

Arabia, the Arabs and the Persian Gulf. A Dissertation of Ancient Sources

José María BLÁZQUEZ MARTÍNEZ

Dep. Historia Antigua-UCM
Real Academia de la Historia

I will expone the point of view of a Historian of the Antiquity about this fascinating subject. I will not talk about the Prehistory of this territory, focussing my attention on Assyrian, Chaldean, Torian, Achaemenid kings and the Roman period, related to the arabs on South Arabia¹.

The first source we must consider are the inscriptions carved on Shalmanasar III monolith from Kurkh. The inscriptions narrate the first six years of Shalmanasar the third reign, telling us about the battle at Gargan on the sixth year of his reign, 835 BC².

This inscription mentions the leaders of the enemy army, including Hadadezer of Damascus, Ishuleni of Hamath, Ahab of Israel and Gindibu' the arab and his one thousand camels. This source holds a great importance because it's the only one left about the battle of Qargar, and mentions the list of the enemy armies and the names of their leaders. It's important also because of the presence of an Arab leader, probably from the western region, because other sources mention vaguely the twelve kings of Hatti and the sea coast.

On the inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser III³ we may read mentions about the Arabs. These inscriptions are of two kinds, one following a cronological sequence and the non-annalistic inscriptions, called "Summary Inscriptions". These "Summary Inscriptions", which are related to the Annals, register the events according to their importance following a cronological order in the descriptions of wars and other events but they offer very little informarion about the Arabs.

¹ Persian Gulf in Prehistory: C. Zacagnini, "Pattern of Mobility Among Ancient Near Eastern Craftsmen", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 42, 4, 1983, 245-264; T.F. Potts, "Patterns of trade in third-millennium BC Mesopotamia and Iran", *World Archaeology*, 24, 3, 1993, 379-402; D.T. Potts, "Rething Some Aspedts of Trade in the Arabian Gulf", *World Archaeology*, 24, 3, 1993, 423-440; J. Eiden, F. Hojlund, "Trade or Diplomacy? Assyria and Dilmun in the Eighteenth Century BC", *World Archaeology*, 24, 3, 1993, 441-448. I want thanks to Prof. Luis Alberto Ruiz Cabrero, Dept. Ancient History, Univeridad Complutense de Madrid.

² I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs. Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent, 9th-5th Centuries BC*, Leiden 1982, 21, 81-111. Generally: J. Boardman *et alii*, *The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and Other States of the Near East, from the Eight to the Sixth Centuries BC*, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, III, 2, Cambridge 2006.

³ I. Eph'al, *op. cit.*, 21-36.

Tiglath-Pileser's Annals incise on stone slabs were removed from the walls of his palace at Calah, Nimrud, to be reused in other structures. They appeared partly in the southwest palace, whose construction began during Esarhadon's reign, and partly in the Central Palace. The slabs weren't found *in situ* either, not in their original order and they constitute only a small portion of the Annals. Many problems arise from the order of the slabs and the continuity of the text. Lines 150-157 of Rost's edition of the Annals deal with the tributes asked by Tiglath-Pileser, paid by various rules from the West, including among others Zalibe, Queen of the Arabs.

The last three lines of one of these slabs seem to concern to the punishment of Ashkelon because of the Mitinti revolt annexing 15 towns from its territory to that of Idibi'ilu, the arab. Idibi'ilu lived on the border of Egypt. He lived, then, in North Arabia. On other slab we may read that Samsi, Queen of the Arabs, who violated the oath that she swore by Shamash. Another queen of the Arabs is mentioned. The inscription is dated on 733 BC, when the war against Damascus began. Tiglath-Pileser's inscriptions related to the nomads on the borders of Palestine were found in Nimrud.

The 38th line of a inscription on a stone slab describe in detail Tiglath-Pileser's activities in Syria, Palestine and their environs, divided as follows:

Lines 15-26: Samsi, Queen of the Arabs. Lines 27-33: The surrender of various nomad tribes. Line 34: the assignement of Idibi'ilu to the Egyptian border.

On a clay tablet writings, which describe briefly the first 17 years of Tiglath-Pileser's reign, are mentioned the same informations about the Arabs. On other clay tablets, Samsi, the Queen of the Arabs is quoted. Another slab, badly conserved, is important because besides mentioning Samsi, Queen of the Arabs, it tells us about the surrender of various nomad tribes, the receipt of tributes from them and the assignement of Idibi'ilu to the Egyptian borders.

This inscription is very important because for the first time is mentioned the payment of tributes to Tiglath-Pileser III. This last inscription is identical to other Tiglath-Pileser's inscriptions mentioned before. Samsi's oath violation, her allegiance to the Assyrian king has been dated on 733 BC.

Tiglath-Pileser's campaign in Galilee was conducted after his campaign against Samsi. Samsi paid camels as tribute.

