

Pre-Islamic Arabia

Pre-Islamic Arabia refers to the Arabic civilization which existed in the Arabian Plate before the rise of Islam in the 630s. The study of Pre-Islamic Arabia is important to Islamic studies as it provides the context for the development of Islam.

Studies

The scientific studies of Pre-Islamic Arabs starts with the Arabists of the early 19th century when they managed to decipher epigraphic Old South Arabian (10th century BCE), Ancient North Arabian (6th century BCE) and other writings of pre-Islamic Arabia, so it is no longer limited to the written traditions which are not local due to the lack of surviving Arab historians accounts of that era, so it is compensated by existing material

consists primarily of written sources from other traditions (such as Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, etc.) so it was not known in great detail; From the 3rd century CE, Arabian history becomes more tangible with the rise of the Himyarite Kingdom, and with the appearance of the Qahtanites in the Levant and the gradual assimilation of the Nabataeans by the Qahtanites in the early centuries CE, a pattern of expansion exceeded in the explosive Muslim conquests of the 7th century. So sources of history includes archaeological evidence, foreign accounts and oral traditions later recorded by Islamic scholars especially pre-Islamic poems and *al-hadith* plus a number of ancient Arab documents that survived to the medieval times and portions of them were cited or recorded. Archaeological exploration in the Arabian Peninsula has been sparse but fruitful, many ancient sites were identified by modern excavations.



Pre-Historic to Iron Age

- Ubaid period (5300 BCE)-could have originated in eastern Arabia-.
- Umm an-Nar Culture (2600-2000 BCE)
- Sabr culture (2000 BCE)

Magan and 'ad

Further information: 'Ād and Majan (Civilization)

- Magan is attested as the name of a trading partner of the Sumerians. It is often assumed to be located in Oman.
- The A'adids established themselves in South Arabia (modern-day Yemen), settling to the east of the Qahtan tribe. They established the Kingdom of 'Ād around the 10th century BCE to the 3rd century CE.

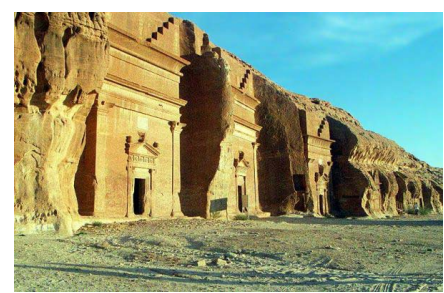
The 'Ād nation were known to the Greeks and Egyptians. Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographos* (2nd century CE) refers to the place by a Hellenized version of the inhabitants of the capital Ubar.

Thamud

The Thamud (Arabic: ثمود) were a people of ancient Arabia, either a tribe or a group of tribes, that created a large kingdom and flourished from 3000 BCE to 200 BCE. Recent archaeological work has revealed numerous Thamudic rock writings and pictures not only in Yemen but also throughout central Arabia.

They are mentioned in sources such as the Qur'an, old Arabian poetry, Assyrian annals (Tamudi), in a Greek temple inscription from the northwest Hejaz of 169 CE, in a 5th-century Byzantine source and in Old North Arabian graffiti around Tayma.

They are mentioned in the victory annals of the Neo-Assyrian King, Sargon II (8th century BCE), who defeated these people in a campaign in northern Arabia. The Greeks also refer to these people as "Tamudaei", i.e. "Thamud", in the writings of Aristo, Ptolemy, and Pliny. Before the rise of Islam, approximately between 400-600 CE, the Thamud totally disappeared.



Picture of Thamudi tombs at Mada'in Saleh carved from mountain

South Arabian Kingdoms

Kingdom of Ma'in (7th century BCE – 1st century BCE)

During Minaean rule the capital was at Karna (now known as Sa'dah). Their other important city was Yathill (now known as Baraqish). The Minaean Kingdom was centered in northwestern Yemen, with most of its cities laying along the Wadi Madhab. Minaean inscriptions have been found far afield of the Kingdom of Ma'in, as far away as al-'Ula in northwestern Saudi Arabia and even on the island of Delos and in Egypt. It was the first of the Yemeni kingdoms to end, and the Minaean language died around 100 CE.^[1]

Kingdom of Saba (9th century BCE – 275 CE)

During Sabaeen rule, trade and agriculture flourished generating much wealth and prosperity. The Sabaeen kingdom is located in what is now the Asir region in southwestern Yemen, and its capital, Ma'rib, is located near what is now Yemen's modern capital, Sana'a.^[2] According to South Arabian tradition, the eldest son of Noah, Shem, founded the city of Ma'rib.

