

ARTICLE

Chariots, mail coaches and wagons in the Arabic dialect of Qaṭrāyīth ("in Qatari") in early Islamic eastern Arabia

Mario Kozah 📵



Department of Humanities, College of Arts and Sciences, Qatar University, Qatar Email: mario.k@qu.edu.qa

Abstract

This paper will present the evidence for two newly discovered words, gawzag and shagar, meaning "two-horse chariot/mail coach" and "wagon" respectively in the eastern Arabian dialect of Qaṭrāyīth (Syriac for "in Qatari") of the seventh and eighth centuries CE. They reveal the continued local knowledge of wheeled transport in Arabia and possible use long after its supposed disappearance in the Near East between the fourth and sixth centuries according to Richard Bulliet's well-known thesis in his seminal work The Camel and the Wheel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). The fact that this vernacular maintained two specific words for two different modes of wheeled transport likely suggests a practical need for them in everyday communication among the inhabitants of the Beth Qatraye region (Syriac for "region of the Qataris" in north-eastern Arabia). Moreover, their use in an Arabic dialect reveals that native words were developed for wheeled vehicles in the local language spoken by the inhabitants of the area well before the adoption of markabah as a neologism to mean chariot in nineteenth-century Arabic, according to Michael Macdonald's stimulating article "Wheels in a land of camels" (Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy 20/2, 2009). Thus, the various rock drawings of two-wheeled carts and chariots in northern Arabia may in fact not only have been known but also used nearby in eastern Arabia, rather than being inaccurate representations reflecting a distant awareness of the existence of chariots elsewhere such as in Mesopotamia and Egypt as had been previously thought. This is a literary, philological. and historical study that aims at presenting newly discovered vocabulary in context for further analysis by linguists and others.

Keywords: Arabia; Early Islam; Seventh-century eastern Arabia; Syriac Christianity; Early Arabic vernaculars

Beth Qaṭraye, Syriac for "region of the Qataris", is a term found in Syriac literature referring to the region of north-eastern Arabia including today's Qatar, Bahrain, and parts of the United Arab Emirates from the fourth to the ninth centuries CE. It was an important cultural, linguistic, and religious crossroads in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, when it produced a number of important Syriac Christian authors who came from this region.

In the early Islamic period from the middle of the seventh century, Beth Qaṭraye produced a number of important Syriac authors. Best known among them is the ascetic and mystical author Isaac of Nineveh, or Isḥaq Qaṭraya, who was born and lived for some time in Beth Qaṭraye, before Catholicos Giwargis took him to Beth Aramaye (Syriac for the



¹ Brock 1999.

[©] The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of SOAS University of London. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

southern Iraqi region). After a short-lived episcopate in Nineveh, he withdrew to an eremitic life in Beth Huzaye (al-Ahwaz province, Iran).² Another very important monastic author from this region is Dadisho^c Qaṭraya.³ Among the various authors designated as Gabriel Qaṭraya in the sources, there is a biblical interpreter who was a teacher in Seleucia-Ctesiphon in the mid-seventh century, and a commentator on the liturgy who lived in the first half of the seventh century.⁴ His work on the liturgy was probably the main source for the short commentary attributed to Abraham Qaṭraya bar Lipeh.⁵ Another biblical interpreter frequently quoted in later sources is Aḥub Qaṭraya.⁶ Christians from Beth Qaṭraye also served as translators. For example, the Persian translator for the (undoubtedly Arabic-speaking) Lakhmid king al-Nuʿmān III (579–601) is said to have been a Christian from Beth Qaṭraye. Finally, an unnamed monk from Beth Qaṭraye is also credited with a preface and translation from Persian into Syriac of the *Law Book* by Shemʻon of Rev Ardashir.⁷