Assyrian king's inscriptions mention the campaigns in Syria from 9th mid-century to 738 BC but they do not mention Arabs. Political and military contacts of the Assyrian kings with the Arab nomads from Syro-Arabian, Sinai and North Arabian deserts began when the Assyrian armies reached the the limits of the Fertlie Crescent in the days of Tiglath-Pileser III. Since then, references about nomads in the border regions of Palestine and the desert within the Fertile Crescent appear. Much information is related to the administration of the nomads. It is based on the information from Nimrud's letters, dated on 732-705 BC. This process continued ininterrupted from the days of Tiglath-Pileser until the end of Sargon's reign. According to Tiglath-Pileser's Annals, Zabibe, Queen of the Arabs, with other leaders from Damascus, Sammaria, Tyre, southern Anatolia, Syria and Phoenicia paid tribute to the Assyrian king on 738 BC as a stele found in Iran tells us. The Assyrian scribes called "Arabs" to the nomads until the days of Assurbanipal.

Tiglath-Pileser's relations with Samsi seem to be related to international trade.

Tiglath-Pileser's III and Sargon's I inscriptions⁴ mention Massa, Tema and Adbeel, children of Ishmael (Gen. 25.13-15), who lived in North Arabia, in the Syro-Arabian desert and North Sinai. The people of Ephah lived in the North of Arabia, caravanserai route to Palestine. The Sabaeans lived in South Arabia but it seemed to be a Sabaean trading colony in North Arabia. Sargon's inscriptions mention nomads living in southern Palestine and northern Sinai. Tiglath-Pileser's and Sargon's inscriptions include information about the control over the southwest border region of Palestine. Indibi'ilu probably had a supervision labour over the traffic through the important border area near Egypt. The Sheikh of the city of Labon took care of the deportees settled on the border of the city of Brook, in Egypt. The Sheikh was a nomad leader.

The new inhabitants were ruled imitating Sargon's administrative economic activities in southern Palestine, and probably were given status in the Assyrian governmental system. Under Tiglath-Pileser's and Sargon's reigns the control of the Egyptian border was given to local nomad chiefs, who were included into the Assyrian administrative system.

Nimrud's letters mention a similar policy on the border of the Syrian Desert during the last third of the 8th century. The letters described the Assyrian control system over south Syrian routes: from Homs to Damascus; from Homs and Damascus to Palmyra.

The Assyrian authorities permitted the nomads to feed their cattle within the settled areas. Badi'ilu probably was connected with the Assyrian supervisory system involving key pouns in the areas bordering the desert.

In resume, during Tiglath-Pileser's and Sargon's reigns, the Assyrian kings tried to integrate various groups of nomads under their control in the border regions of Palestine and Syria. It was important to assure the loyalty of these nomads against the penetration of other nomads, so the Assyrian army could be free to be employed on other wars.

Sargon's documentation mention the conquest of the people of Ephah, Thamud Marsimani and Idibi'ilu, Arabs who lived in the desert and did not pay tributes to the Assyrian king. These Arabs were located in the south of Teima and the area inhabited by the Sabaeans in North Arabia. This conquest needed a hard military campaign, which did not provide booty from these nomad tribes. The Assyrian sources exaggerate when they mention the conquest of the tribes from North Arabia and the deportation of the rest of the population to Palestine. This deportation was possible thanks to an arrangement between Sargon and the nomads from Midian, in relation with the Arab trade. People of these tribes were settled in Samaria because of economic interests, useful to both. Sargon's policy is well reflected on the products sent by the main leaders of the international trade: camels, horses, all kind of aromatic substances, silks, ivory, gold and gems from Egypt, Samsi, It'amara and North Arabian Sabaean colony. The tributes of these three rulers are possibly presents that Sargon received in determined circumstances.

⁴ I. Eph'al, *op. cit.*, 36-39.

Sennacherib (703-681 BC)⁵, Esarhaddon (681-627 BC)⁶ and Assurbanipal (668-631 BC)⁷ changed the previous policies about the Arab nomads. The most information tells us about the southwest border region of Mesopotamia. At the end of this period more information is given about border regions of Palestine and southern Syria.

Sennacherib fought against Babylon until its total destruction in 689 BC. He controlled the nomads on the west Babylonian border and the main routes that, through the northeast Syro-Arabian region, lead to southern Mesopotamia.

He was the first Assyrian king that subdued the nomads in this region. During the first campaign, 703 BC, against the Chaldeans he captured Iatie's, Queen of the Arabs, brother. This is the first mention on Assyrian documents about the Arabs as an ethnic group in Babylon. Among the 81 walled towns conquered some of them had Arab names, as Abiyata and Uait/Uaite. The walled towns that had Arab names show the Arab penetration in Babylonian territory in the second half of the 8th century BC, though these towns were not founded nor controlled by the Arabs.

Two letters from Sargon's period proof the existence of Arabs in Babylon in the 8th century BC. The second letter mentions Arabrazzias in the middle Euphrates region. The Arabs penetrated from the Arabian Desert into western Babylon through South Iraq routes. There are not mentions related to the Persian Gulf.

