EXTERNAL TEXTUAL SOURCES – EARLY ARABIA

Kenneth A. Kitchen
University of Liverpool

1. Timescale

The narratives of 1–2 Kings have little to say about Arabia, except for the visit of the queen of Sheba to Solomon, and his having traded with all the kings of Arabia.

2. Scope of Ancient Arabian Documentary Sources

From Southern Arabia (especially Yemen), but also extending up to Al-Ula in NW Arabia, and over to the Gulf region, we have about 6,000 inscriptions of all kinds in the Old-South-Arabian monumental alphabet (29 letters), with local equivalents in the NW (Taymanite, Lihyanite, etc.) A vast number are graffiti on stone surfaces. But from Yemen and environs, we have Sabean royal and private inscriptions from probably the 10th (certainly the 9th) c. BCE all the way down to their Himyarite successors into the 6th c. CE. Alongside Saba (biblical Sheba), the kingdoms of Qataban (with Ausan), Hadhramaut (now Dhofar) and Main (and its preceding Madhabian city-states), have left their quotient of similar texts in terms of monumental texts and graffiti in Qatabanian, Hadhramautic and Madhabian/Minean respectively. To these may be added semi-cursive/cursive administrative texts and letters on palm-stalks (4th c. BCE onwards).¹

¹ For an inventory/bibliography of most of these texts, see K. A. Kitchen, Documentation for Ancient Arabia. 1: Chronological Framework and Historical Sources (The World of Ancient Arabia, I: Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994) and K. A. Kitchen, Documentation for Ancient Arabia, II (Liverpool: University Press, 2000) which includes updates on king-lists and dated monuments from Vol. I, plus a palaeography. In northern Arabia going up into Transjordan and Syria, besides Nabatean texts, several thousand Safaitic graffiti exist, but these are all too late for our period.
3. The Hebrew Nonarchy and Arabia

3.1. The Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:1–13)

In brief, with one exception, we have *no explicit evidence at all for any South-Arabian queens in 15 centuries of documentation so far!* The sole exception is Queen Halik-malik, ca. 225 CE, and then only because her brother (a king of Saba) kidnapped her back from her erring husband (a king of Hadhramaut). The numerous dynastic successions in Southern Arabia prove that royal women must have existed to provide kings with sons; and we have Assyrian mentions of no less than four executive queens in NW Arabia within ca. 750–690 BCE. So, such ladies did exist. The Solomonic queen of Saba should be regarded as the consort of a ruling *mukarrib* (paramount ruler) of Saba who gave her executive power to bargain with Solomon on trade matters – with Ophir adjoining Havilah (a Hawlan) in Western Arabia the Hiram-Solomon activities in 1 Kgs 9:26–28; 10:11 threatened to cut the camel-borne incense-route from Saba through that zone up to the Levant. There is no rational reason to dismiss her reality; all the wild legends date from over 1,000 years later and are thus irrelevant. Her husband might in principle have been any one of four rulers from Yadail Yanuf to Yadail Bayyin I (ca. 990–925 BCE).  

3.2. Other Arabians (1 Kgs 10:15)

“All the Arabian kings” is wide but not informative. Before 700 BCE (except for Saba/Sheba), our explicit sources are extremely few. Archaeologically, Qurayya in NW Arabia had a brief burst of settled culture in the 13th-12th centuries BCE (interacting with Ramesside Egypt at Timna in NE Sinai). Then our sources fail until Gindibu the Arabian joined in against Shalmaneser III at Qarqar in 853. Between the Qurayyans and Gindibu new groups and their chiefs perhaps arose at least in Al-Ula (the future Dedan). Far away eastwards, Dilmun in Eastern Arabia and Bahrain was an important entity from the mid-3rd millennium BCE, down to ca. 1425 BCE, when Kassites ruled. After them, ca. 1150–720, nothing is known until Uperi in ca. 720–706 BCE;

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