Newly published research collecting and analysing information on the pre-Islamic and early Islamic historical geography and toponyms of the Beth Qatraye region from the most important available Syriac sources as well as Arabic geographical works has revealed new vocabulary from the language of Beth Qaṭraye referred to as Qaṭrāyīth ("in Qatari") used in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period. A number of East-Syriac commentaries on the Peshitta Old Testament dating from the eighth and ninth centuries AD mention this enigmatic East-Arabian language. They also cite seventh-century Syriac authors originating from this region, such as Rabban Gabriel Qaṭraya and Aḥūb Qaṭraya who gloss biblical terms using Qaṭrāyīth. The literary and historical evidence of this newly discovered Qatrāyīth vocabulary, including the term for lot-casting, from two commentaries - the East-Syriac Anonymous Commentary (ninth century) and the older Diyarbakır Commentary (eighth century) - provides some evidence to suggest that Qatrāyīth may in fact be a local Arabic dialect or a language with significant Arabic components (e.g. broken plural and an a- definite article prefix), recorded therein using the Syriac script. Based on this new data of 50 words, it is also possible to demonstrate that the vernacular of Qatrāyīth appears, based on this sample, to consist mainly of Arabic vocabulary (40 out of the 50) as well as a few Syriac and Pahlavi loanwords, and maintains possible evidence of some Arabic and relatively fewer Syriac grammatical structures and lexical influences. As such, it constitutes the oldest evidence of Arabic from East Arabia, revealing a language that seems to be either a form of Arabic or significantly influenced by Arabic from that region. This literary and historical data now requires further analysis by linguists and others to confirm this hypothesis. Furthermore, Qatrāyīth vocabulary recorded using the Syriac script in these commentaries represents the earliest attestations of proto-Garshunographic development from the early Islamic period, dating back to the eighth century. As for authorship, based on internal and extra-textual evidence it can be argued that the anonymous author of the Diyarbakır Commentary and the unnamed editor of the Anonymous Commentary both originate from Beth Qatraye, suggesting that there may have been a Syriac school of exegesis originating from that region in this period, the School of Beth Qatraye, dating back to the seventh century at least, with high standards of

² For further biographical details see Kozah 2017: 459-62.

³ For a number of studies on Dadisho' Qaṭraya see Kozah et al. 2014. For a selection of his writings see Kozah et al. 2015: 155–253 and Kozah et al. 2016.

⁴ See Brock 2014.

⁵ For a full edition and translation see Kozah 2015a.

⁶ See Romeny 2014: 133-55.

⁷ For an edition and translation of the preface see Kozah 2015b.

⁸ See Kozah 2021.

learning, comparable in sophistication to the School of Nisibis. As such, *Qaṭrāyīth* contains the oldest evidence of Arabic from East Arabia. The historical, archaeological, and geographical studies undertaken so far have also revealed the cultural relations between this region and other areas around the Gulf, and how patterns of social predominance shifted over time, providing a better understanding not only of the dynamics of society within Beth Qaṭraye, but also the place of Beth Qaṭraye within the larger history of the Near East in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods.

The source of this gathered <code>Qaṭrāyīth</code> vocabulary is a number of East-Syriac biblical commentaries and in particular the so-called East-Syriac <code>Anonymous Commentary (AC)</code>, a ninth-century work which in its most extended form covers both the Old and New Testaments. The <code>AC</code> contains quotations from two seventh-century biblical commentators from Beth <code>Qaṭraye</code> mentioned above, <code>Aḥub Qaṭraya</code> and Rabban Gabriel <code>Qaṭraya</code>, the latter relied upon as an authority for both the Old and New Testaments, who is at times referred to as Gabriel <code>Qaṭraya</code>, or simply Gabriel or Rabban. Rabban without further description is mentioned numerous times in the course of this commentary, in addition to "our Rabban", suggesting a close relationship between him and its anonymous author.

Interestingly, in addition to citations from Aḥub and Gabriel Qaṭraya, the AC includes many glosses containing words in the vernacular language of Qaṭrāyīth spoken by Qaṭraya (Qaṭaris) including the two newly discovered words, gawzag and shagar, meaning "two-horse chariot/mail coach" and "wagon" respectively. Perhaps the unnamed commentator or editor of the AC originated from Beth Qaṭraya and the "School" which he refers to throughout the text was one headed by Rabban Gabriel Qaṭraya himself in the Beth Aramaye region. The second possibility, related in part to the first, is that many of the readers of the AC were students from a school in Beth Qaṭraya who would therefore have benefitted from further elucidations and glosses in their own dialect of Qaṭrāyīth, a language also used by Aḥūb Qaṭraya and Gabriel Qaṭraya, two of the greatest Syriac exegetes of the seventh century who both hailed from Beth Qaṭraye as their demonym clearly indicates.

The Syriac term for chariot, $qar\bar{u}kh\bar{a}$, appears in the Peshitta Exodus 14:6, ¹⁵ and is explained in the AC, ¹⁶ where it is described as being of the type that is drawn by two

⁹ Kozah 2022.

¹⁰ See Al Thani et al. 2021.