The Arabs cooperated with other groups in Babylon against Assyria in the first Sennacherib's campaign. The control over the nomads from the western Babylonian desert was incomplete. The campaign against the Arabs came immediately after the eighth campaign. The Arabian leaders were a Queen and a King of the Arabs. Adummatu was an Arab fortress and a religious center that was conquered, the same as the Arab Queen, with booty and gods' images that were sent to Assyria. Later, Esarhaddon gave them back to the Arabs.

Sennacherib took prisoners among the Arabs and had captive Tabua in Niniveh. She was crowned Queen of the Arabs by Esarhaddon and she went back to her land.

Herodotus (II.141) calls Sennacherib "king of the Arabs and the Assyrians".

The rule over the nomads from the western Babylonian region and the Assyrian control of the desert routes had a formidable impact on the economy and many political-military effects.

Spices, gems and gold that owned the nomad leaders who lived near this trading routes were transported on camels as booty and sent as presents and tributes to the Assyrian King. When Hazael, King of the Arabs, went to Niniveh to take back the sacred images taken by Sennacherib, Esarhadon asked him for tributes. There are not proofs about the payment of tributes before the Campaign of Dumah. Esarhadon asked for an extra tribute of 65 camels.

After the death of Hazael, he was inherited by his son Yauta' with Esarhadon's approval. Yauta' added to the tributes an extra quantity of 10 mines of gold, 1000

⁵ I. Eph'al, *op. cit.*, 40-43, 112-125.

⁶ I. Eph'al, *op. cit.*, 43-46, 125-142.

⁷ I. Eph'al, *op. cit.*, 46-52, 142-179.

chosen gems, 50 camels and a thousand bags of spices. Between 673 and 669 Yauta' felt free from Esarhadon's rule but the Assyrian army bet him and he fled. The sacred images were taken. These images were given back when Assurbanipal was crowned and Yauta' swore vassals' allegiance oath. The reason for this Yauta's defection may be related to the huge tributes asked by Esarhaddon and the campaigns of the Assyrian army in Egypt.

Esarhaddon's inscriptions tell us about the campaigns against Bazu's territory, located in the Arabian Desert. Esarhaddon killed eight local kings, many warriors and took back to Assyria a huge booty including men, goods and properties of the Bazu leaders.

During the Old babilonian period, the name of the land of Meluhha⁸ was primarily confined to the Persian Gulf region. Bazu was probably located in the northeast part of the Arabian Peninsula, on the road to Meluhha. These names are cited. Esarhadon's inscriptions do not include the reason for this expedition to such a far land. The reason had to be an economic one. No source about Esarhadon's campaigns against the land of Bazu says that these campaigns were against the Arabs. During the second campaign of Esarhaddon in Egypt (671 BC) the Assyrian sources mention the important role played by the Arabian camels. Cambyses also used arabian camels on his campaign in Egypt.

Assurbanipal's inscriptions mention many wars against the Arabs. The first war lasted from 650 to 647 BC; the second war, from 641 to 639 BC against the Arab tribes that rouse against Assyria. The Arabs paid huge tributes. They were a tribal confederation.

The information about Arabs in the Chaldean Annals⁹ of the Achaemenid period is more reduced than the information for the Assyrian Period. The sources only mention the events. They do not mention the Assyrian campaigns.

Since the sinking of the Assyrian rules in Syro-Palestine and the consolidation of the Babylonian rule at the end of the 7th century. During this period the situation changed much. The regions in northern Transjordan, southern and Central Syria, whose borders were defended by the Assyrians, were left defenseless. Secondly, Egypt began to gain a major role in western Asia, reaching the Euphrates.

These changes had an effect on the relations with the Arabs and the sedentary populations from this region, but the sources are not clear about it.

The sources show us that the Arabs did not penetrate within the borders of the settled areas at the beginning of the 6th century. They were quiet. These sources about the Arabs are of two kinds during the Chaldean Period, Geographical and Chronological. The first group are related to the eastern border of Syria and Transjordan during the early years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. In those years the penetration of the Arabs within the settled lands of Transjordan and southern Palestine was intense but the process remains unknown. The same happens with the number of Arabs that penetrated within this territory.

⁸ J. Hansman, "A 'Periplus' of Magan and Meluhha", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 36, 3, 1973, 554-587.

⁹ I. Eph'al, *op. cit.*, 170-171.

The second group of sources narrates Nabonidus¹⁰ sojourn in North Arabia, in the mid 6th century. Nebuchadnezzar¹¹ Chronicles say:

“In the sixth year of the month of Kislev the king of Akkad (i.e. Nebuchadnezzar) mustered his army and marched to he Hatti-land. From the Hatti-land he sent out his companies, and scouring the desert, they look much plunder from the Arabs (iu/kur *A-ra-bi*), their possessions, animal and gods. In the month of Adar the king returned to his own land”.

