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Byzantium and the Pre-Islamic Arabs:

a selection of late antique and Byzantine
historical and literary sources

By

Maria Vaiou

The following sources refer to a variety of historical events on Arab–Byzantine relations, such as the Arab federate queen Mavia’s (d. 425) victory over the Goths and her defense of the capital after the disaster of Adrianople in 378, the existence of Arabs as distinguished officers in the Roman army like the so-called Victor in the fourth century, the case of Aspebetos, a commander in the service of Persia, who fled to the empire (ca. 420), the participation of Arab *foederati* (soldiers fighting the wars of Byzantium) in the first Persian war (421–2), the involvement of the Arabs in the second Persian war (440–2), the negotiations in Egypt with the Blemmyes and Noubades in 452/3, the negotiations between the Arabs near Damascus with the *magister militum per Orientem* (ca.452), the participation of Arab troops in the emperor Leo I’s (457–74) expedition against the Vandals in 468, the occupation of the island of Iotabe, at the entrance of the Gulf of ‘Aqaba and an important station on the Red Sea route, by an Arab Amorkesos, who had rebelled against the Persians, in 473 and his expulsion of Roman tax collectors, Amorkesos’ invitation to Constantinople by the emperor Leo I, who wished to be an ally of the empire, their exchanges of gifts, the granting to Amorkesos of the position of phylarch and the honour of patrikios, the control of the island of Iotabe by the Ghassanid Jabala, in the reign of the emperor Anastasius in 491–518, the diplomatic gift sent to the emperor Anastasius, in 496 by the ‘king of India’ that is Axum/Ethiopia via Gaza, the empire’s allies of the Arabs of Kinda and the Ghassan and the conclusion of a treaty with the emperor Anastasius in 502, the Arab raids during the reign of the emperor Anastasius, the Lakhmid ruler al-Mundhir III’s (Alamoundaras) (d. 554) raids as the reason for the emperor Justinian’s (527–65) support for the Ghassanids in 527, the appointment of Abū Karib, the brother of al-‘arith (al-‘arith, son of Jabala=Arethas), by Justinian as the phylarch of Palestina Tertia (ca. 528), the conferment of the *basileia* on the Ghassanid Arethas (d. 569) in 529 when Arethas became supreme phylarch (tribal leader) and king over all the Saracen *foederati* in Oriens, the mission of Julianus by the emperor Justinian (d. 565) to the Ethiopians and the ‘imyāriyān kingdom around 530 aiming at concluding an alliance against Persia, the Ghassanid participation in the battle of Callinicum in 531 A.D., the Ghassanid king Arethas’ participation in Byzantine wars, the Ghassanid leading role in the second Persian war of Justinian’s reign, from 540 to 545, the death of a son of Arethas in a Ghassanid-Lakhmid war in 545–50 and his sacrifice to Aphrodite by the Lakhmid al-Mundhir III, the offering of the place of Phoinikon/Tabuk, an important station on the spice route in terms of the Ghassanid involvement in the long-distance trade in Palaestina Tertia, by the Ghassanids to the empire in the sixth century, the peace treaty of 561 AD signed between the empire and Persia, in which the Arabs are mentioned specifically i.e. the Lakhmids (Persian allies) and the Ghassanids, a Byzantine encounter with Arabian gold in

the emperor Justinian's reign referring to the dux of Palestine Aratius' capture of a fortress of the Saracens of northern Hijaz, information on contacts with North African Berbers in the period of the emperor Justinian, or provide transliteration on proper names shedding light on tribal identities, contain terms in treaties or other accounts designating the empire's Arab allies, or the Arabs as Skenites, Saracens, Ishmaelites etc.. In addition the sources shed light on broad themes, such as the history of pre-Islamic Arabia in the context of late antique historiography, Arab-Byzantine relations in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries, the empire's relationship with the *foederati*, the place and function of Arab *foederati* in the Byzantine army and their role in the defense of the Oriens and *Limes Orientalis* (eastern border of the empire), the presence of the Arabs in Palaestina Prima and Tertia, the history of the Arab allies of the empire in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries, the empire's wars with Persia, the political value of Persian Arabs, such as al-Mundhir, in the sixth-century competition between the empire and Persia, the empire's conclusion of peace treaties with the Persians, the history of the Persian Arabs and their relations with their overlords, the Ghassanids' participation in the empire's wars, the history of the patriciate, the integration of the *foederati* in the Byzantine system in the sixth century as is attested in their bestowal of high ranks, the relations between the empire and the ṣimyarites, the empire's aim to establish a secure front in the Arabian peninsula in the fifth century, the imperial interest in the trade routes in the Red Sea or western Arabia, the Ghassanid role in the economic history of Byzantium in the Oriens, the relations between the Kinda, Persia and the Lakhmids, the history of Byzantine-Ma'addite relations, the existence of the Arab military units in the Diocese of Aegyptus, and the provinces of Oriens, the military performance of the *foederati*, the military organization of the *Limes Orientalis*, the imperial administrative reforms that affected the phylarchal and federate system in Arabia, Palestine and Phoenicia Libanensis, the historians' concept of the Arabs and Arab history, Berber ethnography, the use of terms like Saracens by Roman and Byzantine historians, Arab defectors to the empire or Persia, the role of ecclesiastical diplomacy in the empire, the existence of Arabs in the provincial Arabia and Arabia Felix, south Arabia and the Byzantine borderland, the ethnography of the Arab nomads, the designation of the Arabs as barbarians in the frame of classicizing historiography, famous places in Oriens for wines, the frontier provinces and military administration with reference to the Arab *foederati* in the Oriens.

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