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Sous la direction de Pierre-Louis GATIER
Bruno HELLY - Jean-Paul REY-COQUAIS

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THE THREE ARABIAS IN PTOLEMY'S GEOGRAPHY

G.W. BOWERSOCK *

The geographical register composed by Ptolemy of Alexandria in the middle of the second century A.D. includes three separate chapters (V. 17, 19 ; VI. 7) devoted to regions called Arabia. These regions, taken as a whole, correspond more or less to Arabian territory as it appears in the other sources for the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine ages. In Ptolemy as elsewhere the Egyptian nome (νομός) of Arabia, lying southwest of Pelusium, lies outside the large tracts that are customarily assigned to Arabia as a comprehensive geographical entity. But Ptolemy differs conspicuously from nearly all other writers who touch on this entity in his division of the territory into three parts -- *Petraea*, ἔρημος (*deserta*), and εὐδαίμων (*felix*). The convention had been, and would continue to be, a division into two, namely *deserta* and *felix*, whereby the former indicated the whole sweep of land east of Pelusium as far as Mesopotamia and the latter the Arabian peninsula. Often the simple term *Arabia* designated the northern and western part as distinct from εὐδαίμων. Stephanus of Byzantium preserves the traditional division in his entry Ἀραβία, ἡ χώρα : δύο δ' εἰσὶ, ἡ μὲν ἀρωματοφόρος μεταξὺ Περσικῆς καὶ Ἀραβικῆς θαλάσσης, ἡ δὲ μᾶλλον δυτικῆ συνάπτουσα πρὸς μὲν τὴν δύσιν Αἰγύπτῳ πρὸς ἄρκτον δὲ Συρίᾳ.

An examination of prevalent geographical partitioning of the ancient Arabian territory cannot obviously establish any fundamental truths of geography. What is at issue here is rather the perceptions of the ancients themselves and the reasons for their perceptions, especially as they changed. Social, economic and political considerations can all determine patterns of identifying tracts of land ; and once traditional identifications have been accepted, we must presume that some noticeable event or events were responsible for deviations when they occurred. The deviations in Ptolemy's treatment of Arabia are remarkable not only for the context of the time at which he was writing but for the failure of those deviations to take hold.

* *Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, U.S.A.*

Nearly a century ago in one of the first volumes of Pauly's *Real-Encyclopädie* the article on Arabia by D.H. Müller recognized Ptolemy's innovative disposition of the land. « Das Land Arabien », he wrote (II. 1, col. 345), « teilen die Alten in das "wüste" Arabien... und in das "glückliche" Arabien ». He then went on to observe correctly, « Durch Ptolemaios wurde die Einteilung in A. *felix*, A. *Petraea*, und A. *deserta* in die Geographie eingeführt ». He did not, however, notice that this new division appears to have had almost no impact upon subsequent geographical writing. And that, no less than the tripartite division itself, demands an explanation, both in terms of Ptolemy and of those who followed him.

A brief comment on the matter provided by Brünnow and Domaszewski in the third volume of *Die Provincia Arabia* is undermined by their indefensible supposition that Ptolemy provides the first coherent representation of the various provinces of the Roman Empire: « Die erste zusammenhängende Darstellung der Provinzen gibt Claudius Ptolemaeus », (p. 250). Those two scholars imagined therefore that, since Petraea corresponds to the territory of the former Nabataean kingdom, Ptolemy had crudely taken over the provincial disposition of his predecessor Marinus of Tyre. On this interpretation Ptolemy's allusion to the legion at Bostra and to the name Aelia Capitolina for Jerusalem had to be considered interpolations by Ptolemy himself or someone else. Brünnow and Domaszewski did not mention and accordingly did not explain the absence of any reference to Nabataeans or to Nabataea in a chapter that comprehends the Nabataean kingdom. This clearly will not do.