¹¹ Of these manuscripts the oldest and most comprehensive, covering both the Old and New Testaments, is MS (olim) Diyarbakır 22. I am grateful to Lucas Van Rompay for kindly sharing his own digitized images (which I use in writing this article) of this lost manuscript, based on photoprints printed from a microfilm made in the 1950s, when the manuscript was in Mosul. The original microfilm (with a pagination of the microfilmed folios whereby MS folio 2 recto = microfilm page 3) has recently been digitized by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library and is available on their website, renamed under shelfmark PI Mosul-Diyarbakir 13 (https://www.vhmml.org/readingRoom/view/502945). The other manuscripts of the AC, which contain only the Old Testament part or even only the Pentateuch section are: MS Mosul 1; MS Kirkuk 8; MS St. Petersburg (olim Diettrich 2); MS Vat. Syr. 502; MS Vat. Syr. 578; MS Birmingham, Mingana 553; MS Louvain, CSCO Syr. 13; MS Chaldean Archdiocese of Irbīl (ACE) 21.

Not to be confused with the liturgical commentator Gabriel Qaṭraya bar Lipeh (also sixth/seventh century); see Brock 2011: 171.

¹³ We know that Gabriel Qaṭraya was associated, at least for some time, with the School of Seleucia. Perhaps this school, active from the sixth century onwards, served as a point of connection between the Nisibene tradition and the southern provinces; see Reinink 2013: 115–31.

¹⁴ Brock 2014: 165-6.

¹⁵ Exodus 14:6 = בממ וכו במת הבי במת והו "He made ready his chariots, and took his people with him".

¹⁶ MS Divarbakır 22 f. 30°; Vat. Sir. 578 f. 14°.

horses which are "skilfully fastened and harnessed". Upon these two horses, we are told, is a bīspaqā, which is a certain type of litter (leqṭīqīn), known in Qaṭrāyīth as gawzag. The punctuation is clear with a full stop followed by a repetition of the Syriac word for litter (leqṭīqīn) glossed in Qaṭrāyīth as gawzag:

With regard to "He made ready his chariots", Scripture calls $qar\bar{u}kh\bar{a}$ that (chariot) which is drawn by two horses which are skilfully fastened and harnessed. Upon them (two horses) there is a $b\bar{i}spaq\bar{a}$ which is a certain (type of) litter. Litter in $Qatr\bar{a}yith$ is qawzaq.¹⁷

Notable is the fact that Ḥenanishoʻ bar Seroshway (ninth century), ¹⁸ cited in the Lexicon of Bar Bahlul and known for his reliance on the AC as copied in MS Diyarbakır 22, directly draws on this gloss from the MS Diyarbakır 22 / Vat. Sir. 578 version of the AC when defining leqṭ̄q̄n̄n. He is cited as stating that leqṭ̄q̄n̄n is a gawrag, misspelling the Qaṭrāȳth noun gawzag, followed by the Arabic transliteration jawrak, confirming that it is a misspelling rather than a scribal error. ¹⁹ According to Aaron Butts, leqṭ̄q̄n̄n is itself a Greek loanword meaning "small litter" (< Gr lektíkion < Lat lectica). ²⁰ In every language the names of technical innovations such as tools or, as in the matter at hand, vehicles, is generally open to the importation of foreign vocabulary, which seems to be the case in this instance. Unlike the original meaning of this loanword of an open chair/bed or closed cubicle carried by litter-bearers (animal or human), leqṭ̄q̄n̄n in Syriac appears to have undergone a semantic shift such that it comes to include also a type of wagon or mail coach known as a bīspaqā, which is itself another loanword ultimately derived from Parthian and referred to in the same AC gloss.

However, according to the AC version in MSS Mingana 553 f. 40° and Vat. Sir. 502 f. 66° , where both the full stop and the repetition of the Syriac word for litter (leqtiqin) are absent, the Qatrayith noun gawzag is understood to be glossing $bispaq\bar{a}$, which we are told is a type of litter:

With regard to "He made ready his chariots", Scripture calls $qar\bar{u}kh\bar{a}$ that (chariot) which is drawn by two horses which are skilfully fastened and harnessed. Upon them (two horses) there is a $b\bar{i}spaq\bar{a}$ which is a certain (type of) litter known in Qaṭrāyīth as gawzag.