These incursions against the Arabs obey to the general situation in the western part of the Babylonian Empire during 4th to 7th years of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. On the 4th year of his reign he failed to invade Egypt and suffered huge losses. The next year he remained quiet but preparing the next campaign assembling horses and chariots. This weakness was developed by Jehoiakim, king of Judah, to revolt on 600 BC against Nebuchadnezzar, who used chaldean tribes: Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites. That was the situation at the moment of Nebuchadnezzar attack against the Arabs. This king leads the raid in the desert; this action shows us the importance of this military operation to him. He looted the Arabs’ possessions and took animals and goods. This campaign is mentioned by Jeremiah, the Hebrew Prophet (48.28-33).

The prophet describes the Arabs: shaved heads; they lived isolated in tents; they had camels and cattles. The oracle tells us about the Arab tribes attacked by Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian raids took place in the northern areas of the Hatti-land, including Syro-Palestine: Carchemish, Judah and Ashkelon; the borders of the southern and Central Asia Provinces, reorganized by the Babylonian kings.

Nebuchadnezzar worked in two fronts: the Syrian Desert, leading small military groups, and Judah. The raids against the Arabs had a great impact all through the Near East, as Jeremiah’s oracle reflects. Other event related to these raids against the Arabs is included on the “Book of Judith” (2.23) [4th century BC.]. This text says that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the children of Ishmael, who were against the wilderness in the South of the land of the Chellians. He conquered the border of Cilicia and slew all that fought against him, came into the borders of Japheth which were towards the South. The narration of the “Book of Judith” (1-3) and Babylonian Chronicles referred to the campaigns during Nebuchadnezzar reign are very similar. Without any doubt the “Book of Judith” is based on the Babylonian Chronicles. The only difference is that the “Book of Judith” joins all the campaigns in only one. The geographical details are not from the Nebuchadnezzar period but from the Achaemenid period. The sources of the “Book of Judith” are the same as the sources of Xenophon’s *Anabasis* (1.5) and they do not proof the penetration of the arabs in the Euphrates region on the 6th century. The nomads Hazur and Qedar, attacked by Nebuchadnezzar are called “Eastern people, shaved heads” by Jeremiah

¹⁰ I. Eph’al, *op. cit.*, 179-191. S.F. Al-Said, *Nabonid’s Campaign against North-Wesl Arabia*, Ryadh, 2000.

¹¹ I. Eph’al, *op. cit.*, 171-179.

(49.28-3). This vinculation Hazur-Arabs only appears on this oracle. The nomads live in tents, they are quiet, confident, they live isolated and they do not have doors nor locks. The prophet characterizes the Arabs perfectly.

The policy of Nebuchadnezzar changes between the 11st and the 23rd years of his reign (594-582 BC) because of the rise of Egypt and perhaps the military activity of Psammeticus II in Palestine and the absence of Babylonian armies in Palestine. Three kingdoms from this region, with an antibabylonian tendency, were united in the Jerusalem's conference: Edom, Moab and Ammon, besides Tyre and Sidon (Jer. 27). These three kingdoms supported Chaldeans against Judah.

During 558 BC revolt only Ammon participated. The king of Ammon sheltered to the people of Judah. It is unknown why Nebuchadnezzar did not conquer Ammon after conquering Judah. Maybe it is related to the failed siege of Tyre by this Babylonian king (Ezek. 29.17-18). He fought against the Moabites and Ammonites and after beating them he headed for Egypt.

In 582 BC the kingdoms of Moab and Ammon disappeared. In the mid 6th century, in the Transjordan region the population decreased and was forced to exile.

This situation in Palestine provided the Arab penetration within the kingdom of Ammon, as Ezekiel's oracle reflects (25.1-5).

This oracle was redacted after the fall of Jerusalem. Yahveh accuses Ammon not to help Judah when this kingdom was invaded. That is why Yahveh lets the Arabs to penetrate within Ammon's territory where they will settle. During the Achaemenid period the Arabs were firmly settled in the territories of the former Transjordanian kingdoms.

Nabonidus (556-539 BC) left his country. He changed Babylon for Teima, leaving the administration of the kingdom to his son Belshazzar. The sources are not clear about the reasons of his behaviour.

The historians dispose of the Babylonian Historical Sources and the North Arabian inscriptions, but they are difficult to date.

Nabonidus fought against Teima and killed his king. The cattles were slaughtered. Nabonidus rebuilt the town, where he lived for ten years. He went to North Arabia: Dedan, Fadak, Khaybar, Yadi and Yathrib. These were important oasis near Teima, within a 370 km. area. These journeys had probably a military character to control the three main routes of Medina: two routes to the North, Teima and Dedan. The other to Ha'il, towards the eastern desert of Nafud. Nabonidus defeated the king of Dedan.

Another inscription mentions the king of the Arabs, besides the kings of Egypt and Media, hostile to the conquest of the Arabs. Probably this inscription joins news about the attacks of the Arabs to the oasis controlled by Nabonidus, where they were defeated.