First let us review the treatment of Arabia in the century or so preceding Ptolemy in order to establish the tradition that both he and Marinus inherited. Strabo in Book 16 (C767), explicitly citing the testimony of Eratosthenes *περὶ τῆς Ἀραβίας*, describes the northerly and desert region (*περὶ τῆς προσαρκτίου καὶ ἐρήμης*) as bounded by Arabia *felix*, Coele Syria, Judaea, and the northern corner of the Arabian Gulf, and he notes that the Nabataeans are included within this region. South of it, he declares, is Arabia *felix*: ὑπὲρ δὲ τούτων ἡ εὐδαίμων ἐστίν. A few generations later Josephus, although no geographer, is manifestly operating with the same assumptions. He alludes frequently to Arabia *tout court*, by which he means *deserta* in the broad sense as including Nabataea. When he has occasion to mention the peninsula it is distinguished as Ἀραβία ἢ εὐδαίμων (*AJ* I. 239; *BJ* II.385). He also knows that the Nabataean land inside Arabia could be called Ναβατηνὴ (*AJ* I. 221). Josephus' contemporary, the elder Pliny, divides Arabia into the same two parts: *Ultra Pelusiacum Arabia est, ad Rubrum Mare pertinens et odiferam illam ac divitem et beatae cognomine inclutam* (*NH* V.12, 65). Among the various inhabitants of the more northerly part Pliny names the *Nabataei*. It is also worth recording here that the Peutinger Table shows *deserta* as beginning east of Pelusium. Although the archetype of the Vienna parchment must have been a document of late antiquity, the ultimate archetype may well have been a map of several centuries before.

Another first-century source, unfortunately very little studied for its rich harvest of geographical references, is the *De Materia Medica* of the Neronian physician and herbalist,

Pedanius Dioscurides of Anazarbus. As might be expected in treating exotic plants and herbs, Dioscurides has many occasions to mention the products of Arabia. Obviously he has no specialized interest in geography, but he does know what he is talking about. His names for regions can only reflect the current usage of his time. It is evident that he is not thinking in terms of Roman provinces, whose boundaries did not always coincide with local regions of similar name, and hence he can speak, for example, of Pisidia in Pamphylia (III.102.3). For Arabia he, like his contemporaries, knows of two great territories, one εὐδαίμων (named as such when it is meant, as in II.82.5) and the other simply Ἀραβία. He can also be more precise, when he needs to be, about more restricted areas within these large parts : he mentions Ἀραβία ἢ λιβανωτοφόρος (I.68.1), which we learn from Strabo was a designation for a district of *felix* (C782), and he alludes to ἡ Ναβαταία καλουμένη as a district of northerly Arabia (I.17.1). Twice he refers to Nabataea by naming Petra : Ἀραβία ἢ ἐν Πέτρᾳ (I.17.1) and ἡ ἐν τῇ κατὰ Ἰουδαίαν Πέτρᾳ (III.157.1). Similarly when he wishes to specify the part of Arabia east of Pelusium, he can write ἐν τῇ κατ' Αἴγυπτον Ἀραβίᾳ (II.182.1). His consistent use of κατὰ (as in κατὰ Ἰουδαίαν) makes it plain that this is not an allusion to the nome of Arabia.

What we find in Ptolemy's *Geography* is surprisingly different. The appearance of an Ἀραβία Πετραία as distinct from ἔρημος is new, and while this region does indeed resemble the outline of the old Nabataean kingdom there is not a single reference to Ναβαταῖοι, Ναβατηνὴ, or Ναβαταία. Ptolemy's three Arabias are all the more remarkable because almost no one seems to have adopted his usage. As far as I am aware, it is perpetuated in geographical literature only in a few later writers who are transparently copying Ptolemy at length. These are the author of an anonymous treatise associated with Agathemerus (*GGM* II. p. 499) and Marcianus of Heraclea in his *Periplus* (I.9 and 17a). Marcianus' debt to Ptolemy has been elaborately documented lately by Polaschek in the tenth *Supplementband* of Pauly (cols. 772 - 89).