The noun $b\bar{s}paq\bar{a}$ is in fact a loanword in Syriac ultimately derived from the Parthian, specifically meaning wagon or mail coach, ²² a type of litter ²³ as the AC commentator defines it. Furthermore, Claudia Ciancaglini reveals the connection of $b\bar{s}paq\bar{a}$ to specifically Sasanian contexts of messengers, postal systems and even hearses, ²⁴ suggesting that the commentator understands the Syriac word for litter ($leqt\bar{q}q\bar{n}$) as including both wheeled and wheelless vehicles, unlike the original meaning of the loanword. ²⁵ According to Adam Silverstein the mail coach or royal post-horse (badespanik) in

¹⁷ Diyarbakır 22 f. 30° l. 36-9. 2 102 shorita partal ora partal casas and shore.

¹⁸ Henanishoʻ bar Seroshway (probably second half of ninth century), the Church of the East bishop of Hirta was a lexicographer and biblical interpreter; see Van Rompay 2011: 195.

محفّة صندوق عصحمالم دسمه لمن سد ها محم. مصم حد هذه محمد (جورك) محفّة. محسنات من حدة من محفّة (Duval 1901: 980).

²⁰ Butts 2016: 134.

²¹ Mingana 553 f. 40^r l. 22-25; Vat. Sir. 502 f. 66^r. كروي ما المرابع ا

²² Syr. 🖚 bīspaqā wagon, mail coach < Parth bayaspak < OIr dvai-aspaka (Sokoloff 2009: 142).

²³ Syr. ۖ leqtīqīn litter, bier, pyx, portable altar (Payne-Smith 1903: 245); small litter (Sokoloff 2009: 697).
24 Ciancaglini 2008: 127.

²⁵ Notable in this regard is Audo's definition of *leqtiqin* as "a chariot; wagon": מבֹבבלא. (Audo 1897: 29).

Sasanid times probably transported a courier in two-horse teams: the Pahlavi bayaspanıg ("post-horse") and the related terms despan (Middle Persian), despan (Armenian), and duaspa (New Persian) all indicate that royal carriages were originally drawn by two mounts. Since in both versions of the gloss the commentator explains that $b\bar{i}spaq\bar{a}$ is a type of litter, whether the $Qatr\bar{a}y\bar{i}th$ noun gawzag is specifically the semantic equivalent of the wheeled $b\bar{i}spaq\bar{a}$ or more general $leqt\bar{i}q\bar{i}n$ can only be gleaned by analysing its possible etymological and morphological origins.

It is most likely that the Syriac noun $zawg\bar{a}$, meaning a two-horse chariot²⁸ and, therefore, a semantic equivalent of $b\bar{i}spaq\bar{a}$, is the origin of the $Qatr\bar{a}y\bar{i}th$ Arabic vernacular gawzag which appears to have undergone metathesis (zawg to gawz). This is very common even in the modern Arabic vernaculars where Classical Arabic zawj, meaning a pair or a couple, becomes jawz in numerous Arabic dialects including those of the Levant and Gulf.²⁹ Furthermore, the Persianate ending in gawzag might suggest that the noun may have been indirectly borrowed into the $Qatr\bar{a}y\bar{i}th$ via Pahlavi, although no Pahlavi semantic equivalent could be found resembling it. If $zawg\bar{a}$ is indeed the origin of gawzag then the gloss in both versions of the AC commentary would indicate that $b\bar{i}spaq\bar{a}$ is known as gawzag in $Qatr\bar{a}y\bar{i}th$, where the connection between them is reflected in the shared sense of "two" (horses) found in both nouns (as $b\bar{i}$ and gawz). Such a reading is in line with the overall purpose of the commentary at this point to describe the chariot mentioned in Exodus 14:6 as being of the type that is drawn by two horses. However, given the paucity of data currently at our disposal, it would seem that arriving at a satisfactory etymology for gawzag must remain pending for now.

In the case of the MSS Vat. Sir. 578 and Diyarbakır 22 version of the gloss where Syriac leqtiqin is specifically mentioned as meaning gawzag in Qaṭrāyīth, we have either a clarificatory intervention by the scribe who is unaware of the meaning of bīspaqā in Syriac and its semantic and morphological connection with gawzag, 30 or it may more likely be that all litters are known generically as gawzag in Qaṭrāyīth, after the best known type in the East-Arabian region – the two-horse chariot or mail coach. The second interpretation is given further support by the AC commentator's understanding of the Syriac word for litter (leqtiqin) as including both wheeled and wheelless vehicles as argued above. In this sense the gloss presents significant new source evidence suggesting the continued existence or local memory of wheeled transport during the early Islamic period and perhaps even knowledge of a defunct Sasanid postal system in the East-Arabian region. Whatever the historical reason, it is certainly clear that two-wheeled chariots were familiar enough for the native Qaṭraye inhabitants to have particular vernacular names for them during the sixth to eighth centuries at least.