The inscriptions of the Teima Oasis have a special value related to the Arabs. They are dated in the 6th century and are the oldest in the region. These inscriptions mention the participation of various people in these wars, including some Arab groups. Teima, an important trading knot, needed quietness in the region. Nabonidus went to Teima in the third year of his reign. The Nabonidus Chronicle mention

a campaign in the Ammamanu mountains. Another fragment tells us about military activities. There is not enough information to reconstruct Nabonidu's route to Teima. It seems logical that this route was not through Syro-Arabian desert but through the Fertile Crescent.

Various documents prove the presence of Arabs in Babylon in the 6th century BC. It is impossible to know if this presence is the result of the nomad penetrations in Babylon during the 8th century BC or it is caused by the settlement of exiled populations from different regions. There are people from Teima before Nabonidus' arrival. Maybe it is related to the commerce in North Arabia.

A document proves that Babylonian and Arabs controlled the caravans' traffic from Babylon to Teima. Two documents show that Babylon had a safe control to assure regular traffic to Teima along the desert routes, trading routes from Teima to Uruk and from Teima to Babylon. The routes encircling the Nafud desert from East to West.

From Nebuchadnezzar to Nemiah there was a huge penetration of Arabs in the Transjordan and southern Palestine. They reached Egypt and the Middle Euphrates but this process is not well known in details.

The sources of the Achaemenid period are the Memories of Nehemiah, who was in Jerusalem in 445 BC, Herodotus' *History*, that visited Egypt and Persia in the mid 5th century BC, and Xenophon's *Anabasis*, who arrived to Mesopotamia in 400 BC.

These sources call "Arabs" to the nomads settled between Egypt and the Euphrates. The Arabs were not a unified political and administrative entity during the Achaemenid period. "Arabia" in the times of Darius I and Xerxes is related to a certain population controlled by Persia not to a territory.

After Nabonidus' defeat in 539 BC, Cyrus controlled North Arabia and the desert routes to Mesopotamia and Transjordan. A text from Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* VII.IV.16; V.13) says that Cyrus conquered Phrygia, Cappadocia and the Arabs, that helped to conquer Babylon but this description is more literature than history.

In the narration of Cyrus' campaign against his brother Artaxerxes II, the name "Arabia" is related to the Middle Euphrates region (*Anabasis* I.5). The Arabs mentioned in *Cyropaedia* VII.IV.16 besides Phrygia and Cappadocia on the way from Sardis to Babylon are the same as in *Anabasis* I.5. After the victory over Nabonidus, Cyrus got the control over the Arabs in the western part of the Babylonian Empire. The inscription "Qabur al Jundi" is the proof of the Persian rule in North Arabia. At the beginning of the Hellenistic Period, neither Transjordan nor North Arabia was part of Alexander's Empire or of his inheritors.

The end of the Persian rule over these regions caused the end of the Persian control of the trading routes in the Fertile Crescent. This happened after the death of Darius II, 404 BC when Egypt provided an anti-persian policy in Cyprus.

PHOENICIA AND PALESTINE. THE ARABS IN HERODOTUS

Herodotus (III.97.1-2) tells us that the Ethiopians on the Egyptian borders, the Colchians, Caucasus and the Arabs did not pay tributes. They contributed with

presents at regular intervals. The presents from the Arabs were 1000 talents of incense per year. At Darius I times, the Arabs were not subjects. These Arabs mentioned by Herodotus lived in southern Palestine and northern Sinai. It is not clear if the other arabs gave presents too or they paid tributes. They had a friendship *status* because of their help during Cambyses campaigns in Egypt (Herodotus III.4-5.7.9.68.91.97).

The Arab gift of 1000 talents does not indicate a favored *status*. It could be interpreted as a category of regular tax.

Herodotus (III.5) includes other interesting informations, such as some *emporía* on the sea coast, southern Gaza, belonging to the king of the Arabs. These *emporía* were related to Arabian trade and financial purposes. The territory of the king of the Arabs included the routes ending on the Mediterranean coasts of Petra and, perhaps, Elath. There are severe doubts about the Arabian king's control of the caravans in the Middle Euphrates region or the routes in Syria.

Prophet Nehemiah (2.19; 6.1-2.6) mentions three enemies when Jerusalem's wall was constructed. One of them was Cejeshem the Arab, that had to be an important ruler named by the Persian authorities, because Sanballat the Heronite was Governor in Samaria and Tobiah the Ammonite was a high rank person in Transjordan. The three of them wrote a letter to Nehemiah accusing him of preparing a rebellion. It has been proposed that the hostile relations between Cejeshem and Nehemiah had economic and administrative grounds related to Arabian trading activity in southern Judah, Cejeshem's sphere of control.

Two inscriptions of the Achaemenid period seem to mention Cejeshem the Arab. One comes from Dedam and is dated around the mid 5th century BC¹².