By contrast Stephanus, as we have seen, preserved the two Arabias ; and more importantly his sources for Arabian geography, Glaukos, Uranius, and Ulpianus, appear to have done the same. Too little of Ulpianus survives to warrant any certainty, but with Glaukos and Uranius, both of whom wrote (as we shall see) after the first century A.D., the situation is quite different. In the thirteen extant fragments of Glaukos it is easy to observe his use of Ἀραβία for the north and ἡ Εὐδαίμων Ἀραβία for the peninsula. Furthermore he locates Petra, spelled interestingly as a plural as on the Peutinger Table, ἐν Ἀραβίᾳ (F12). Again in the more than thirty fragments of Uranius Ἀραβία is systematically differentiated from ἡ Εὐδαίμων Ἀραβία (to which his third book was, it seems, principally devoted). Finally the testimony of Ammianus Marcellinus deserves to be emphasized here, because, as Mommsen proved a century ago (*Hermes* 16 (1881), 612 - 18), Ammianus knew the work of Ptolemy and used it repeatedly. But in discussing the Arabs he made a deliberate choice to reject the three Arabias in favor of two : Arabia, including *Nabataei* (14.8.13), and *beati* (23.6.45). Not even Cassius Dio, whose lifetime overlapped Ptolemy's, writes of Petraea but rather, in the style of Josephus and Dioscurides,

of ἡ Ἀραβία ἢ πρὸς τῇ Πέτρᾳ (68.14.5). He thereby indicates the same territory as Petraea but regards it as a part of Ἀραβία.

The only significant exception to this pattern is a remarkable fragment (no.19) from the end of Appian's lost work on the Arabs, the Ἀράβιος. Here Appian describes his flight from Egypt, presumably from his native Alexandria, at the time of the great uprising of Diaspora Jews in the last years of the reign of Trajan. In seeking to escape from the Jews (φεύγοντί μοί ποτε τοὺς Ἰουδαίους) Appian has arranged to be picked up by a boat on a river along which he can be transported to Pelusium. On his way to the meeting with the boat he goes through Arabia Petraea (ἴοντι διὰ τῆς Πιτραίας Ἀραβίας-ἐπὶ ποταμὸν) but his Arab guide divines from the cry of a crow that they have lost their way. They miss their rendezvous, which turns out to be a good thing (as Appian learns later) because the boat he intended to take was seized by the Jews. Meanwhile coming to another river, still nearer to Pelusium, Appian is able to make his escape.

The narrative leaves no doubt whatever that the scene of Appian's desperate travel is the eastern area of the Nile Delta. Only in this area could one miss one river and find another on the way to Pelusium. There is no possibility that Appian could be describing a journey to Pelusium from the east, in other words from Arabia Petraea: the Jews of Palestine did not participate in this revolt, and there are no rivers on which to sail to Pelusium. Appian of Alexandria was certainly escaping from Egypt, and the fragment, which is attributed to the mantic powers of his Arab guide, includes general comments at the end on the Arabs who settled in Egypt. In short the Ἀραβία through which Appian passed lay in Egypt in the delta region southwest of Pelusium. That region is precisely the location of the nome of Arabia, with its metropolis at Phakoussa (Ptol. IV. 5. 53), modern Faqus. Accordingly the adjective Πιτραία in the text of this fragment, which was first published from a still unidentified codex in 1869, is plainly wrong. Neither Ptolemy's Petraea nor the more traditional Arabia *deserta* ever included the Egyptian nome, but it is clear from the fragment that Appian had a good knowledge of that area and naturally considered it pertinent to his Ἀράβιος. The word Πιτραίας should be deleted. It probably constitutes a gloss by some copyist acquainted with Ptolemy's terminology. This would be by no means the only corruption in the text, as the Teubner apparatus shows. The unidentified codex varies at several points from a Paris manuscript (the only other witness) edited in 1880, and both agree on several readings that are insupportable as Greek.