The Syriac name for chariot, c agalt \bar{a} , 31 is given in both the Peshitta Genesis 45:19/21 32 and in the AC and MS (olim) Diyarbakır 22, 33 where it is first glossed using the unidentified

²⁶ Silverstein 2007: 24.

²⁷ Notwithstanding Thomas Audo's later definition of *leqtiqin*.

²⁹ Ar. غزز zawj a pair, or couple, i.e. any two things paired or coupled together (Lane 1863: 1266); غزز jawz (for ززج) husband, pair (Hava 1915: 100).

 $^{^{30}}$ That this may be a case of dittography (unintentional repetition of $leqt\bar{q}\bar{q}n$ by the scribe) is possible but unlikely given the clear punctuation.

³¹ A cart, wain, wagon (Payne-Smith 1903: 400); chariot, wagon (Sokoloff 2009: 1068).

³² Genesis 45:19 = محتم محتم تحتم تحد م مختم محتم العندة و Genesis 45:21 محتم محتم محتم محتم المختم محتم محتم المختم محتم المختم المخت

³³ The older East-Syriac *Diyarbakir Commentary* (eighth century) is found uniquely in MS (olim) Diyarbakir 22, for the books of Genesis to Exodus 9:32, after which the AC is introduced, covering the rest of the Old and New

noun *shagar*,³⁴ followed by the Pahlavi semantic equivalent *bardīyūn*, given in MacKenzie as *wardyūn*, meaning carriage or chariot.³⁵ Given that the *AC* generally only glosses in Pahlavi and *Qaṭrāyīth* for the Pentateuch section, and the Pahlavi semantic equivalent is explicitly cited in this gloss, there is the strong likelihood that *shagar* is from the *Qatrāyīth* of the anonymous commentator and his readers.

Scripture also calls "chariots" those that have wheels, which transport heavy loads, are pulled by bulls, and are called *shagar*. Chariots in Persian: *bardīyūn*.³⁶

Henanisho^c bar Seroshway who, as mentioned above, is often cited in the Lexicon of Bar Bahlul, appears to be directly drawing on this particular *AC* gloss when defining 'agaltā or chariot, using the Pahlavi semantic equivalent bardīyūn to identify it. In the same entry he also equates 'agaltā with the term for litter (leqṭāqīn) which, as argued above, the *AC* commentator understands as including both wheeled and wheelless vehicles, adding further corroboration to this reading.³⁷ Thomas Audo's entry on 'agaltā is relevant in this regard, given that his definition also appears to be drawing on the *AC* gloss since he specifically describes it as a wheeled vehicle made of wood, drawn by bulls, and used to carry various loads.³⁸

If shagar is indeed a Qaṭrāyīth noun meaning chariot or, more accurately, a cart or wagon, given that it is described in the AC gloss as used for transporting "heavy loads" and is "pulled by bulls", then it would appear to be derived from the Classical Arabic shajār signifying some form of vehicle or litter.³⁹ The Classical Arabic shajār as indicated in Kazimirski 1860: 1193 ("bois de petite litière, petite litière") appears to be a metonymic development from shajar "tree; wood" akin to the semantic path conjectured for Qaṭrāyīth shagar with some lexicographical evidence indicating that it can be used metonymically to refer to the small vehicle itself. If, furthermore, this Qatrāyīth gloss is Arabic transliterated using Syriac letters, then the noun shagar would be the local Arabic vernacular pronunciation of the Classical Arabic shajār, where the velar plosive /g/ in the Qaṭrāyīth suggests a degree of Syriac influence on the pronunciation, or an Arabic vernacular where the /g/ pronunciation features. *Qaṭrāyīth*, spoken in the region from at least the seventh century, may then have been a dialect in which Arabic gim is realized as /g/, pointing to a sedentary urban dialect of the type that existed in the period after the Islamic conquests, rather like the Shiite dialect of present-day Bahrain. 40 Alternatively, the letter gomal may simply be indicating the Classical Arabic jīm /j/, as it generally does in later Garshūnī, in which case the Qaṭrāyīth lexeme would be pronounced exactly the same as the Classical Arabic shajār, differing perhaps only with the shortening of the /a/ vowel. Thus, the

Testaments to the end of the manuscript. For an edition and translation of the *Diyarbakır Commentary* see Van Rompay 1986; for a facsimile edition with an English translation of the *AC* on Genesis 1:1–28:6 (based on MS Mingana 553 only) see Levene 1951.

