Ancient South Arabia through History

Ancient South Arabia through History:

Kingdoms, Tribes, and Traders

Edited by

George Hatke and Ronald Ruzicka

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PROLOGUE

The Austrian Academy of Sciences (AAS) is proud to possess a sizable collection of squeezes of inscriptions, copied epigraphical material written in various Ancient South Arabian languages, and ethnographic photographs, which are preserved in the collection of the Austrian Orientalist and explorer of Yemen, Eduard Glaser. The present volume is closely associated with the 'Glaser Collection'. The chapters by Monamy and Sienell follow the collector's adventurous life and the fate of his collection. Hatke focuses on relations between the ancient South Arabian kingdoms and the ancestors of today's Modern South Arabian speakers (300 BC to 550 CE). Ruzicka gives an overview of his software program KALAM, a kind of Sabaic word analyzer and, together with his colleague Hatke, explains the workflow of digitizing the collection of squeezes. Stein and Multhoff elaborate on the epigraphic material of Mleiha (Sharjah, U.A.E.) and on Sabaic linguistic material (new definition of the nḍ', šṣy and their various cognates), while Japp discusses monumental structures at Ṣirwāḥ and other sites (5th to 1st centuries BCE). Daum devotes his chapter to the role of tithes in the ancient religions of Yemen and Mecca and at present. Then in the article by Darles and Arbach, an impressive overview is given of the development of the pantheon of gods, with a focus on the period between the 9th and 6th centuries BCE, and with reference to monumental and epigraphic material.

The vast corpus of epigraphical and photographic material collected by Glaser provides many opportunities for historical, philological, and anthropological research. Squeezes constitute a fragile corpus, are difficult to preserve, and are to be studied only with extreme care. In former times such materials were difficult to access, but the methods of digitization open new windows of opportunity. The department of Library, Archive, and Collections at the AAS has profited tremendously from the funding programs devoted to the Digital Humanities associated with the AAS. Petra Aigner and her team were awarded twice with projects on digitization, edition, and dissemination of the squeezes. In the course of these projects, they convened the conference on Ancient South Arabia, the proceedings of which you have at hand. In this way, Aigner and her team seek to carry on the scholarly tradition exemplified by Maria Höfner, who undertook pioneering work on Ancient South Arabian philology (often based on the material brought back to Europe by Glaser), and the

anthropological research of Walter Dostal (ASA, Institute for Social Anthropology) in Yemen. In addition to his own fieldwork in Yemen, Dostal made extensive use of the photographs and notebooks of Eduard Glaser.

   Despite the current, tragic state of contemporary Yemen, the AAS is honored to serve as a hub of research into this often overlooked corner of the Near East. It is hoped that this volume will contribute to the preservation and appreciation of a cultural heritage now partly destroyed and difficult to access.

Sibylle Wentker,
Head of Library, Archive and Collections at the
Austrian Academy Of Sciences,
October 2018

The cover shows GL1069_01, a squeeze from the Glaser collection at the Austrian Academy Of Sciences.

INTRODUCTION

Since the nineteenth century, Austria has played an integral role in the exploration and study of the southwestern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, a region encompassing all of today's Yemen and neighboring areas of Saudi Arabia and Oman which is commonly referred to as South Arabia. Travelers, epigraphers, linguists, historians, and ethnographers from Austria have made invaluable contributions to the field of South Arabian studies, helping this still understudied area of the Near East to achieve greater recognition by the scholarly community. Therefore it was entirely appropriate that the conference *Ancient South Arabia: Kingdoms, Tribes, and Traders* was held from 31 August to 2 September 2016 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, an institution which has been intimately involved in South Arabian studies since the late nineteenth century. Together with the University of Vienna, which also helped fund the conference, the Academy is responsible for reviving the study of pre-Islamic South Arabia in Austria and it was with this in mind that the conference was organized.

The title of the conference, *Ancient South Arabia: Kingdoms, Tribes, and Traders*, was chosen to emphasize such key elements of South Arabian history as the interactions between central powers and small-scale tribal communities within state society as well as the long-distance networks of interaction that linked South Arabia with the outside world. That the conference itself brought together scholars in different disciplines from across Europe testifies to the importance of networks in facilitating the exchange of ideas and information. At the same time, contributions to the conference included presentations not only on ancient South Arabian history, culture, and language but also but also on the role of digital humanities in preserving the South Arabian past. This was particularly timely given the current state of Yemen, a country in chaos whose rich and unique heritage is just as much under threat as the lives of its present-day inhabitants. Digital humanities also play a vital role in making South Arabia's ancient past accessible to a wider community of scholars and laymen alike. It is hoped that the proceedings of the conference which are published in this volume will be useful and of interest to both groups.

George Hatke, June 2018

CHAPTER ONE

THE OTHER SOUTH ARABIANS:
THE ANCIENT SOUTH ARABIAN KINGDOMS
AND THEIR MSA (MODERN SOUTH ARABIAN)
NEIGHBORS, CA. 300 BCE-550 CE

GEORGE HATKE
VIENNA

Abstract

The Modern South Arabian (MSA)-speaking peoples of the Ḥaḍramawt, Soqoṭrā, and southern Oman are among the least known ethnic groups of the Arabian Peninsula, if not the Near East as a whole. Although the ancestors of today's MSA-speakers were for centuries in contact with the kingdoms of pre-Islamic South Arabia as a result of the aromatics trade, they are seldom mentioned in the Ancient South Arabian (ASA) corpus. Beginning at the end of the first millennium BCE, the territory of one such MSA-speaking group, namely Saʾkal(h)ān, makes its first appearance in ASA, in Ḥaḍramitic. During the first half of the first millennium BCE, they are joined in the ASA corpus by the Mahra and by Śakūrid. Initially targeted in military campaigns, MSA-speaking peoples were gradually integrated into the Ḥimyarite state, largely through their recruitment for work in construction projects. The Christianization of the island of Soqoṭrā, beginning sometime around the fifth century, might have been another way in which MSA-speaking peoples were integrated, though further research will need to be undertaken to confirm this hypothesis.

Introduction

When one thinks of the Arabian Peninsula one thinks, in addition to the usual images of sand dunes, oases, and camels, of the Arabic language.

This is quite reasonable in that, while Arabic-speakers had already established a presence in parts of the Fertile Crescent in pre-Islamic times, it was through the Muslim conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries CE, launched from the Arabian Peninsula, that Arabic was diffused over a far wider area of the Near East and North Africa. In most regions outside the Arabian Peninsula, Arabic has coexisted for most of its history with other languages, most notably Aramaic in Mesopotamia and the Levant, Coptic in Egypt, and Berber in the Maghreb. What is less well known is that, in parts of the Arabian Peninsula itself, Arabic has also coexisted with other languages, namely the languages of the Ancient South Arabian (ASA) and Modern South Arabian (MSA) branches. In his *Ṣifat Jazīrat al-ʿArab*, the tenth-century Yemeni scholar al-Ḥasan bin Aḥmad al-Hamdānī gives at one point a linguistic survey of South Arabia in which he alludes to one such non-Arabic language, namely Mehrī, stating that this was unintelligible (*ghutm*).[1]

Today, there is a consensus that ASA constitutes a group of related Central Semitic languages, namely Sabaic, Qatabānic, Minaic, and Ḥaḍramitic, so called by modern scholars after the names of the ancient kingdoms in which they were spoken—Sabaʾ, Qatabān, Maʿīn, and Ḥaḍramawt respectively. Although a case has been made for the existence of a fifth language, spoken in the kingdom of Ḥimyar and corresponding to the "Ḥimyarī" language referred to by medieval Arabic authors like al-Hamdānī, who in fact claims that Ḥimyarī was still spoken in parts of Yemen in his own day,[2] it is more likely that the Ḥimyarites spoke a southern dialect of Sabaic in pre-Islamic times, and that what was known during the early Islamic period as Ḥimyarī represents the final stages of Sabaic.[3] Notwithstanding a number of Sabaic loanwords in modern Yemeni Arabic,[4] ASA went extinct with the demise of so-called "Ḥimyarī" at some point during the Middle Ages. By contrast, the language of the Mahra to which al-Hamdānī refers has fared better than ASA, as have several other MSA languages still spoken in eastern Yemen, southern Oman, and the Yemeni archipelago of Soqoṭrā.