One silver bowl from Tell-el-Maskhuteh mentions Qainu, Cejeshem's son, king of Qedar. It is dated in the second half of the 5th century BC. He would be the leader of the Qedar tribe league but this identification is not sure.

THE PERSIAN GULF

The Greeks did not know the Persian Gulf until Alexander's Era. Herodotus, even though he visited Babylon and mentions often Arabia and the Arabs does not mention the Persian Gulf.

Arrian, in the *Anabasis* or *History of Alexander* (VII.XIX), says that Alexander's project was to colonize the coast of the Persian Gulf and the islands nearby, because it was a profitable region similarly to Phoenicia. Alexander understood the wealthy of the Persian Gulf. While being in Babylon, Alexander, two fleets arrived there. One was led by Nearchus¹³ and arrived from the Persian Gulf sailing up the Euphrates. The other fleet arrived from Phoenicia. The ships arrived to the

¹² For the Sasanian Persians (224-651 CE): T. Daryaei, "The Persian Gulf Trade in Late Antiquity", *Journal of World History*, 14, 1, 2003, 1-15.

¹³ J.W. Sedlar, *India and the Greek World*, New Jersey 1980, 87; M. Albadalejo, *La India en la literatura griega. Un estudio etnográfico*, Alcalá de Henares 2005, 111-116.

Euphrates in pieces and they were assembled there. From there they sailed to Babylon. The crew of this fleet were fishermen from the coast of Phoenicia. Alexander sent emissaries to Phoenicia and Syria to employ sailors. Arrian tells us that Alexander boated these fleets to fight the Arabs from the coast, probably the Persian Gulf, because they did not send presents or honoured him.

In Arrian's words the real intention was Alexander's hunger of controlling the whole world. Two gods of the arabs are mentioned, Uranus and Dyonisius, identified by the greek historian. Alexander wanted to be revered as a third god. After controlling Arabia Alexander would let the Arabs to follow their traditional uses and customs. Alexander desired the conquest of Arabia because he thought it was a land rich in cassia, myrrh and incense. Its coasts were bigger than the Indian ones and there were many islands and ports that could receive fleets and many towns could be funded. Alexander knew that at the Euphrates' mouth there were two islands. The smallest one was covered by forests. There was a shrine devoted to Artemis. There were also many wild goats that were sacrificed to Artemis. Alexander called Ikaras to this island. The second island was called Tylos (Bahrein) and produced many fruits.

This information about the Persian Gulf was given to Alexander by Archias, who had examined the coasts towards Arabia. Archias arrived to Tylos and he did not dare to go further. Androthenes sailed through the most part of Arabia. His information was used by Teophrastus (*History of plants*), including many details about the trip and geographical descriptions.

Androthenes of Thasos sailed along the coasts of Gerrahei, southern Kuwait. There, Gerra and Cadar were located nearby the sea, followed by Rhegnia and Macae. Alexander also sent Hiero of Solos to surround Arabia until arriving to the coast.

These journeys had a great tradition among the Greeks. Just remember Euthymenes Peryplus through the nearest Atlantic Ocean (7th century BC) and the Pseudo Scylax through the North Africa coast (later than 360 BC but previous to Alexander's Era). A Phoenician Peryplus was ordered by Necho II (610-595 BC) to sail around Africa, and Carthaginians Hanno and Himilco visited the Atlantic coasts. This encounter is mentioned by Curtius Rufus (IX.20.25), Plutarch (*Alex.* 67), Diodorus (XVII.106) and Arrian (*Anab.* VI.28).

Alexander crossed Carmania followed by his companions playing flutes and the soldiers dancing imitating Dyonisius when he came back from India. The population gave them food. Nearchus did not believe in that journey. Alexander offered sacrifices to Carmania's gods for his victories in India, and in then name of the army for crossing Gedrosia.

The encounter was in Hamozeia (Hormuz) and Carmania (Arr. *Indika* 33-36). Alexander ordered the fleet to arrive to Susa and the Tigris. Then he entered the Persian Gulf within the fleet.

Alexander chose the best sailors from Phoenicia, Cyprus and Egypt to join the fleet.

Nearchus informed Alexander about his journey. The coast had dangerous cliffs so the fleet had to anchor far from the beach. Carmania was a region with many fruit

trees and plentiful water. Arrian's description, after Nearchus journey, is a reckoning of ports where the fleet arrived. They arrived to Batis, where there were many cultivated trees —except olive tree—, vines and wheat. Later they saw a huge cape that belonged to Arabia, called Maceta, from where Assyrians imported women and spices. This information is very important to prove that Assyrians obtained products from the Persian Gulf.

At the beginning of the 18th century BC, when Shamsi Adad I (1813-1781 BC) the texts of Mari tell us about the contacts between Shamsi Adad's reign and Amal Dilmun in the west coast of the Persian Gulf.

