



ARABIA I. THE ACHAEMENID PROVINCE ARABĀYA

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i. The Achaemenid province Arabāya

In the Bīsotūn (1.15) and several other Old Persian inscriptions (see Kent, *Old Persian*, pp. 169-70) that list provinces of the Achaemenid empire in a geographical sequence, Arabāya is placed after Babylonia and Assyria (i.e., Syria) and before Egypt. During the Achaemenid period the term Arabāya was not yet used to designate southern Arabia (W. Caskel, "Arabien," in Fischer, *Weltgeschichte IV*, Frankfurt am Main, 1967, pp. 204-19). Herodotus (2.8, 3.5.91; see also Xenophon *Anabasis* 1.5.1-2) locates the Arabs in the region from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, that is, in southern Palestine and northern Sinai. They also lived in the steppes of southern Mesopotamia. (See P. Briant, *État et pasteurs au Moyen-Orient ancien*, Cambridge and Paris, 1982, pp. 113-79; I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs*, Jerusalem and Leiden, 1982, pp. 192-214; E. Herzfeld, *The Persian Empire*, ed. G. Walser, Wiesbaden, 1968, pp. 304-06; O. Leuze, *Die Satrapieneinteilung in Syrien und im Zweistromlande von 520-320*, repr. Hildesheim, 1972, pp. 103-04, 162). Such a location is confirmed by the lists in the Achaemenid inscriptions, which use the term Arabāya for the district of the nomads between Egypt and the Euphrates region.

This use of Arabāya to designate a geographical rather than an administrative



entity is paralleled in the term Aribi (Arabu/Arubu), which appears in the Assyrian royal inscriptions beginning in 853 B.C. In the Bible the term Arab designates inhabitants of the Syrian desert (Jeremiah 3:2). In Babylonian economic and legal documents of the Achaemenid period some Arabs (Arbāya) are referred to as residents of Babylon, Nippur, Sippar, Uruk, and other cities (R. Zadok, “Arabians in Mesopotamia during the late-Assyrian, Chaldean, Achaemenian and Hellenistic Periods,” *ZDMG* 131, 1981, pp. 42-84). It is still impossible to determine what language or languages these people spoke. About twenty personal names have been preserved; these do not differ from Aramaic names.

According to Herodotus (3.4ff., 39ff., 97), the Arabs aided Cambyses in his invasion of Egypt in 525 B.C. by providing the Persian army with waterskins when they crossed the desert between Palestine and Egypt. United with the Persians by this bond of friendship, the Arabs, unlike other nations of the empire, were not considered subjects. They did not enter any satrapy and were exempt from royal tribute, but instead brought the Persian kings a “gift” of a thousand talents (ca. thirty tons) of frankincense a year. Herodotus (7.69) also mentions an Arab camel corps among different contingents levied for Xerxes’s Greek expedition. These Arabs were armed with long bent-back bows; together with the Ethiopians they were under the command of Arsames, son of Darius I.

The Persepolis Fortification Tablets refer to two groups of officials consisting of eight and twelve Arabian men (Harbāpe). In 500 B.C. they were issued flour and beer on their way to Darius I in Susa (R. T. Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, Chicago, 1969, p. 691). On the Persepolis reliefs some Arabs in long draped and girdled clothing are shown presenting textiles and leading a dromedary (G. Walser, *Die Völkerschaften auf den Reliefs von Persepolis*, Berlin, 1966, pls. 27, 76). An Arab in a long shawl is also depicted on the base of the statue of Darius I in Susa (M. Roaf, “The Subject Peoples on the Base of the Statue of Darius,” *CDAFI* 4, 1974, pp. 135-36).



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.