And so this isolated instance of Petraea outside of Ptolemy, in a text written by a fellow citizen of Alexandria during the geographer's own lifetime, disappears. The intrusion of Petraea at the hands of copyists in later times can be documented in at least two other cases. A passage of Dioscurides reading ἀπὸ τῆς Πέτρας (I.67.1) is reproduced in Oribasius, as is much of Dioscurides, but the transmitted text of Oribasius shows Πιτραίας instead of Πέτρας. In the superscript to the list of bishops at the Council of Antioch in A.D. 341 (a superscript already condemned on other grounds as an interpolation), a bishopric of Arabia Petraea is named, but in the opening of the actual communication of the council itself only Ἀραβία appears.

We may now return to Ptolemy before looking more closely at the evidence of Glaukos and Uranius in relation to him. The hypothesis of Brünnow and Domaszewski that Ptolemy reproduced the categories of Arabia that appeared in Marinus, of whose work he held a poor opinion, dissolves altogether when the allusions to Bostra's legion and to Aelia Capitolina are combined with the total absence of any reference to the Nabataeans. It is nonetheless true that Petraea corresponds essentially to the territory of the old Nabataean kingdom, inasmuch as Ptolemy assigns Gerasa and Philadelphia (cities of the Roman province of Arabia) to Coele Syria. Elias Bickermann demonstrated in a famous article in the *Revue Biblique* of 1947 that Coele Syria was applied over the centuries to several different geographical entities, but he noted that in the second and third centuries certain cities of the Decapolis, including Philadelphia, proclaimed themselves as part of Coele Syria. Bickermann attributed this allegiance to the work of local antiquarians : « Sous les Antonins les archéologues locaux reprennent l'ancien terme comme ornement de la titulature de certaines cités helléniques dans la région du Jourdain ». Unfortunately Bickermann omitted completely the *Geography* of Ptolemy from his survey of the meanings of Coele Syria, and he also did not know that Philadelphia's advertising of Coele Syria began as early as Hadrian. In other words, Ptolemy does not preserve from Marinus a vestige of the inclusion of the Decapolis cities in Syria before the annexation of Arabia. It represents the actual claims made by those cities in his own day.

The contemporary character of Ptolemy's list may also explain the absence of Nabataeans. It is illuminating to review the fragments of Glaukos' Ἀραβικὴ Ἀρχαιολογία. The date of this work must fall before A.D. 226 since the site of Ertha is described as a Parthian city on the Euphrates (F3). It shows several points of contact with Ptolemy's list. For example, the little town of Negla (modern Nejl) on the Peutinger Table appears otherwise only in Ptolemy (V.17.5) and Glaukos (F5) where it is called a πολίχνιον Ἀραβίας. Moreover Glaukos took care to pronounce Ailana (Aila) a κώμη (F7), which surprised Stephanus for whom it was a πόλις. But for Ptolemy too (V.17.1) it is a κώμη. Above all Glaukos, like Ptolemy, evidently avoided all reference to the Nabataeans and is accordingly most unlikely to have been writing before A.D. 106. There are enough references to cities and towns in Nabataea to be certain of this point : Negla, Aela, Gadda, Characmoba, Arindela, Petra – all in Nabataea – are located in Arabia (*simpliciter*) without reference to the Nabataeans. This parallel with Ptolemy's practice is as striking as the failure of Glaukos to make use of the term Petraea. We have already noted that he retains the customary division of Arabia into two parts. Nabataea is thus part of Ἀραβία but never called Nabataea or Nabatene.

The desire of the Decapolis cities to associate themselves with Coele Syria together with the systematic repudiation of the name « Nabataean » must be seen as a contemporary reflection of second-century discourse in and concerning the Roman Near East. This discourse is entirely independent of Roman provincial boundaries, and Ptolemy's invention of Arabia Petraea may be viewed in this historical context as an attempt to represent such geographical thinking in his register. The term Petraea seems to have attracted no one, perhaps because it was scarcely more acceptable than Nabataea or Nabatene. One reason for