During Sabaeen rule, Yemen was called "Arabia Felix" by the Romans who were impressed by its wealth and prosperity. The Roman emperor Augustus sent a military expedition to conquer the "Arabia Felix", under the orders of Aelius Gallus. After an unsuccessful siege of



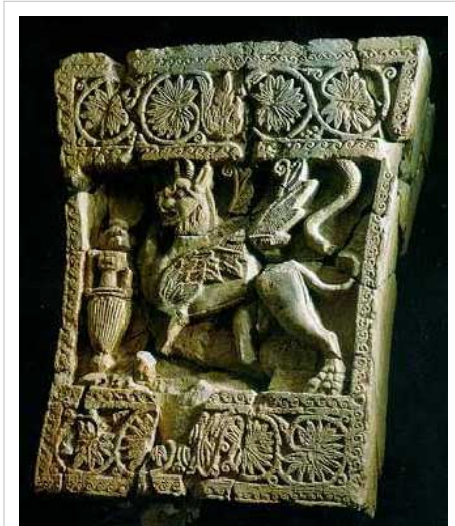
Sabaeen inscription addressed to the moon-god Almaqah, mentioning five South Arabian gods, two reigning sovereigns and two governors, 7th century BCE.

Ma'rib, the Roman general retreated to Egypt, while his fleet destroyed the port of Aden in order to guarantee the Roman merchant route to India.

The success of the kingdom was based on the cultivation and trade of spices and aromatics including frankincense and myrrh. These were exported to the Mediterranean, India, and Abyssinia where they were greatly prized by many cultures, using camels on routes through Arabia, and to India by sea.

During the 8th and 7th century BCE, there was a close contact of cultures between the Kingdom of D'mt in northern Ethiopia and Eritrea and Saba. Though the civilization was indigenous and the royal inscriptions were written in a sort of proto-Ethiosemitic, there were also some Sabaean immigrants in the kingdom as evidenced by a few of the D'mt inscriptions.^{[3] [4]}

Agriculture in Yemen thrived during this time due to an advanced irrigation system which consisted of large water tunnels in mountains, and dams. The most impressive of these earthworks, known as the Marib Dam was built ca. 700 BCE, provided irrigation for about 25000 acres (101 km²) of land^[5] and stood for over a millennium, finally collapsing in 570 CE after centuries of neglect.



A Griffin from the royal palace at Shabwa, the capital city of Hadhramaut.

Kingdom of Hadhramaut (8th century BCE – 3rd century CE)

The first known inscriptions of Hadramaut are known from the 8th century BCE. It was first referenced by an outside civilization in an Old Sabaic inscription of Karab'il Watar from the early 7th century BCE, in which the King of Hadramaut, Yada'il, is mentioned as being one of his allies. When the Minaeans took control of the caravan routes in the 4th century BCE, however, Hadramaut became one of its confederates, probably because of commercial interests. It later became independent and was invaded by the growing Yemeni kingdom of Himyar toward the end of the 1st century BCE, but it was able to repel the attack. Hadramaut annexed Qataban in the second half of the 2nd century CE, reaching its greatest size. The kingdom of Hadramaut was eventually conquered by the Himyarite king Shammar Yahri'sh around 300 CE, unifying all of the South Arabian kingdoms.^[6]

Kingdom of Awsan (8th century BCE – 6th century BCE)

The ancient Kingdom of Awsan in South Arabia (modern Yemen), with a capital at Hagar Yahirr in the wadi Markha, to the south of the wadi Bayhan, is now marked by a tell or artificial mound, which is locally named Hagar Asfal.