The designation Modern South Arabian is rather misleading in that MSA languages are not lineal descendants of the Ancient South Arabian languages, though they are still popularly called "Ḥimyarī" in the Arab world. To this it should be added that MSA languages are spoken well to the east of the main area in which ASA languages were once spoken and,

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[1] al-Hamdānī 1974
[2] ibid.
[3] Stein 2008.
[4] Watson 2004: 406-7.

while there is evidence that the MSA-speaking region formerly extended even further to the east and northeast of their current domain, there are no indications of a parallel westward extension in earlier times. Moreover, despite having survived into the modern period, MSA languages retain a number of archaic features, suggesting that Proto-MSA was introduced to the Arabian Peninsula at a very early date—earlier, perhaps, than Proto-ASA.[5] Although the MSA languages spoken by the peoples dwelling to the east of the ancient kingdoms of South Arabia would have spoken what amounts in effect to Ancient Modern South Arabian, this clumsy oxymoron is best avoided. Nor is the term Proto-MSA a suitable designation for the forms of the MSA languages spoken during the period with which we are concerned in this paper, given that Proto-MSA refers, strictly speaking, to the Ursprache from which MSA languages are derived, which was introduced to South Arabia in the period before written history. It is hoped, therefore, that the reader will forgive the admittedly—if unavoiadably—awkward title of this paper, linking as it does two seemingly anachronistic elements: ancient kingdoms and modern languages.

For information on the early history of MSA-speaking peoples we must rely entirely on external sources. The goal of this paper is to synthesize this material in an effort to shed light on the nature of relations between these peoples and the kingdoms of the more westerly regions of South Arabia between ca. 300 BCE and 550 CE. Our primary sources are for the most part ASA inscriptions,[6] supplemented by the writings of Graeco-Roman authors. Since the textual material on early MSA-speaking peoples is scarce, this paper makes no attempt at presenting anything more than a very modest, preliminary overview of the history of the MSA-speaking peoples who dwelled to the east of the kingdoms of pre-Islamic South Arabia. More specifically, the scope of this paper will be limited to relations between these peoples and the ancient kingdoms of Ḥaḍramawt and Ḥimyar, as these were the only two such kingdoms from which epigraphic data on MSA-speaking peoples is available. After giving a brief outline of the MSA languages and their distribution, as well as a summary of the terms employed in ASA to designate MSA-speaking peoples, this paper will treat the early history of MSA-speakers chronologically, beginning with the section entitled "Phase I (ca. 300 BCE-300 CE):

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[5] del Olmo Lete 2003: 40-1, 45.
[6] In this study, printed editions are cited only when portions of text from ASA inscriptions are quoted directly. For all other inscriptions mentioned here, see the *Digital Archive for the Study of Pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions* (http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/).

Ḥaḍramawt and the South Arabian Periphery", in which Ḥaḍramī activities in Ẓufār and Soqoṭrā, as well as Ḥaḍramī relations with the Mahra, will be treated. Our main primary sources in this section are Ḥaḍramitic inscriptions as well as a mid-first century CE Greek text, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, supplemented by Ptolemy's *Geography*. Then in "Phase II (ca. 300-450 CE): Ḥimyar and its Arabian Empire", we will consider the impact of Ḥimyarite military expansion on MSA-speakers, focusing on references to campaigns against the Mahra in the Sabaic inscription ʿAbadān 1. "Phase III (ca. 450-550 CE): Integrating the Mahra, Saʾkalān, and Śakūrid" will examine ways in which Ḥimyar, having established military and political supremacy throughout South Arabia and, indeed, much of the Arabian peninsula as a whole, asserting their authority over MSA-speaking peoples by recruiting them as laborers in construction projects. The results of this investigation will be summarized in the conclusion. To reiterate, this paper is intended only as a preliminary study.[7] It is presented in the hopes of encouraging further research by scholars, including not only epigraphers and archaeologists but also those engaged in the field of historical linguistics, to undertake research into the earliest history of MSA-speaking peoples.

MSA-Speaking Peoples: Terms and Territories

Unlike the tribal peoples inhabiting the regions to the north of the South Arabian kingdoms, whom Sabaic inscriptions call "Arabs" (*ʿrb* or *ʾʿrb*), ASA lacks a single, all-encompassing name for the MSA-speaking peoples based in regions to the east. Rather, three names were used, and then only in Sabaic and Ḥaḍramitic: Mahra, Saʾkālān, and Śakūrid. The first occurs in the form *Mhrt* (=Mahrat) in a handful of Sabaic inscriptions dating from the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries CE, while in Ḥaḍramitic it seems to be attested once, in a short inscription from the early third century CE (Ja 954), as a broken plural: *ʾmhr^n* (=ʾAmhūrān). In Arabic texts, the Mahra are referred to invariably as مهرة, without the definite article (cf. Sabaic *Mhrt*). The name Mahra refers to a group spread out over a fairly wide area,

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[7] This is not to say, however, that the present study is the first of its kind. The early history of the Mahra, for example, has already been treated by Müller 1991, while the pre-Islamic and medieval history of Soqoṭrā has been the subject of several short studies and monographs, most notably Beckingham 1983; Müller 1999; Biedermann 2006; Strauch 2012. On the geography of pre-Islamic Ẓufār, see von Wissmann 1977.

encompassing the eastern Ḥaḍramawt[8] and parts of Ẓufār. That the name Mahra was already understood in pre-Islamic times as referring to a conglomeration of different tribes and clans, rather than a single tribal entity unto itself is suggested by the fact that in one Sabaic inscription dating from 360 CE (ʿAbadān 1), we read of the Tughmaʾ, regarded by medieval Arab genealogists as a clan within the Mahra group.[9] It is possible, then, that the name Mahra served in both pre-Islamic times as a catch-all term masking a fair degree of ethnic and/or linguistic diversity.[10] The same inscription also provides the names of a number of settlements attacked by the Ḥimyarites in the course of a military campaign against the Mahra.