From this on the History of the Persian Gulf begins. Arrian says that Alexander wanted to know plants, ports, islands, towns; to be informed of the fertile regions and the deserts. The fleet arrived to Neoptana, in the region of Harmocia, fertile land but without olive trees. Here they found a Greek man that announced thye fleet that Alexander was near. Nearchus took the ships to the land and checked some of them. The fleet arrived then to Oracta Island, that produced wheat, vines and palm trees. They visited an island devoted to Poseidon and another deserted island called Pylora. They arrived to Dodona, plentiful of fishing. The fleet sailed near the coast by night.

The fleet arrived then to Cape Tania and a deserted island called Catea, devoted to Hermes and Aphrodite. These deities were offered sheeps and wild goats yearly. From this point, Persia began. Their inhabitants lived as the Persians. The fleet arrived to Cecandrus Island and another island in which pearl fishing took place. The fleet stopped nearby Ochus mount, where there was a good port. The fleet arrived later to Apostana, where it had anchored many boats. It arrived to a gulf where many trees grew, as in Greece. He visited an inhabited zone called Gogana. Then they anchored at the mouth of two brooks, Areon and Sitacus.

The Persian coast is dangerous. Alexander sent the fleet to provision and to remain in Persian for 21 days, drawing the ships to be repaired on the ground. Then they arrived to the city of Hieratis. They passed by the region of Mesambria, where grew many trees of all species. They anchored at Taoce, where the Persians had stablished a residence. This information is important because it shows us the interest that the Persian Gulf had to Persia. The fleet visited other places, where they anchored.

Persia was divided in three regions: the nearest part to the sea was infertile and sandy. To the North there was a region of moderate climate, with meadows, vines and fruit trees, except the olive tree. This region had gardens and lakes, where all kind of aquatic birds lived. It was covered of forests and there were many horses. The most northern region was covered with snow.

The Greek arrived to the mouth of the Euphrates. Here there were merchants who traded with incense and perfumes of Arabia with Babylonian destinations. This trade would take place through the waters of the future Kuwait. From here, the army set out to the encounter with Alexander.

The importance of Nearchus Peryplus is huge. It gives us information about the wealth of the Persian Gulf and its products, that interested Alexander, Achaemenid, Chaldaean and Assyrian kings.

The foundation of a new “Alexandria” at the mouth of the Euphrates shows the importance that the Persian Gulf had on Alexander’s plans because of commercial reasons and for being the way to India. Alexander funded many “Alexandrias” in important geographical places that became focal points for hellenization: Alexandria in Egypt, Alexandria the Furthest, Alexandria in the Caucasus, Alexandria Kandahar, Alexandria Herat, Alexandria in India, etc. Under his reign may have taken place the Erythrean Sea Treaty, including the Indic Ocean and the Persian Gulf.

It is thought that Ptolemy II did a tour from the Arabian Gulf to the Persian Gulf, but it is not sure.

This importance is confirmed by the Hellenistic pottery of Failaka, Strabo (XVI.3.1-2), Pliny (VI.147) and Athanasius collect information about its fauna, flora, geography and commercial importance of the Persian Gulf.

Strabo write:

“1 Above Judaea and Coelê-Syria, as far as Babylonia and the river-country of the Euphrates towards the south, lies the whole of Arabia, with the exception of the Scenitae in Mesopotamia. Now I have already spoken of Mesopotamia and the tribes that occupy it; but as for the parts on the far side of the Euphrates, those near its outlets are occupied by Babylonians and the tribe of the Chaldaeans, of whom I have already spoken; and of those parts that follow after Mesopotamia as far as Coelê-Syria, the part that lies near the river, as well as Mesopotamia, is occupied by Arabian Scenitae, who are divided off into small sovereignties and live in tracts that are barren for want of water. These people till the land either little or none, but they keep herds of all kinds, particularly of camels. Above these people lies an extensive desert; but the parts lying still farther south than their country are held by the people who inhabit Arabia Felix, as it is called. The northern side of Arabia Felix is formed by the above-mentioned desert, the eastern by the Persian Gulf, the western by the Arabian Gulf, and the southern by the great sea that lies outside both gulfs, which as a whole is called Erythra

2 Now the Persian Gulf is also called the Persian Sea; and Eratosthenes describes it as follows: its mouth, he says, is so narrow that from Harmosi, the promontory of Carmania, one can see the promontory at Macae in Arabia; and from its mouth the coast on the right, being circular, inclines at first, from Carmania, slightly towards the east, and then towards the north, and, after this, towards the west as far as Teredon and the outlet of the Euphrates; and it comprises the coast of the Carmanians and in part that of the Persians and Susians and Babylonians, a distance of about ten thousand stadia. I have already spoken of these peoples. And thence next to its mouth it extends another ten thousand stadia, as stated, Eratosthenes says, by Androstenes the Thasian, who made the voyage, not only with Nearchus but also on his own account; so that it is clear from this that the Persian sea is but little short of the Euxine in size; and Eratosthenes says that Androstenes, who sailed round the gulf with a fleet, states that in making the coasting voyage, with the continent on the right, one sees next after Teredon the island Icarus and a temple sacred to Apollo in it and an oracle of Tauroopolus.