Kingdom of Qataban (4th century BCE – 3rd century CE)

Qataban was one of the ancient Yemeni kingdoms which thrived in the Beihan valley. Like the other Southern Arabian kingdoms it gained great wealth from the trade of frankincense and myrrh incense which were burned at altars. The capital of Qataban was named Timna and was located on the trade route which passed through the other kingdoms of Hadramaut, Saba and Ma'in. The chief deity of the Qatabanians was Amm, or "Uncle" and the people called themselves the "children of Amm".

Kingdom of Himyar (2nd century BCE – 525 CE)

The Himyarites rebelled against Qataban and eventually united Southwestern Arabia, controlling the Red Sea as well as the coasts of the Gulf of Aden. From their capital city, Zafar (Thifar), the Himyarite Kings launched successful military campaigns, and had stretched its domain at times as far east to the Persian Gulf and as far north to the Arabian Desert.

During the 3rd century CE, the South Arabian kingdoms were in continuous conflict with one another. Gadarat (GDRT) of Axum began to interfere in South Arabian affairs, signing an alliance with Saba, and a Himyarite text notes that Hadramaut and Qataban were also all allied against the kingdom. As a result of this, the Aksumite Empire was able to capture the Himyarite capital of Thifar in the first quarter of the 3rd century. However, the alliances did not last, and Sha'ir Awtar of Saba unexpectedly turned on Hadramaut, allying again with Aksum and taking its capital in 225. Himyar then allied with Saba and invaded the newly taken Aksumite territories, retaking Thifar, which had been under the control of Gadarat's son Beygat, and pushing Aksum back into the Tihama.^{[7] [8]}

Aksumite occupation of Yemen (525 – 570 CE)

The Aksumite intervention is connected with Dhu Nuwas, a Himyarite king who changed the state religion to Judaism and began to persecute the Christians in Yemen. Outraged, Kaleb, the Christian King of Aksum with the encouragement of the Byzantine Emperor Justin I invaded and annexed Yemen. The Aksumites controlled Himyar and attempted to invade Mecca in the year 570 CE, Eastern Yemen remained allied to the Sassanids via tribal alliances with the Lakhmids, which later brought the Sassanid army into Yemen ending the Aksumite period.

Sassanid period (570 – 630 CE)

The Persian king Khosrau I, sent troops under the command of Vahriz (Persian: اسپیهد وهرز) who helped the semi-legendary Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan to drive the Ethiopian Aksumites out of Yemen. Southern Arabia became a Persian dominion under a Yemenite vassal and thus came within the sphere of influence of the Sassanid Empire. After the demise of the Lakhmids another army was sent to Yemen making it a province of the Sassanid Empire under a Persian satrap. Following the death of Khosrau II in 628, the Persian governor in Southern Arabia, Badhan, converted to Islam and Yemen followed the new religion.

North Arabian Kingdoms

Kingdom of Qedar (8th century BCE - ?)

The most organized of the Northern Arabian tribes, at the height of their rule in the 6th century BCE, the Kingdom of Qedar spanned a large area between the Persian Gulf and the Sinai.^[9] An influential force between the 8th and 4th centuries BCE, Qedarite monarchs are first mentioned in inscriptions from the Assyrian Empire. Some early Qedarite rulers were vassals of that empire, with revolts against Assyria becoming more common in the 7th century BCE. It is thought that the Qedarites were eventually subsumed into the Nabataean state after their rise to prominence in the 2nd century CE.



Statue of Ammaalay, 1st century BCE,
Yemen

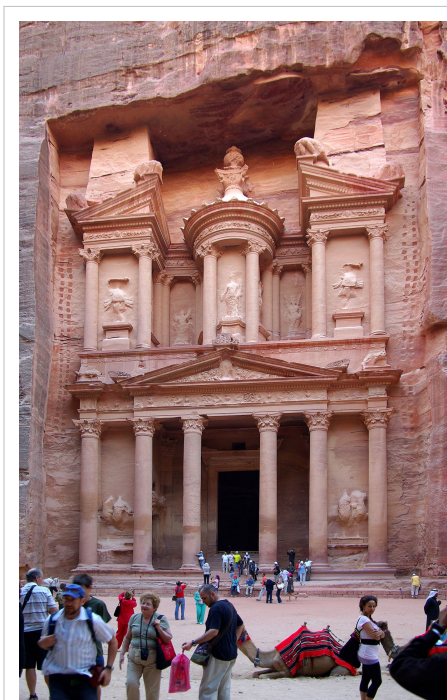
The Achaemenids in Northern Arabia

Achaemenid Arabia corresponded to the lands between Egypt and Mesopotamia, later known as Arabia Petraea. According to Herodotus, Cambyses did not subdue the Arabs when he attacked Egypt in 525 BCE. His successor Darius the Great does not mention the Arabs in the Behistun Inscription from the first years of his reign, but mentions them in later texts. This suggests that Darius conquered this part of Arabia.^{[10] [11]}