By contrast, Saʾkālān and Śakūrid designated rather more circumscribed groups. Around the turn of the Common Era, Ḥaḍramitic inscriptions from Ẓufār speak of a land (ʾrḍ) of Saʾkālhān—the suffix -hn being the standard form of the definite article in Ḥaḍramitic—indicating that the tribe or ethnic group of that name was based in that region. Only in Sabaic inscriptions are members of Saʾkālān referred to as active participants in the life of South Arabia, specifically in connection with construction projects. It has been suggested that the name Saʾkālān is derived from *Hakalī, a name surviving into modern times in the form Ḥakḷī (alternatively Ekḥilī), which designates the indigenous Jibbālī people of Ẓufār.[11] As for Śakūrid (S³krd), this name appears to be the basis of the Greek name for Soqoṭrā, Dioskouridēs, via a reconstructed *Dhū-Śakūrid.[12] Although the known attestations of Śakūrid in the ASA corpus, minus the relative pronoun Dhū-, are limited to two Sabaic inscriptions dating from the first half of the sixth century CE, the fact that

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[8] Here referring to the region in the eastern part of today's Yemen, not to be confused with the ancient kingdom of that name which did not establish political control over the main *wādī* cutting across the region of the Ḥaḍramawt until the turn of the first century BCE/CE (Schiettecatte 2014: 264). Henceforth, the ancient kingdom shall be referred to as simply Ḥaḍramawt, while the region in eastern Yemen that retains this name shall be designated *the* Ḥaḍramawt.

[9] Robin and Gajda 1994: 122.

[10] A parallel case is that of the term Blemmyes, employed by Graeco-Roman authors to designate the indigenous inhabitants of the Eastern Desert between the Nile and the Red Sea. Although there is good philological evidence that at least some of the peoples so called spoke an early form of Tu:-beḍa:wye, i.e. the Beja language (Satzinger 2004), thus warranting their identification as Beja, the case has been made that the term "Blemmyes" referred to what was in fact a very diverse group of peoples (Barnard 2005).

[11] von Wissmann 1977: 29.

[12] Müller 1999: 188; idem 2001: 151.

Dioskouridēs is mentioned by Graeco-Roman authors as far back as the mid-first century CE, when the island of Soqoṭrā—which in time gave its name to the entire archipelago—was under Ḥaḍramī rule, indicates that the name Śakūrid was current in South Arabian circles over a much longer period. That the name has yet to be identified in the Ḥaḍramitic corpus is best explained by the paucity of epigraphic material produced by the kingdom of Ḥaḍramawt, compared to the other ancient South Arabian kingdoms.[13] Like Saʾkālᵃⁿ, Śakūrid appears in Sabaic as the name of a tribe or ethnic group involved with Ḥimyarite construction projects, but projects that took place on the mainland, not on Soqoṭrā itself. Clearly, then, Saʾkālᵃⁿ and Śakūrid differed in some way from the Mahra, the significance of which difference is a topic that will be discussed in detail below. What does bear mentioning at this point is the fact that, while the Arabs are mentioned with relative frequency in Sabaic inscriptions dating between the third and sixth centuries CE, and had established a presence in South Arabia even before that time, MSA-speakers appear by contrast to have been a rather more peripheral group. Thus, while Arabs formed units in the armies of Sabaʾ and Ḥimyar, and even exerted a certain degree of influence on the Sabaic language,[14] the same cannot be said of MSA-speakers.[15]

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[13] Some 1500 Ḥaḍramitic texts have been published to date—as compared to more than 5500 published inscriptions in Sabaic, more than 2000 Qatabānic inscriptions, and 1600 Minaic inscriptions—and half of these, from the excavations at Raybūn in Central Ḥaḍramawt, consist of small fragments (Stein 2011: 1046).

[14] Arabic influence on Sabaic is most evident in the dialect of Sabaic spoken in the town of Haram (modern K̲h̲aribat Hamdān) in Wādī al-Jawf, as well as at Nihm, located in the Yemeni highlands to the northeast of Ṣanʿāʾ. In addition to introducing new deities and new political institutions to the region, these people introduced new vocabulary, including both verbs and substantives (Avanzini 2016: 171-2; Frantsouzoff 2016: 8-9, 66).

[15] To date, the few similarities between ASA and MSA appear to be fortuitous. Thus, while so-called "parasitic h" in Minaic is paralleled in Soqoṭrī (Simeone-Senelle 2004: 6-7), the fact that it appears in Arabic ummuhāt "mothers" (sg. umm) suggests that it is a shared retention. Ḥaḍramitic, as the easternmost of the ASA languages, might be expected to have been the most influenced by contact with MSA, and it is indeed possible that the consonantal distinction between the two genders in third person pronouns, a feature unique to Ḥaḍramitic and MSA, is an innovation attributable to language contact (Rubin 2008: 69). That Qatabānic ṭd "one" is paralleled by MSA words for "one" (thus Mehrī ṭāt, Ḥarsūsī ṭad, Soqoṭrī ṭɔd) suggests to Kogan (2015: 543) that we have here evidence of MSA substratum or adstratum influence. Given the lack of evidence of direct Qatabānian-MSA contact, however, this might be a vestigial form once more widespread in South Arabia.

In passing, it should be noted that, while the only incontrovertible ASA references to MSA-speaking peoples identified thus far are attested in Sabaic and Ḥaḍramitic, the possibility that similar references may turn up in other ASA languages must not be dismissed out of hand. Worthy of note in this regard is a unique Minaic document from the Minaean capital of Qarnā: a registry of foreign women married to Minaean men, carved on a series of pillars between the sixth and second centuries BCE (Maʿīn 93A+B+C+D; Maʿīn 94; Maʿīn 95; Maʿīn 96; Maʿīn 97; Maʿīn 98; al-Saʿīd 2002/2009; Maʿīn 114; Maʿīn 115).[16] As it records the names and—more importantly—the places of origin of the women, this registry constitutes an invaluable source for the international contacts of the kingdom of Maʿīn during the period in which it had largely overtaken Sabaʾ as the main commercial power in South Arabia. Although nothing in any of the registry's entries indicates the occupation of the Minaean men who married these women, they would undoubtedly have been merchants who met their wives in the course of their commercial ventures abroad. In addition to women from the Levant (including no fewer than 33 from Gaza, by far the most commonly mentioned toponym in the registry), Egypt, and Ionia, we find women from other South Arabian kingdoms, as well as from Northwest Arabia, East Arabia, and a number of other regions—or perhaps tribes—which have either eluded identification, or whose identification is not accepted by all scholars. Of these, we may note Tamlaḥ (*Tmlḥ*), Nathī (*Nthy*), ʿAynʾīl (*ʿynʾl*), Khasham (*Ḥs²m*), and Yamayth (*Ymyt̲*), together with twelve women the names of whose place or tribe of origin are not preserved. All of these names seem to be Semitic, and it is not impossible that many if not all are Arabian. However, neither these names, nor the names of the women with which they are associated, can be reliably linked with any MSA group or region. Furthermore, while there is epigraphic evidence of friendly relations between the kingdoms of Maʿīn and Ḥaḍramawt,[17] hard evidence of direct Minaean contact with the MSA-speaking regions to the east of Ḥaḍramawt is lacking. Consequently,

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[16] Bron 1998: 102-21; Rossi (in press); al-Saʿīd 2002; idem 2009.