the avoidance of reference to the old kingdom and its people may well be the same as that recently proposed by M. Rey-Coquais for the eagerness of the Decapolis cities to cling to the name of Coele Syria : « Les descendants des colons grecs et les indigènes depuis longtemps hellénisés, qui constituaient ensemble l'élément dominant de ces cités de la Décapole, n'auraient-ils pas éprouvé quelque sentiment de supériorité, quelque dédain ou quelque hostilité vis-à-vis des Nabatéens, tenus pour des Barbares ? » (*ADAJ* 25 (1981), 31). But since both Ptolemy and Glaukos show that there was no reluctance to discuss Arabs generally as well as their many settlements and tribes, the omission of the Nabataeans in particular must be due to the unofficial *damnatio* accorded to a defunct dynasty, to rulers who have been overthrown. One suspects, moreover, that the residents of the Decapolis can have felt no desire to be annexed to a people and a realm that had lately been subdued. It is astonishing that cities of the Decapolis even continued to boast on their coins that they belonged to Coele Syria in the early third century when the Roman province of the same name, far to the north, was already in existence.

The disdain or hostility, if such it was, toward the Nabataeans eventually evaporated, and it may well be that with Philip as the second native Arab on the throne of the Caesars the Nabataean heritage no longer posed any embarrassment or awkwardness. Great orators in the Greek language, like Callinicus and Genethlius, were natives of Petra who were able to teach the Athenians. Callinicus was so famous that the city of Nikephorion on the Euphrates, where he died by violence, changed its name to honor him. In the second half of the third century epigraphy from the Negev shows a revival of the cult of the deified Nabataean king Obodas. These developments serve to explain why the *Arabica* of Uranius show no hesitation in naming the Nabataeans explicitly in connection with sites they inhabited. Uranius is as consistent in naming them when appropriate as Glaukos is not. His language normally takes the form of χώρα or χωρίον, or πόλις Ναβαταίων (F6, 7, 8, 12, 24).

The multiple reference to Nabataeans in Uranius formerly misled several generations of scholars into thinking him a writer of the first century B.C. But this simply cannot be : the name Uranius is unexampled at such an early date, whereas it is common in late antiquity, and more important – though insufficiently stressed – is his use of the term Σαρακηνοί as a Greek equivalent of Tay, representing nomads (F10). Furthermore, he manifestly treats changes of city names in fragment 29, which, although confused in Stephanus, shows his knowledge of the fourth-century name Constantia for Tela near Edessa. The name is listed in Stephanus under Nikephorion probably because Uranius also took note of that city's change of name to Callinicum. For Uranius Palmyra is simply φρούριον Συρίας (F11) because the days of Odaenathus and Zenobia were long since past. He is indisputably an author of the second half of the fourth century or later (though not necessarily so late as the sixth century, where Jacoby wanted to put him). For Uranius, as for Glaukos, there is no Petraea, but the Nabataeans are back.

Ptolemy is not the most reliable of geographers, but he is a precious witness to the age in which he wrote. He introduces his readers not to the Roman provincial organization

but to something far more difficult of access, namely local geographies and regional prejudices. His introduction of Petraea as a third Arabia did not take hold, but the historical situation that moved him merits our close attention. Almost all the many places he registers in his *deserta* are unknown to us apart from Thapsacus and Dumata, and the desert between Nabataea and the Euphrates is a void on the Peutinger Table. But if Ptolemy can be vindicated as a contemporary witness, it is now time to take his evidence for *deserta* and its thirty-nine cities seriously. Although that is an unsettling thought, we may have in Ptolemy the key to a better understanding not only of Palmyra's communications with the Arabian Gulf but of a curiously neglected item in the elder Pliny : at a place called Forat, not far from Charax above the gulf, one encountered visitors from Petra (*NH* VI. 32, 146).

Note on textual criticism : For fragment 19 of Appian see the apparatus and references in the Teubner edition of Viereck-Roos, revised by Gabba, p. 534-35. For Dioscurides and the parallel texts in Oribasius see the excellent edition of *De Materia Medica* by Wellmann.