Nabateans

The Nabataeans are not to be found among the tribes that are listed in Arab genealogies because the Nabatean kingdom ended a long time before the coming of Islam. They settled east of the Syro-African rift between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea, that is, in the land that had once been Edom. And although the first sure reference to them dates from 312 BCE, it is possible that they were present much earlier.

Petra (from the Latin *petrae*, meaning 'of rock') lies in the Great Rift Valley, east of Wadi `Araba in Jordan about 80 km (50 mi) south of the Dead Sea. It came into prominence in the late 1st century BCE through the success of the spice trade. The city was the principal city of ancient Nabataea and was famous above all for two things: its trade and its hydraulic engineering systems. It was locally autonomous until the reign of Trajan, but it flourished under Roman rule. The town grew up around its Colonnaded Street in the 1st century and by the middle of the 1st century had witnessed rapid urbanization. The quarries were probably opened in this period, and there followed virtually continuous building through the 1st and 2nd centuries CE.



Al Khazneh in the ruins of Petra (Jordan)

Palmyra and Roman Arabia

There is evidence of Roman rule in northern Arabia dating to the reign of Caesar Augustus (27 BCE – 14 CE). During the reign of Tiberius (14–37 CE), the already wealthy and elegant north Arabian city of Palmyra, located along the caravan routes linking Persia with the Mediterranean ports of Roman Syria and Phoenicia, was made part of the Roman province of Syria. The area steadily grew further in importance as a trade route linking Persia, India, China, and the Roman Empire. During the following period of great prosperity, the Arab citizens of Palmyra adopted customs and modes of dress from both the Iranian Parthian world to the east and the Graeco-Roman west. In 129, Hadrian visited the city and was so enthralled by it that he proclaimed it a free city and renamed it *Palmyra Hadriana*.

The Roman province of Arabia Petraea was created at the beginning of the 2nd century by emperor Trajan. It was centered on Petra, but included even areas of northern Arabia under Nabatean control. Recently has been discovered evidence that Roman legions occupied Mada'in Saleh in the Hijaz mountains area of northwestern Arabia, increasing the extension of the "Arabia Petraea" province.^[12] The desert frontier of Arabia Petraea was called by the Romans the Limes Arabicus. As a frontier province, it included a desert area of northeastern Arabia populated by the nomadic Saraceni.

Qahtanites

Further information: Lakhmids, Ghassanids, Kindah, Kahlān, History of the Levant, Syria (Roman province), Arabia Petraea, and Arab people

In Sassanid times, Arabia Petraea was a border province between the Roman and Persian empires, and from the early centuries CE was increasingly affected by South Arabian influence, notably with the Ghassanids migrating north from the 3rd century.

The Ghassanids, Lakhmids and Kindites were the last major migration of non-Muslims out of Yemen to the north and southwestern borders.

- The **Ghassanids** revived the Semitic presence in the then Hellenized Syria. They mainly settled the Hauran region and spread to modern Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. The Ghassanids held Syria until engulfed by the expansion of Islam.

Greeks and Romans referred to all the nomadic population of the desert in the Near East as Arabi. The Greeks called Yemen "Arabia Felix" (Happy Arabia). The Romans called the vassal nomadic states within the Roman Empire "Arabia Petraea" after the city of Petra, and called unconquered deserts bordering the empire to the south and east Arabia Magna (Larger Arabia).