[17] Cooperation between the kingdoms of Maʿīn and Ḥaḍramawt is documented in RES 2775 (=Maʿīn 8), a Minaic inscription from Qarnā which states that the Ḥaḍramī king ʾĪlīsamaʿ Dhubyᵃⁿ bin Malkīkarib dedicated a tower in that city which his uncle S̲h̲ahrᵘᵐ ʿAlhᵃⁿ had built. Another, fragmentary, Minaic inscription, as-Sawdāʾ 85 from Nas̲h̲s̲h̲ān (modern al-Sawdāʾ), is dedicated in honor of an unnamed Minaean king and the Ḥaḍramī king Yadaʿʿab G̲h̲aylᵃⁿ. Collaboration of a similar sort is also implied in M 423 from Yat̲h̲ill (modern Barāqis̲h̲), a fragmentary Minaic inscription which invokes both Maʿīn and Ḥaḍramawt (*b-Mʿnᵐ w-b Ḥḍrmt*).

the possibility that the registry of foreign wives from Qarnā might yield data on relations between Maʿīn and MSA-speaking peoples remains for the time being a matter for speculation.

So much for terms relating to MSA-speaking peoples in ASA. What of the MSA languages themselves? A sub-branch within Semitic, MSA comprises at present six languages: Mehrī,[18] Ḥarsūsī,[19] Jibbālī,[20] Soqoṭrī,[21] Hōbyōt,[22] and Baṭḥarī.[23] MSA-speakers, historically pastoralists and fishermen for the most part, but practicing some agriculture on the side, currently number some 200,000 and live in the Mahra Governorate of eastern Yemen, Ẓufār in southern Oman, the island of al-Ḥallāniyya off the southern coast of Oman, and the Soqoṭrī Archipelago. In earlier times, the area occupied by MSA-speakers appears to have been much larger, judging from the geographical distribution of Mehrī-type toponyms. These are easily recognizable on account of their suffixes, -ūt, -ōt, -īt, -ēt, -ōten, and -ūten, as well as such prefixes as ya- and yi-, and are scattered across what are now monolingual Arabic-speaking regions in central and northern Oman.[24] The implication is that the Mahra, and no doubt other MSA-speaking peoples as well, dominated most of what is now Oman in pre-Islamic times, and indeed well into the Islamic period. Thus al-

[18] Of the MSA languages, Mehrī, spoken by the Mahra people, is the most widely spoken and best documented, not least given that the Mahra, who number about 100,000, account for roughly half the total number of MSA-speakers. The form of Mehrī spoken in eastern Yemen is divided into two, western and eastern, dialects, known as Mehrīyət and Mehriyōt respectively, while the dialect spoken in Ẓufār is called Məhrəyyət.

[19] Ḥarsūsī is currently spoken by somewhere fewer than 1000 people living in central Oman.

[20] The Jibbālī people are also known by such names as Gəblét, Šxawrī, Ekḥilī, Ḥakilī, Qarāwī, and Śḥɛrī, the Arabic term Jibbālī being a calque on the nisba Śḥɛrī "mountain-man". The term Śḥɛrī is somewhat pejorative, as it has acquired the sense of "without tribal status, servile". Jibbālī-speakers constitute a group of varied social status and tribal origin, numbering about 5000. A small minority of Jibbālī-speakers inhabit al-Ḥallāniyya.

[21] Soqoṭrī is the most typologically divergent of the MSA languages—the result of its isolation from the other languages of the MSA group on the mainland (Rubin 2008: 75).

[22] Hōbyōt was historically spoken along the Yemeni-Omani border and is now spoken by only a handful of people, making it one of the most endangered of Semitic languages.

[23] In the past, Baṭḥarī was spoken on the southern coast of Oman opposite al-Ḥallāniyya but is now spoken by only twenty or so elderly individuals (Eades 2014: 21) and is thus, like Hōbyōt, an endangered language.

[24] Dostal 1967: 133 (Pl. 19); Müller 1991: 82.

Hamdānī states that the Mahra still inhabited parts of the Oman Peninsula in his day,[25] and it appears that much of the country was in their possession as late as 1479-80, when they were expelled by the Ibāḍī *imām* of Oman.[26]

Over the years, graffiti in an as yet undeciphered script have come to light throughout Ẓufār,[27] in Jabal Akhḍar,[28] and on Soqoṭrā.[29] The distribution of these graffiti correlates nicely with the historical distribution of MSA languages. This includes even Jabal Akhḍar which, although Arabic-speaking at present, would appear on the basis of the toponymic evidence noted above to have been part of a once larger MSA-speaking region. In all likelihood, then, these graffiti preserve ancestral forms of at least some of the MSA languages spoken today. It is taken for granted that this epigraphic corpus is of pre-Islamic date, not least given that most pre-Arabic Arabian scripts fell out of use well before the coming of Islam. That said, a short inscription of probable ninth-century CE date from Najrān which gives the name Ṭawq bin al-Haytham in both the Arabic script and South Arabian *musnad*[30] indicates that the latter script remained in use, at least on occasion, well into the Islamic period.[31] This inscription is by no means the only evidence to that effect, for two rock inscriptions found near Ṣaʿda in northern Yemen are written in *musnad*, but in the Arabic language—containing, no less, such quintessentially Islamic names as Muḥammad (or Maḥmūd), ʿAbd Allāh, ʿAlī, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān.[32] In the more remote MSA-speaking regions further east, it is likely that the use of the pre-Islamic script continued even later.[33] None of

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[25] al-Hamdānī 1974

[26] Müller 1991: 82.

[27] al-Shaḥrī 1991; idem 1994; al-Shaḥrī and King 1991; King 1992.

[28] Yule 2013.

[29] Jung 1996: 80, 81, Plate II (Figs. 2 and 3).

[30] Al-Said 2004.

[31] This corroborates the evidence that al-Hamdānī was aware of the phonetic value of the letters of the *musnad* alphabet (Robin 1991-93a: 134).

[32] ibid.

[33] How late is at present impossible to say. The first European reports on MSA languages in the 1830s say nothing about such languages having a written tradition. When, during that time, James Wellsted visited Soqoṭrā and sought manuscripts from the locals, he was told that those which they had once possessed had been destroyed by the Wahhābīs during their invasion of the island in 1801 (Wellsted 1840: II: 314-15), though it cannot be taken for granted that such material—assuming it ever existed in the first place—was written in anything other than Arabic. Whether the timeframe tentatively suggested by Yule 2013: 401 for the graffiti from Jabal Akhḍar can really be extended as late as 1900 is

the MSA-region graffiti are very long, a characteristic which they share with graffiti in Ancient North Arabian (ANA).[34] Like the latter corpus, the graffiti from the MSA-speaking region were presumably the product of pastoralists and/or semi-pastoralists and might well be similar in content to ANA graffiti, in which case they would consist of personal names, short phrases describing visits to a given place, and religious invocations. So far, however, the MSA-region graffiti have resisted decipherment. Although some of the characters recall those of the *musnad* script, others appear more closely akin to characters in some of the ANA scripts, while still others lack parallels in either. If all Arabian scripts can be traced back ultimately to the alphabetic linear script of Bronze Age Syria-Palestine, the facile assumption that the more informal scripts were derived from *musnad* is best rejected. In fact, it is by no means established whether MSA-speakers used a single script or several different, if still related, scripts. Nor can it be taken for granted that letter-forms in MSA-region graffiti which bear some resemblance to ASA or ANA letter-forms had the same phonetic value. To give an analogy, the Cherokee syllabary incorporates characters which are often derived, in modified form, from the Latin alphabet but which have completely different phonetic values from those of their Latin prototypes. It seems, then, that unless and until some Arabian "Rosetta Stone" comes to light, the MSA-region graffiti are fated to remain an intractable mystery. Moreoever, since most of these graffiti are quite short, they are unlikely to yield much in the way of historical data if and when scholars ever decipher the script(s) in which they are written.