3 After sailing along the coast of Arabia for a distance of two thousand four hundred stadia, one comes to Gerrha, a city situated on a deep gulf; it is inhabited by Chaldaeans, exiles from Babylon; the soil contains salt and the people live in houses

made of salt; and since flakes of salt continually scale off, owing to the scorching heat of the rays of the sun, and fall away, the people frequently sprinkle the houses with water and thus keep the walls firm. The city is two hundred stadia distant from the sea; and the Gerrhaeans traffic by land, for the most part, in the Arabian merchandise and aromatics, though Aristobulus says, on the contrary, that the Gerrhaeans import most of their cargoes on rafts to Babylonia, and thence sail up the Euphrates with them, and then convey them by land to all parts of the country.

4 On sailing farther, one comes to other islands, I mean Tyre and Aradus, which have temples like those of the Phoenicians. It is asserted, at least by the inhabitants of the islands, that the islands and cities of the Phoenicians which bear the same name are their own colonies. These islands are distant a ten days' sail from Teredon and a one day's sail from the promontory near the mouth of the gulf at Macae.

5 Both Nearchus and Orthagoras state that the island Ogyris lies in the high sea at a distance of two thousand stadia from Carmania, and that on it is to be seen the grave of Erythras, a large mound planted with wild palm trees; and that Erythras reigned as king over that region and left the sea named after himself. Nearchus says that these things were pointed out to them by Mithropastes, the son of Aristes, which latter was satrap of Phrygia; and that the former was banished by Dareius, took up his residence in the island, joined them when they landed in the Persian Gulf, and sought through them to be restored to his homeland.

6 Along the whole of the coast of the Red Sea, down in the deep, grow trees like the laurel and the olive, which at the ebb tides are wholly visible above the water but at the full tides are sometimes wholly covered; and while this is the case, the land that lies above the sea has no trees, and therefore the peculiarity is all the greater. Such are the statements of Eratosthenes concerning the Persian Sea, which, as I was saying, forms the eastern side of Arabia Felix.

7 Nearchus says that they were met by Mithropastes, in company with Mazenes; that Mazenes was ruler of an island in the Persian Gulf; that the island was called Oaracta; that Mithropastes took refuge, and obtained hospitality, in this island upon his departure from Ogyris; that, furthermore, Mithropastes had a conference with Mazenes for the purpose of being recommended by him to the Macedonians in the fleet; and that Mazenes became guide in their voyage. Nearchus goes on to say that there is an island at the beginning of the Persian Gulf where quantities of valuable pearls are to be fortified; and that in other islands there are pebbles of transparent and brilliant stones; and that in the islands off the mouth of the Euphrates there are trees which smell like frankincense, and that juice flows from their roots when they are broken in pieces. And he speaks of the large size of the crabs and sea-urchins, which is a common thing in the whole of the exterior sea; for, he adds, some are larger than hats and others as large as a vessel holding two cotylae; and he says that he saw a whale stranded on the beach that was fifty cubits in length".

The Roman Emperors were not interested in the Persian Gulf. They were interested in the Arabian Gulf, although Rome continued very interested in the trade of some goods that Arabia produced and that the Roman Empire consumed in great amounts, but the route was the Arabian Gulf until Alexandria, and the caravaner route until the Nabatean Arabia, Damascus and Antioch. August was interested in Nubia. Nero received great amounts of incense that he made burn in Poppea's funeral ceremonies in 65 AC (Plin. XII, 83).

It does not seem that Rome had interest in the Persian Gulf. Trajan, conquering the Nabatean Arabia, controlled directly the commercial route. Late sources (Eutr. VIII.3.2; Euseb. *Chron.* VII, 1) indicate that Trajan thought about constructing a fleet in the Persian Gulf to trade with India¹⁴. The policy followed by the Antonine Emperors is badly known in Nubia, just as the one of the Severan dynasty. In the 3rd century AC the interest on the Arabian Gulf decreased. It is little known Dioclecian's policy in the Arabian Gulf. Lacked data still remain about the activities in the Persian Gulf. Although the numerous roman coins of Theodosius, Arcadius and Honorius found in Ceylon indicate direct relations between the Roman Empire and this land, the Persian Gulf had no role in this trade.

Without a doubt, the Persian Gulf maintained for many centuries its commercial importance to carry products from Arabia towards inner Asia.

¹⁴ J.W. Sedlar, *op. cit.*, 179. In 3rd century AD Maishan, situated in Southern Babylon around the Tigris.Euphrates mouths, had trading contacts with the Persian Gulf ports (J.W. Sedlar, *op. cit.*, 209-210). Many travelled by ship, probably the usual route from the Persian Gulf to the Western Indus valley (J.W. Sedlar, *op. cit.*, 211).