



## ARBĀYISTĀN

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**ARBĀYISTĀN**, name of a Mesopotamian province in the Sasanian empire. It is known from Šāpūr I's inscription on the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt (Gk. 2 *ARABIAN*, Parth. 1 [*'rb*]ystn), Pahl. *Vendidād* 1.77 (Arwāstān), and as a loanword in Armenian (*Arvastan*, Hübschmann, *Armen. Etymologie*, p. 27). There is also a term 'Arab, meaning the same as Bēt 'Arbāyē, the Syriac name of Arbāyistān, but also designating a narrower area in northeastern Mesopotamia around Tellā. Arbāyistān was largely identical with northern Mesopotamia, excluding Osrhoene. The province bordered in the south on [Āsōristān](#) approximately along a line from Anata to Takrīt. In the west, the border generally went along a line from [Amida](#) (Dīārbakr) to the east of Singara, southwestwards to the [Ḳabūr](#) and to Dura. The important city of [Nisibis](#) was ceded to Iran in the treaty of 363 A.D. In the east Arbāyistān bordered on [Adiabene](#) (Nōd-šīrakān), and in the north on Armenia. Here small territories such as Sophene, Arzanene, and Gordyene seem to have been included. The road system was well developed. The main road went from Zeugma on the Euphrates to Edessa, bifurcating at Sarūg, with one northern connection to Nisibis, and one southern road to Singara and Mosul. These two east-west roads were crossed by several proceeding north and south, one of them coming from Amida.

Arbāyistān had many important cities, among them Amida, Nisibis, and Singara. Hotly contested because of its situation and strong fortifications, Nisibis for long periods was in Roman possession. [Hatra](#), also a very strong fortress south of Singara, was conquered by Šāpūr I in 240-41 A.D. while still a crown-prince. The population was composed of Arabs, Arameans, Jews,



Armenians, and Iranians. The Arabs, who lent their name to Arbāyistān, were not only nomads but also occupants of Hatra, where their inscriptions, written in Aramaic, testify to Aramaic influence and their sculptures to the fascination of Parthian culture. After the conquest the city lost its importance. The majority of the population were Arameans, speaking and writing the literary language of Edessa, the language of the Syrian church, which was the dominant religious factor in Arbāyistān. Armenians, also Christians, lived in the north. The strength of the Jewish element is difficult to calculate, but there were certainly many Jews in the province. Iranians were more numerous in Arbāyistān than in Āsōristān, for Kurdish tribes were settled in the northeastern districts.

The revenues of Arbāyistān to a great extent derived from commercial traffic. The silk route passing through to Zeugma provided the government with great incomes from the custom-house stations. The traffic on the rivers was also a source of profit. In total, however, Arbāyistān did not furnish as much revenue as Āsōristān.

Arbāyistān was part of the defense system against the Romans, although the strongest fortresses were in Roman possession. Along the Euphrates, the Sasanians had a series of well-fortified cities as a protection against invasion. The excellent road system made the province easily accessible for Romans and Byzantines and Sasanians, and it was the classical battlefield in their wars. Operations often concentrated on sieges and attacks on cities. During the Arab invasion Arbāyistān was a rather easy prey to the invading Muslims, who made it a base of operations against Armenia.

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