Phase I (ca. 300 BCE-300 CE): Ḥaḍramawt and the South Arabian Periphery

As the easternmost of the pre-Islamic South Arabian kingdoms, Ḥaḍramawt had direct access to the frankincense-producing belt straddling the modern-day border between Yemen and Oman. To facilitate the transport of frankincense from Ẓufār to more westerly destinations in South Arabia, whence the valued aromatic resin could then be carried overland via the caravan route to Gaza, the Ḥaḍramīs established a commercial outpost on the coast of Ẓufār at Khawr Rūrī, known in pre-

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questionable. Since MSA died out in that region fairly early on, certainly well before the nineteenth century, it is likely that these graffiti are quite old.

[34] For an online corpus of ANA inscriptions, still under construction, see
http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/index.php?id=42&prjId=4&corId=0&colId=0.

Islamic South Arabia as Sumhūrām (*S¹mhrm*), sometime around the third century BCE. Although the Minaeans handled most of South Arabia's caravan trade during the second half of the first millennium BCE, the Mediterranean world knew of Ḥaḍramawt's involvement with this commerce through direct contact with Ḥaḍramī merchants, such as the two individuals who erected an altar to the Ḥaḍramī god Siyyᵃⁿ at Delos,[35] an important center of perfume production in Hellenistic times, and one at which aromatic resins like those exported from South Arabia were in high demand.[36] Moreover, the close association of Ḥaḍramawt with frankincense is evident from an anonymous Greek text dating from the mid-first century CE, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*,[37] which describes the realm of the Ḥaḍramī king as simply "the frankincense-bearing land" (χώρα λιβανωτοφόρου).[38] The same text speaks of a port belonging to Ḥaḍramawt called Kanē,[39] i.e. the coastal site of Qāniʾ (ASA *Qnʾ*; modern Biʾr ʿAlī), founded by Ḥaḍramawt in the first century BCE.[40] The *Periplus* gives Eleazos as the name of the Ḥaḍramī king who at that time held sway over the port.[41] This ruler can be identified with a first-century CE king of Ḥaḍramawt named ʾĪlīʿazz Yaluṭ. Of the region beyond Qāniʾ, the *Periplus* has the following to say:

> Μετὰ δὲ Κανή, τῆς ‹γῆς› ἐπὶ πλεῖον ὑποχωρούσης ἄλλος ἐκδέχεται βαθύτατος κόλπος, ἐπὶ πολὺ παρεκτείνων, ὁ Σαχαλίτης, καὶ χώρα λιβανωτοφόρος, ὀρεινή τε καὶ δύσβατος, ἀέρα παχὺν ἔχουσα καὶ ὁμιχλώδη ‹καὶ› κατὰ τῶν δένδρων φερόμενον τὸν λίβανον.[42]

> After Kanē, with its shoreline receding further, there next come another bay, very deep, called Sachalitēs, which extends for a considerable distance, and the frankincense-bearing land; this is mountainous, has a difficult terrain, an atmosphere close and misty, and trees that yield frankincense.[43]

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[35] RES 3952 (Robin 1991-93b: 61 [Fig. 18]).
[36] Castel et al. 2012: 45.
[37] On the *Periplus* and its relevance for the history of South Arabia during the first century CE, see Robin 1991.
[38] *Periplus* §29.9.3-4; cf. ibid. §31.10.20.
[39] *Periplus* §27.9.1-§28.9.21.
[40] Schiettecatte 2014: 192.
[41] *Periplus* §27.9.4-5.
[42] *Periplus* §29.9.22-25.
[43] trans. Casson 1989: 67.

This is a fairly accurate description of the climate, terrain, and flora of Ẓufār, which is indeed mountainous and, thanks to the summer monsoon, receives a fair amount of rainfall from June to September, at which time the region is cloaked with mists and cloud cover.[44] That the bay of Sachalitēs can be associated with the Ẓufārī coast is supported by Ḥaḍramitic references to Saʾkalʰān (less commonly Saʾlakān), a name from which Sachalitēs is clearly based. A "land of Saʾkalʰān/Saʾlakān" (ʾrḍ $S^1ʾkl^{hn}/S^1ʾkl^n$) is mentioned in no fewer than six Ḥaḍramitic inscriptions from Sumhūrām (KR 2/6; KR 3/7; KR 5/6; KR 6/1; KR 10/1.2), in addition to one inscription from (Ja 892) at Saʾnān (Ḥaḍramitic $S^1ʾn^n$; modern Ḥanūn), located in the Ẓufārī interior.[45] That Saʾkal(ʰ)ān is paired with the noun ʾrḍ "land" in a construct phrase is significant in that, in ASA, the nomen rectum in such constructions is, with a single exception in Sabaic,[46] the name of a tribe or ethnic group, e.g ʾrḍ Ḫwl^n "the land of Khawlān", ʾrḍ Rdm^n "the land of Radmān", ʾrḍ Mhʾnf^m "the land of Muhaʾnif^um", ʾrḍ Tnḫ "the land of Tanūkh", etc. On these grounds, Saʾkal(ʰ)ān is clearly the name of a people, not a region, which lends support to the name's derivation from the reconstructed ethnonym *Hakalī. Despite its remoteness, Sumhūrām was closely tied to the Ḥaḍramī state. Thus in two of inscriptions from the site (KR 2 and KR 5), we read of a "commander of the army of Ḥaḍramōt[47] in the land of Saʾkalān" (qdm gys² Ḥḍrmt b-ʾrḍ $S^1ʾkl^n$), while in other inscriptions mention is made of a "governor (of the king) in the land of Saʾkalʰān (KR 6/1: ʿqb mlk^{hn} b-ʾrḍ $S^1ʾkl^{hn}$, KR 10/2: ʿqb^m b-ʾrḍ $S^1ʾkl^{hn}$) or to a "governor of the king in Sumhūrām (KR 11/3: ʿqb mlk^{hn} b-S^1mhrm). That trade was tightly controlled by South Arabian rulers is well documented in other ASA inscriptions as well as in the *Periplus*.[48]

Nevertheless, the people designated Saʾkal(ʰ)ān in Ḥaḍramitic inscriptions appear only as the inhabitants of a region, not as individuals involved in the affairs of the kingdom of Ḥaḍramawt. That said, it must be

[44] al-Shaḥrī 1991: 174.

[45] For full treatments of these inscriptions, together with bibliographic references, see http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it/.

[46] The exception in question is found in Jabal Riyām 2006-17, a Sabaic inscription dating from probably ca. 260-280 CE, in the thirteenth line of which we encounter a reference to "the land of the north" (ʾrḍ s²ʾmt).

[47] The name Ḥaḍramawt is written Ḥḍrmt in Ḥaḍramitic inscriptions. Since w is generally not used to indicate internal long vowels, it can be assumed that the derivative form Ḥḍrmwt in non-Ḥaḍramitic inscriptions reflects diphthongization (*/ō/ > /aw/). By implication, Ḥḍrmt (Ḥaḍramōt) is the original form of the name.

