goths.

**AD 383**

A revolt by Saracen *foederati* (allies of the Romans) is crushed by the Romans under Theodosius I (AD 379–395).

**AD 383**

The king of Ḣimyar, Malkikarib Yuhanʿim, and his sons profess monotheism. Although the deity is described simply as ‘Lord of heaven and earth’, it is thought that they espoused Judaism, possibly as an expression of neutrality since Ḣimyar was situated between Christian Ethiopia and Zoroastrian Iran.

**first third of the 5th century AD**

Under the king Abikarib Asʿad, the Himyarite kingdom reached its greatest territorial extent.

**AD 421–422**

The Nasrid Arab king, Mundhir I, intervenes on the Sasanian side in Theodosius II’s (AD 408–450) first war against Iran, but suffers a disastrous defeat at Nisibis.

**AD 441**

Saracens, probably from within the Sasanian empire, join the Iranian attack on Nisibis in Theodosius II’s second war with Iran.

**Between AD 451 and 535**

The southern frontier of the Province of Arabia is brought further north probably to the Wādī Mujib (between Madaba and Kerak in modern Jordan).

**AD 454**

Another breach of the Mārib dam is repaired by the Himyarite king Shuraḥbiʿil Yaʿfur

**Before AD 459**

Large numbers of ‘Saracens’, as well as some ‘Ḥimyarites’, come to visit St Simeon Stylites at Telanissos (modern Dayr Simʿan, in northern Syria) and are converted to Christianity.
Between AD 470 and 475

According to a tradition known only from a Ge'ez manuscript, a South Arabian Christian priest named Azqīr was martyred at Najrān on the orders of the Himyarite king Shuraḥbiʿīl Yakkuf.

Before AD 473

A Saracen chief called Amorkesos (Imru’ al-Qays?) leaves the Iranians, with whom he has been allied, and fights other Saracens in Roman territory on the border with the Iranian empire. He then establishes himself on the island of Iotabe, at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba, driving out the Roman customs officers and enriching himself on the customs dues. Having sent, Petrus, the bishop of his tribe, to negotiate with the emperor Leo (AD 457–474), he is invited to Constantinople in 473 and is showered with honours including the title of phylarch. The island was recovered by the Byzantines in 498.

AD 497–502

Jabala the Jafnid with Maʾdīkarib and Ḥujr sons of al-Ḥārith the Thaʾlabite raid the Roman frontier. In 502, the emperor Anastasius (AD 491–518) concludes a treaty with them, and with another al-Ḥārith, leader of the tribe of Kinda.

c. AD 500

Abyssinian forces, under a general called Ḥyōna’, invade South Arabia and make Marthadʾīlān Yanūf king of Ḥimyar. Persecutions of the Jews begin.

AD 502–506

The Nasrids and the Jafnids fight each other within the context of the war between the Iranians and the Byzantines.

AD 503

The Nasrids under al-Mundhir (later to be al-Mundhir III, reigned AD 505–554) invade the Provinces of Arabia and Palaestina Prima reaching the monasteries of the Judaean Desert.

c. AD 519

Probably as a result of the refusal by Justin I to renew the Byzantine ‘subsidy’ to Iran, the Nasrid, al-Mundhir III, attacks Byzantine territory capturing two Byzantine commanders, Timostratus son of Silvanus and John son of Lucas.

AD 519

The Abyssinians invade South Arabia and place the Christian Maʾdīkarib Yaʿfur on the throne.
AD 521  Ma‘ād karīb Ya‘fur leads an expedition into central Arabia against the Iranians and their Arab allies. He receives the support of the Banū Tha‘labā (called in the commemorative inscription, ‘the Arabs of the Romans’) and the tribe of Mu‘ād.

AD 522  Following the death of Ma‘ād karīb Ya‘fur, Yūsuf Ash‘ar (Dhū Nuwās), a follower of Judaism, seizes the Himyarite throne.