- The **Lakhmids** settled the mid Tigris region around their capital Al-Hirah they ended up allying with the Sassanid against the Ghassanids and the Byzantine Empire. The Lakhmids contested control of the central Arabian tribes with the Kindites, eventually destroying Kindah in 540 after the fall of Kindah's main ally at the time, Himyar. The Sassanids dissolved the Lakhmid kingdom in 602.
 - The **Kindites** migrated from Yemen along with the Ghassanids and Lakhmids, but were turned back in Bahrain by the Abdul Qais Rabi'a tribe. They returned to Yemen and allied themselves with the Himyarites who installed them as a vassal kingdom that ruled Central Arabia from Qaryah dhat Kahl (the present-day Qaryat al-Fāw) in Central Arabia. They ruled much of the Northern/Central Arabian Peninsula until the fall of the Himyarites in 525 CE.
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Late Antiquity

The early 7th century in Arabia began with the longest and most destructive period of the Byzantine–Sassanid Wars. It left both empires exhausted and susceptible to third-party attacks, particularly from nomadic Arabs united under a newly formed religion. According to historian George Liska, the "unnecessarily prolonged Byzantine–Persian conflict opened the way for Islam" ^[14]

Fall of the Empires

Before the Byzantine–Sassanid War of 602–628, the Plague of Justinian erupted, spreading through Persia and into Byzantium territory. Procopius; Constantinople's local historian that lived to witness the plague, documented that citizens were dying at a rate of 10,000 per day. ^[15] The exact number; however, is often disputed by contemporary historians. Both empires were permanently weakened by the pandemic as their citizens struggled to deal with death as well as heavy taxation, which increased as both empires campaigned for more territory.

Despite almost succumbing to the plague, emperor of Byzantine, Justinian I; attempted to resurrect the might of the Roman Empire by expanding into Arabia. The Arabian Peninsula had a long coastline for merchant ships and an area of lush vegetation known as the Fertile Crescent which could help fund his expansion into Europe and North Africa. The drive into Persian territory would also put an end to tribute payments to the Sasanians, which resulted in an agreement to give 11000 lb (5000 kg) of tribute to the Persians annually in exchange for a ceasefire. ^[16]

However, Justinian could not afford further losses in Arabia. The Byzantines and the Sasanians sponsored powerful nomadic mercenaries from the desert with enough power to trump the possibility of aggression in Arabia. Justinian viewed his mercenaries as so valued for preventing conflict that he awarded their chief with the titles of patrician, phylarch, and king – the highest honours that he could bestow on anyone. ^[17] By the late 6th century, an uneasy peace remained until disagreements erupted between the mercenaries and their client empires.

The Byzantines' ally was a Christian Arabic tribe from the frontiers of the desert known as the Ghassanids. The Sasanians' ally; the Lakhmids, were also Christian Arabs, but from the life giving rivers of modern day Iraq. However, denominational disagreements about God forced a schism in the alliances. The Byzantines' official religion was Orthodox Christian, which believed that Jesus Christ and God were two natures within one entity. ^[18] The Ghassanids were Monophysite Christians from Iraq, who believed that God and Jesus Christ were only one nature. ^[19] This disagreement was unforgivable and resulted in a permanent break in the alliance.

Meanwhile, the Sassanid Empire broke their alliance with the Lakhmids due to false accusations that the Lakhmid's leader committed treason and the Lakhmid kingdom was destroyed. ^[20] The fertile lands and important trade routes of Iraq were now open ground for upheaval.

Rise of Islam

When the stalemate was finally broken and it seemed like Byzantine had finally gained the upper hand in battle, nomadic Arabs invaded from the desert frontiers bringing with them a new social order that emphasized religious devotion over tribal membership.

By the time the last Byzantine-Sassanid war came to an end in 628, Islam was already united under the power of the religious-politico Caliphate (or leader). The Muslims were able to launch attacks against both empires which resulted in destruction of the Sassanid Empire and the overthrowing of Byzantine's territories in the Levant, the Caucasus, Egypt, Syria and North Africa. ^[21] Over the following centuries, most of the Byzantine Empire and the entirety of the Sassanid Empire came under Muslim rule.

"Within the lifetime of some of the children who met Muhammad and sat on the Prophet's knees, Arab armies controlled the land mass that extended from the Pyrenees Mountains in Europe to the Indus River valley in South Asia. In less than a century, Arabs had come to rule over an area that spanned five thousand miles." ^[22]

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