[48] Schiettecatte 2014: 24-1.

stressed that ASA inscriptions are in general very reticent about commercial matters. Although the Minaic corpus preserves a number of records of commercial expeditions abroad,[49] similar ventures are seldom mentioned in either Sabaic or Qatabānic inscriptions.[50] In view of the fact that Ḥaḍramitic inscriptions are not only few in number but also tend to be quite brief, the lack of direct references to commercial matters in the Ḥaḍramitic corpus is not surprising. Since the very raison d'être of Sumhūrām was commerce, and since this commerce was dominated, for most of the early history of the town's history, by the export of frankincense from Ẓufār, there is every reason to believe that the Ḥaḍramīs maintained ties with the indigenous population of the region. Obviously, more archaeological investigations will need to be undertaken in Ẓufār before one can make definitive judgments regarding the nature of Ḥaḍramī contact with Ẓufārī locals, though in the meantime it would appear that, if indigenous Ẓufārīs were involved with harvesting the frankincense, they played little role in its transport. Conceivably, much of the frankincense might have been transported by Ẓufārīs in containers made from such perishable materials as straw or leather, which might explain why local pottery is not better represented at Sumhūrām. On the other hand, epigraphic surveys in Ẓufār indicate that inscriptions and drawings are concentrated not along the well-known mountain passes and caravan routes but in those regions which were distant from such routes, and which were frequented by herdsmen rather than merchants.[51] This might lend support to the thesis that most indigenous Ẓufārīs were not well integrated into South Arabia's commercial network in pre-Islamic times.

Of these matters the *Periplus* is ambiguous, stating simply that "the frankincense is handled by royal slaves and convicts" (Μεταχειρίζεται δὲ ὁ λίβανος ὑπὸ δούλων βασιλικῶν καὶ τῶν ὑπὸ τιμωρίαν πεμπομένων).[52] Whether the "royal slaves and convicts" in question were local Ẓufārīs or hailed from some other region, perhaps outside the Arabian Peninsula, is not clear. Nor does the *Periplus* have anything explicit to say about

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[49] Robin 1994.

[50] For some exceptions, see the Sabaic inscription B-L Nashq and the Qatabānic inscription Maraqten-Qatabanic 1.

[51] al-Shaḥrī 1991: 177. Although drawings of ships have come to light during epigraphic surveys in Ẓufār, suggesting contact with merchants, some of the vessels are of modern design (ibid.: 183), in which case they cannot be used as evidence of direct contact between local people and seaborne merchants during antiquity.

[52] *Periplus* §29.9.28-29 (trans. Casson 1989: 67).

indigenous Ẓufārī contact with the harbor of Moscha Limēn,[53] with which
Sumhūrām is identified. In fact, the *Periplus* has little to say about the
indigenous inhabitants of the coast between eastern Ḥaḍramawt and
Sumhūrām.

> Μετὰ δὲ τὸν Σύαγρον κόλπος ἐστὶν συναφής, ἐπὶ βάθος ἐνδύνων εἰς τὴν
> ἤπειρον, Ὄμανα, σταδίους ἔχων ἑξακοσίους τὸ διαπέραμα, καὶ μετ' αὐτὸν
> ὑψηλὰ ὄρη πετρώδη καὶ ἀπόκοπα, ἀνθρώπων ἐν σπηλαίοις
> καταοικούντων, ἐπὶ σταδίους ἄλλους πεντακοσίους.[54]

> Immediately after Syagros is a bay indenting deeply into the coast, Omana,
> 600 stades across the mouth; after it, high mountains, rocky and sheer,
> where men live in caves, for another 500.[55]

In his commentary on this passage, Casson identifies Syagros with Rās
Fartak and Omana with Qamar Bay.[56] As we shall see, another, more
famous, Omana existed much further east in the Oman Peninsula. The
mountains to which the *Periplus* refers can be identified with Jabal Qamar,
which rise to 3000-4000 feet and reach the coast at Rās Sajir and at
Mirbat.[57] The distance from Rās Fartak to Sumhūrām is some 170 nautical
miles, considerably more than the author's estimate of 1100 stades (600 +
500).[58] During the period in which the author of the *Periplus* was writing,
Sumhūrām, though still functioning as a port from which Ẓufārī
frankincense was shipped, had become an important station on the
maritime route linking the Mediterranean world with India, as evidenced
not only by the testimony of the *Periplus*[59] but also by archaeological
evidence of imports from both of those regions at the site.[60] That
Sumhūrām was rebuilt by inhabitants from S̲h̲abwa in the first century
CE[61] further indicates the outpost's importance during the same period.

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[53] *Periplus* §32.10.30a-§32.11.7.

[54] *Periplus* §32.10.26-29.

[55] trans. Casson 1989: 69.

[56] Casson 1989: 170.

[57] ibid.

[58] ibid.

[59] *Periplus* §32.10.29-§32.11.5.

[60] On material from the Mediterranean region found at Sumhūrām, see Comfort
1960; Avanzini 2008. On Indian material, see Goetz 1963; Bukharin 2002;
Subramanian 2012; Pavan 2015; Pavan and Schenk 2012.

[61] Schiettecatte 2014: 193.

The *Periplus* provides some interesting details regarding the indigenous population of the South Arabian coast to the east of Sumhūrām. The relevant passage reads as follows:

<Ἀπὸ δὲ Μόσχα> λιμένος ἐπ᾽ ἄλλους σταδίους ὡς χιλίους πεντακοσίους ἕως Ἀσίχωνος ἄχρι <ὄρος> τῇ γῇ παρατείνει καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἀπολῆγον αὐτοῦ μέρος ἑπτα νῆσοι πρόκεινται κατὰ τὸ ἑξῆς, αἱ Ζηνοβίου λεγόμεναι, μεθ᾽ ἃς ἄλλη παράκειται χώρα βάρβαρος οὐκέτι τῆς αὐτῆς βασιλείας ἀλλ᾽ ἤδη τῆς Περσίδος, ἣν ἀφ᾽ ὕψους παραπλέοντι ὡς σταδίους δισχιλίους ἀπο τῶν Ζηνοβίου συναντᾷ νῆσος Σαράπιδος λεγόμενη, ἀπὸ σταδίων τῆς γῆς ὡσεὶ ἑκατὸν εἴκοσι. Ταύτης τὸ μὲν πλάτος ἐστὶν ὡσεὶ σταδίων διακοσίων, τὸ δὲ μῆκος ἑξακοσίων, οἰκεῖται δὲ κώμαις τρισὶυ καὶ ἀνθρώποις ἱερῖς Ἰχθυοφάγων γλώσσῃ δὲ Ἀραβικῇ χρῶνται [δὲ] καὶ περιζώμασι φύλλων κουκίνων. Ἔχει δὲ ἡ νῆσος χελώνην ἱκανὴν καὶ διάφορον. Ἐξαρτίζουσι δὲ εἰς αὐτὴν συνήθως οἱ ἀπὸ Κανῆς σκάφας καὶ ἐφόλκια.[62]