AD 522–523  The Himyarite king Yūsuf attacks the South Arabian Christians and their Abyssinian allies in the capital Żafār and on the western coast. With the help of the Arab tribe of Kinda, he besieges Najrān, and after its surrender he massacres the Christian inhabitants.

AD 524  (January-February) The emperor Justin I (AD 518–527) sends an emissary, Abraham father of Nonnosus, to the Nasrid king al-Mundhir III, to negotiate the release of the Byzantine commanders he captured in about AD 519. Negotiations take place at the Conference of Ramla (south-east of al-Ḥīra, in southern Mesopotamia), at which the participants also receive reports of the massacre of the Christians of Najrān.

AD 525  An Abyssinian expedition, under Kālēb Ella Asbeha, defeats and kills Yūsuf and installs Simyafa‘ Ashwa‘ on the throne, bringing South Arabia under Abyssinian (and thus Christian) control. Gregentius, bishop of Żafār, rebuilds the cathedral there which had been destroyed by Yūsuf.

c. AD 525–528  The Nasrid al-Mundhir III is expelled from his capital al-Ḥīra, and is replaced by al-Ḥārith (Arethas) of Kinda, who eventually gives his daughter Hind in marriage to al-Mundhir. She remains a devout Christian, while al-Mundhir remains a pagan.

AD 526  A great earthquake in Syria in which 250,000 people are said to have died in Antioch alone.

AD 527  Al-Mundhir III invades the vicinity of Emesa and Apamæa in central Syria carrying off many
captives including, it is said, 400 virgins whom he sacrificed to the goddess al-ʿUzzā.

**AD 528**

Following the accession of the emperor Justinian I (AD 527) the Jafnids return to Byzantine service and participate in a punitive expedition against al-Mundhir III, as well as in the battle of Thannuris (528, where the Byzantines were defeated and Jabala the Jafnid phylarch was killed), the suppression of the Samaritan revolt (529), and the battle of Callinicum on the Euphrates (531), at which al-Mundhir III was victorious.

**AD 528/529**

One of the two earliest documents in the Arabic script, a graffito at Jabal Usays, southern Syria, records that the author, Ruqaym son of Muʿarrif of the tribe of Aws, was sent there by the Jafnid king al-Ḥārith (died AD 559), presumably during the campaign against al-Mundhir III.

**c. AD 530**

Justinian I installs members of the tribe of Kinda in Palestine.

**AD 530/531**

Justinian I (AD 527–565) sends an embassy to Hellēstheaios, king of the Abyssinians, at Aksum, and the latter's vassal, Esimiphaios the Christian king of Ḥimyar, to try to forge an alliance against the Iranians.

**after AD 531**

An Abyssinian, Abraha, makes himself king of Ḥimyar, independent of the king in Aksum, and under him and his sons, the country remains officially Christian until AD 575.

**AD 536**

A massive volcanic explosion, probably that of Rabaul near Papua New Guinea, resulted in the Middle East in 18 months during which the sun shone weakly for no more than 4 hours per day and the massive loss of crops. Drought in the Arabian Peninsula drives some 15,000 Saracens into the Byzantine province of Euphratensis, after they had been refused help by the Nasrid al-Mundhir III.

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AD 537/539  A ‘border dispute’ between the Nasrids and the Jafnids ends in the second war with Iran (540–545) of Justinian I’s reign.

AD 541  The ‘Plague of Justinian’ of plague raged throughout Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia and continued to ebb and flow until the middle of the 8th century.

AD 548  Another breach of the Mārib dam. It is renovated by Abraha

AD 552  Abraha’s fourth campaign in Central Arabia

AD 546–561  Spasmodic warfare between the Jafnids and the Nasrids.

AD 554  The Nasrid al-Mundhir III is killed in a battle against the Jafnid al-Ḥārith at Qinnasrīn (north central Syria).

AD 559–560  The last dated South Arabian monumental inscription so far discovered. [Note that the most recent dated everyday document, on a stick, dates to AD 522]

AD 569  The Jafnid leader al-Ḥārith dies and is succeeded by his son al-Mundhir.

AD 569  The Nasrid king ʿAmrw son of Hind is killed by the poet ʿAmrw son of Kulthūm.

AD 569–570  The Nasrid king Qabūs invades Jafnid territory but is driven back and crushingly defeated by al-Mundhir near the Nasrid capital al-Ḥīra.

AD 569/570  A Syriac letter is ‘subscribed’ by 137 Archimandrites (abbots of monasteries) who identify themselves as coming from the Province of Arabia.

c. AD 570  The birth of the Prophet Muḥammad in Mecca.

AD 572–575  The Jafnid al-Mundhir withdraws from Byzantine service after Justin II (AD 565–578), on the verge of insanity, tries to have him overthrown. The Nasrids and the Iranians take the opportunity to ravage the Byzantine eastern provinces.

AD 575  The Jafnid al-Mundhir restores relations with the Byzantines and, shortly after, attacks the Nasrids.

AD 575  The Sasanians conquer South Arabia. Yemen becomes an Iranian province.
c. AD 578  
Al-Mundhir again defeats the Nasrids.

AD 580  
Al-Mundhir travels to Constantinople where he is crowned by the emperor Tiberius II (AD 578–582).

AD 580/581  
Al-Mundhir and a Jafnid army participate in a Byzantine attempt to attack the Sasanian capital Ctesiphon, under the leadership of the future emperor Maurice. The expedition is a failure, but al-Mundhir defeats a Nasrid army.

AD 581  
Al-Mundhir is captured and taken to Constantinople where he is held under house-arrest until the accession of the emperor Maurice in 582, after which he is exiled to Sicily.

AD 581–582  
In anger at the treatment of al-Mundhir, his son, al-Nu‘mān, leads a Jafnid army in rebellion against the Byzantines, repeatedly overrunning and plundering towns and districts in the provinces of Syria and Arabia, and retiring to the inner desert with the spoils. Eventually, he overpowers and kills the dux of Boşrā who had refused to hand over al-Mundhir’s property in the city. However, when the citizens produce it the Jafnids refrain from looting the city.

AD 582  
Shortly after the accession of the emperor Maurice (AD 582–602), al-Nu‘mān travels to Constantinople to attempt to negotiate the release of his father, al-Mundhir. Maurice tries unsuccessfully to make him renounce Miaphysitism and accept the Chalcedonian doctrine. Al-Nu‘mān refuses and leaves in anger but is arrested on his way home and kept prisoner in Constantinople.

End of the 6th century AD  
The final bursting of the Mārib Dam and the desertion of the oasis.

AD 602  
With the accession of the emperor Phocas (AD 602–610), al-Mundhir is allowed to return home from exile.

c. AD 602  
The Nasrid king, al-Nu‘mān III is murdered on the orders of the Iranian King of Kings, Khusraw II Parviz, and this brings to an end Nasrid rule in al-Ḥīra.
AD 604  The Arab tribe of Bakr defeats Iranian forces at the battle of Dhū Qār.

AD 613  The Jafnid army is defeated by the Iranian army during the Sasanian invasion of the eastern Byzantine provinces.

AD 622  The Hijra, the Prophet Muḥammad’s emigration from Mecca to the oasis of Yathrib (later al-Madīna). The theoretical beginning of the Muslim era, though it does not come into use until AH 17 (AD 638).

AD 622/623  ‘Long-haired Saracens’ fighting for the Iranians, probably in Armenia, are captured by the Byzantine emperor Heraclius.

AD 628  Saracens form part of the emperor Heraclius’ army at his victory over the Iranians at Nineveh.

AD 629  The Prophet Muḥammad returns to Mecca.

AD 632  The death of the Prophet Muḥammad and the election of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr.

AD 632  The Iranian governor of Ṣan‘āʾ, the capital of Yemen, converts to Islam and sends troops to augment the armies of the nascent Islamic state in the wars of conquest, but the conversion of the whole of Yemen takes much longer.

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