Beyond Moscha Limen, for about another 1500 stades a mountain range(?) stretches along the shore up to Asichōn, and off the very end of this lie seven islands in a row called the Isles of Zēnobios, beyond which stretches another country, inhabited by an indigenous people, which is no longer in the same kingdom but already in that of Persis. After sailing along it over open water for about 2000 stades from the Isles of Zenobios, you come to the Isle of Sarapis, as it is called, about 120 stades offshore. It is some 200 stades wide and 600 long and is populated by three villages and by holy men of the Ichthyophagoi. They use the Arabic tongue and wear loincloths of palm leaves. The island has good supplies of fine-quality tortoise shell. The merchants of Kanē customarily fit out small sailing vessels to trade with it.[63]

First a few words about the geographical data provided in this passage. Asichōn has been reliably identified with Rās Ḥasik, a name from which Asichōn is undoubtedly derived.[64] In fact, the island nearest to Rās Ḥasik is called Ḥasikiyya.[65] Orthographically there are no problems here, for Greek renditions of proper names beginning with the Semitic voiceless pharyngeal fricative /ḥ/ drop the fricative consonant completely, while the voiceless velar stop /k/ is rendered χ.[66] As for the Isles of Zenobios, these can be identified with the K͟hurīyā Murīyā Islands, which do indeed lie just

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[62] *Periplus* §33.11.8-19.
[63] trans. Casson 1989: 71.
[64] Casson 1989: 173.
[65] Casson 1989: 173.
[66] Al-Jallad et al. 2013: 26, 27, 28, 29.

off the Rās Ḥasik.[67] Where the author of the *Periplus* errs is in the
distances associated with these places. While he underestimates the
distance from Rās Fartak to Sumhūrām, he grossly overestimates the
distance from Sumhūrām to Rās Ḥasik, which is less than half the distance
which he gives.[68] With this we come to the "Isle of Sarapis", identified
with Maṣīra Island.[69] The name Sarapis might be related to the proper
name *Srpyw*, attested in Nabataean Aramaic, which has been vocalized as
Σεραπίων.[70]

   Of great ethnographic interest is the reference to the Ichthyophagoi
inhabitants of Maṣīra. Ichthyophagoi, literally "the Fish-Eaters", is a vague
term by which Graeco-Roman authors referred to various unrelated coastal
peoples from northeast Africa to the Indus.[71] The *Periplus* reports that,
elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula, there were Ichthyophagoi inhabiting
the Ḥijāzī coast to the south of the Nabataean outpost of Leukē Kōmē
(modern ʿAynūna).[72] Other Ichthyophagoi, along with nomadic peoples,
are said to have inhabited the coast between Eudaimōn Arabia, i.e. Aden
(Sabaic *ʾdnᵐ*), and Qāniʾ.[73] There is no reason to believe that the
Ichthyophagoi of Maṣīra had any direct link with the other Arabian
Ichthyophagoi except with regard to their lifestyle. They might, however,
have been related to the Ichthyophagoi whom Ptolemy locates in the
coastal areas of southeastern Arabia,[74] if only given their geographical
location. In addition to three unnamed villages, Maṣīra is said to have been

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[67] Casson 1989: 173.
[68] Casson 1989: 173.
[69] Casson 1989: 175.
[70] Roncaglia 1971: 178.
[71] Herodotus, in whose history we find the earliest known mention of the name
Ichthyophagoi (Schneider 2013: 59), locates a group by this name in the area of the
first Nile cataract (*Histories* §3.19-25). Other African Ichthyophagoi are reported
in the *Periplus* (§2.1.7-8; §4.2.15) to have inhabited the Red Sea coast of the
northern Horn of Africa. At the eastern extremity of the Fish-Easters' range, Strabo
(*Geography* §15.2.1-2) and Arrian (*Indika* §26.2) locate Ichthyophagoi on the
coast of Baluchistan, and Philostratus (*Vita Apollonii* §3.55) still others by the
mouth of the Indus (Schneider 2013: 65). That the term Ichthyophagoi was applied
over the centuries to so many unrelated peoples testifies not only to its popularity
among Graeco-Roman authors but also to its flexibility, which allowed such
authors to fashion whatever variety of Ichthyophagoi which the context demanded
(ibid.: 64, 66).
[72] *Periplus* §20.7.6-7.
[73] *Periplus* §27.9.1-3.
[74] Ptolemy, *Geographia* §6.7.14.

populated by "holy men" who spoke in "the Arabic tongue".[75] The two questions which this passage raises pertain to language and religion.

Regarding language, it should be stressed that this is the only direct reference in the *Periplus* to what is called Arabic. There are, however, other references in the text to Arabs. As we shall see below, the *Periplus* states that Arabs constituted a portion of the population of Soqoṭrā while, in its description of the port of Mouza, i.e. al-Mukhāʾ (Sabaic *Mḫwⁿ*), located on the southern Red Sea coast of Yemen, it states that that settlement "teemed" with Arabs, who acted as shipowners, charterers, and sailors.[76] These Arabs were instrumental in maintaining Ḥimyarite trade with Rhapta, a trading station located somewhere on the coast of Tanzania,[77] and it is likely that the Arab inhabitants of Soqoṭrā had similarly taken up residence there as merchants. There is reason to believe, then, that by the turn of the Common Era, some Arabs had established themselves as a mercantile class who handled South Arabia's maritime trade. Yet, while the *Periplus* claims that the inhabitants of Maṣīra spoke Arabic, the text does not specifically designate them as Arabs. Are we to understand, then, that the merchants from Qāniʾ who traded with the island were Arabs, and that the locals spoke some form of (perhaps) pidgin Arabic for the purposes of commerce with said merchants? Perhaps, though in that case one would have to make certain assumptions about the ethnic identity of the Qāniʾ merchants and/or their language—things about which the *Periplus* has nothing to say. Let us not forget that the author of the *Periplus* does not seem to have had any direct contact with the peoples of this region, with the result that he was relying on second-hand and perhaps faulty information—witness his errors in estimating distances between certain landmarks on this stretch of the South Arabian coast. Furthermore, we cannot take it for granted that our author had any knowledge of the languages of any region of Arabia, with the result that he imposed the term "Arabic" on languages that were in fact quite distinct from the Arabic language in the standard sense. If so, and in light of the evidence that MSA was once far more widespread than is the case today, one might posit that the "Arabic" spoken on Maṣīra was in fact some early

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[75] *Periplus* §33.11.14-17.
[76] *Periplus* §21.7.21-22.
[77] The location of Rhapta has never been established to the satisfaction of all scholars, and while the area of present-day Dar es Salaam and the Rufiji Delta to the south have both been proposed as potential candidates (Casson 1989: 141; Chami 1999 passim), it cannot be excluded that the toponym Rhapta, which, after all, is not even a local name, might have shifted over time (Horton and Middleton 2000: 36).

form of one of the MSA languages. This finds support from the thirteenth-century Iranian traveler Ibn al-Mujāwir, who in his *Tārīkh al-Mustabṣir* identifies the inhabitants of Maṣīra as Mahra, and states in no uncertain terms that these people spoke a language which none but they could understand.[78]

Regarding the religious practices of the Ichthyophagoi holy men of Maṣīra, the *Periplus* provides no details. ASA preserves several titles for individuals holding a priestly office, e.g. *rs²w* (attested in all four branches of ASA), *rby* (Qatabānic), and *s³ḥr* (also Qatabānic). This last term recalls Arabic *sāḥir* (pl. *sāḥirūn*, *saḥara*, *suḥḥār*) "magician", suggesting that those who held this office practiced some form of sorcery, augury, and/or divination. It should be stressed, though, that the priests known from ASA inscriptions operated in a state society with an elaborate administrative framework. By contrast, the holy men of Maṣīra of whom the *Periplus* speaks operated in a stateless society of fishermen only loosely controlled by Parthia, and therefore cannot be usefully compared with the priests based in the South Arabian kingdoms to the southwest. Their role might instead have been more comparable to that of the *kāhin* (pl. *kuhhān*, *kahana*), a pre-Islamic ritual expert who acted as a diviner or soothsayer.[79] Although most of the *kuhhān* known from Arabic sources hailed from the more northerly areas of the Arabian Peninsula, a South Arabian *kāhin* who practiced magic, one ʿAbhala bin Kaʿb al-ʿAnsī (AKA al-Aswad), was influential enough to have led a resistance movement against the nascent Islamic state during the last months of Muḥammad's life (March-June 632 CE).[80] The Qurʾān takes pains to differentiate Muḥammad's role as a messenger of Allah from that of the *kāhin*, who is paired with an individual possessed by jinn (*majnūn*)[81] and with a divinely inspired poet, or *shāʿir*,[82] of the sort that transmitted oracles in rhymed prose.[83] Ibn al-Mujāwir notes that the Mahra were known as sorcerers (*saḥara*), for they had—in his words—a touch of ignorance, as well as intelligence and madness (*junūn*).[84] This view might have been in part the product of Ibn al-Mujāwir's confusion of the Mahra with the Jibbālī, who are also known as Śḥerī, and that this later name was associated with the Arabic term for

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[78] For a detailed account of al-ʿAnsī's career, see al-Ṭabarī 1965: IV: 1851-81.

[79] Fahd 1978.

[80] Ibn al-Mujāwir 2008: 269.

[81] Qurʾān 52:29.

[82] Qurʾān 69:41-42.

[83] On the role of the *shāʿir* in pre-Islamic Arabia and his relationship with the *kāhin*, see Fahd 1997.

[84] Ibn al-Mujāwir 2008: 269.

magic (*siḥr*).[85] Nevertheless, the association of MSA-speaking peoples with the practice of magic is well known; Ibn al-Mujāwir himself implies as much in his description of the population of Soqoṭrā.[86] The oral literature of Soqoṭrā in particular provides tantalizing clues to the pre-Islamic and, indeed, pre-Christian religious beliefs of MSA-speaking people, particularly in the references to good and evil spirits, the personified (and thus originally deified?) sun and moon, and tree spirits.[87]

On the Arabian mainland, exorcism rituals among the Mahra may also preserve pre-Islamic traditions. These rituals are known as *rābūt*, a term derived from the root √*r-ʕ-b*, from which is also derived the Arabic cognate *raʿaba*, meaning not only "to be afraid" but also "to speak in rhyme, to bewitch".[88] The incantation accompanying such rituals, which is recited in Mehrī, contains no Islamic formulae, e.g. the *basmallah* or salutations upon Muḥammad, which points to the ritual's pre-Islamic origin.[89] To what extent the popular religion of MSA-speakers during the modern period shares a kinship with the ritual and cultic practices of Maṣīra's "holy men" during antiquity is hard to say, though it must be stressed that not all beliefs and customs associated with popular religion in South Arabia during the modern period are derived from pre-Islamic tradition, with the result that they cannot be used to extrapolate ancient ritual and cultic practices.[90] To this it should be added that archaeological research on Maṣīra is still in its nascent stages and has so far concentrated on long-distance trade and other maritime activities rather than on religious practices.[91]

According to the *Periplus*, the Arabian territory beginning on the coast opposite the Isles of Zēnobios (=Khurīyā Murīyā) and including no doubt Maṣīra as well was subject not to Ḥaḍramawt but to another kingdom, that

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[85] ibid. (n. 2).

[86] ibid.: 264.

[87] Naumkin and Kogan 2014: 273 and passim.

[88] Simeone-Senelle 1995: 132.

[89] ibid.: 141.

[90] In an otherwise excellent study on archaic South Arabian isoglosses, Belova 2015: 86 draws attention to the term *zār* "une espèce de *ǧinn* qui provoque un accès d'épilepsie", noting its Cushitic origins and the various derived forms in Yemeni Arabic, MSA, and Ethiosemitic, but neglecting to note that belief in the *zār* spirit and the rituals associated with it appear to have originated in the Horn of Africa only in the sixteenth century CE and were not diffused into neighboring regions in the Arab world until the first half of the nineteenth century (Mercier 1983-84; Natvig 1987).

[91] Charpentier et al. 2013; Blue et al. 2014.

of Persis (=Fārs),[92] which appears to have dominated the easterly stretch of the South Arabian coastline as far as Omana,[93] a port with which the site of Ed-Dur (=al-Dūr) in the emirate of Umm al-Qaywayn has been tentatively identified.[94] On the other hand, Dibba al-Ḥiṣn, a bit to the northeast, has also been proposed.[95] Under Iran's Parthian Dynasty (247 BCE-224 CE), Persis enjoyed almost complete independence, with its own rulers and coinage, acknowledging vassalage to Parthian overlords only when these were strong enough to insist on it.[96] Coins struck in the name of some of Persis' rulers, dating from the first century BCE, have indeed been found at Ed-Dur, while one further Persis coin has come to light at Mleiha.[97] How useful this material is as evidence of rule by Persis over southeastern Arabia is, however, rather questionable, not least given that Parthian, Characenian, and even Roman, Nabataean, South Arabian (Ḥaḍramī), and Indian coins have also been found at ed-Dur.[98] More significantly still, the *Periplus* implies that not only Omana and the coast as far as the Isles of Zēnobios but also Apologus (=Ubulla) at the northern end of the Arabian Gulf was subject to Persis,[99] a statement which strains credulity if one takes it to mean that Persis, a small and relatively unimportant polity in southwestern Iran, ruled an area stretching from the Gulf coast of Iraq to Ẓufār. The conclusion one is forced to draw, then, is that "Persis" in the *Periplus* is actually shorthand for Parthia,[100] much as "Medes" (*Mḏy*) in Minaic parlance is shorthand for the Achaemenid Persians,[101] in whose empire the ethnic Medes of northwestern Iran were but one of many vassal peoples.

When exactly the Parthians established rule, or at least a sphere or influence, over the Oman Peninsula and Ẓufār is unknown. Whatever the case, it is likely that the establishment by the Parthians of commercial

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[92] *Periplus* §33.11.11-12.

[93] *Periplus* §36.12.3-12.

[94] Schuol 2000: 404. Haerinck 1998: 278 is more reticent about the identification of Omana with Ed-Dur but remains open to the possibility. As he correctly points out (ibid.: 277), there are multiple toponyms in southeastern Arabia containing the "Oman-" element.

[95] Tomber 2008: 109.

[96] Casson 1989: 174.

[97] Haerinck 1998: 286-7.

[98] ibid.: 281-6, 288-92.

[99] *Periplus* §35.11.32-12.2. On the identification of Apologos with Ubulla, see Casson 1989: 179-80.

[100] Haerinck 1998: 286. That it was Parthia, rather than Persis, whose rule extended as Ẓufār is similarly taken for granted by Schuol 2000: 408.

[101] RES 3022/3.