³⁴ MSS: Mingana 553 f. 25° l. 27; Vat. Sir. 502 f. 43° l. 11; Vat. Sir. 578 f. 1^r l. 25; Diyarbakır 22 f. 23^r l. 44.

³⁵ Per. كنتم bardīyūn carriage, chariot; cf. wardyūn vehicle, carriage, chariot (MacKenzie 1971: 87).

³⁶ Mingana 553 f. 25° l. 26-8; Diyarbakır 22 f. 23^r l. 43-5:

مفته المود يخلاله لعالم [D لقبع] ديماله لعب حنيك، دراته همته علم دحلونه هددة .. عالم دفنه لع [D لعب] عجد. .. م

عليها بمهم و هذة ه دفسمه ه و دم به به مهر دوسمه محلله دولته عظه، محلله م لمهم ه لعبة التي يُعنَّل (Duval 1901 · 1404)

³⁸ مقت مبدر جے منقلہ دھنوج ملے کہ محالے در المان کے دمانے مدور کے دعائے محالے دہ محالے دہ دعائم سے محالے دانے محالے در المان 1891: 201).

³⁹ Ar. مَوْدَج shajār / shijār signifies the wood [or framework] of the مَحَار / مِسَّارِم , which when covered becomes a مَوْدَج AA (says that مَوْدِج having the heads uncovered, also called مَوْدِج having the heads uncovered, also called مَوْدِج (Lane 1863: 1507–08); small litter (Hava 1915: 344); bois de petite litière, petite litière (Kazimirski 1860: 1193).

⁴⁰ Holes 1983: 36.

likelihood that this unidentified gloss is in the *Qaṭrāyīth* of the anonymous eighth-century author and his readers from Beth Qaṭraye is further supported by the fact that *shagar* seems to be derived from the Arabic, the overwhelming pattern with *Qaṭrāyīth* vocabulary.

A few small insights may also be gleaned from the newly discovered *Qaṭrāyīth* vocabulary relating to the materials and tools that may have been used to produce the above chariots and carts. Two species of tree are mentioned in this local vernacular, both of whose wood is well suited for the construction of such wheeled vehicles, in part or in whole. First, the robust and rot-resistant cypress or juniper, *brūthā* in Syriac, is given in both the Peshitta 2 Samuel 6:5 and in the *AC* of MS Diyarbakır 22, where it is explained as being the ancestor (lit. father) of the cedar, mentioned immediately before it in the same verse, then *brūthā* is glossed using the *Qatrāyīth* construct phrase *abū rish*.⁴¹

The cypress is its ancestor. In Qatrayīth it is abū rish. 42

That $ab\bar{u}$ rish is evidently an Arabic construct phrase, with the sense of "feathered", thereby also implying that the tree is tall and graceful, is further corroborated by the lack of a Pahlavi gloss and any possible Pahlavi comparable semantic equivalents. Arabic dialects from Eastern Arabia continue to use the term $ab\bar{u}$ in everyday parlance to refer to an abundance of or source of something. It is also evidenced in numerous toponyms in the region. If, therefore, the $Qatr\bar{a}y\bar{t}th$ phrase is Arabic recorded using the Syriac script, and not in fact Syriac, then the construct $ab\bar{u}$ rish (literally "father of feathers") can be analysed as fully Arabic. Despite the fact that rish is written without a $y\bar{u}dh$ it is phonetically almost the same as Arabic $r\bar{i}sh$, and as an Arabic construct phrase $ab\bar{u}$ rish would, therefore, mean "feathered", or "resembling feathers". This would, therefore, be an appropriate epithet for a tall, thin, and graceful tree such as the cypress or juniper.

A less likely reading of *rish* would be that it is the Syriac form of the noun $r\bar{s}h$, written without a $y\bar{u}dh$, meaning head, top, tip, or summit. Thus the construct phrase, $ab\bar{u}$ rish, or "very tall" (literally "father of the top/head"), may be a $Qatr\bar{a}y\bar{t}h$ local name for this species of tree which is tall and, perhaps also, with a pointed top. If this reading is correct then the $Qatr\bar{a}y\bar{t}h$ construct is a rare Syro-Arabic find where the first part is an Arabic noun while the second part is Syriac. The Syriac construct rules would then appear to be applied in this case given that rish is in the absolute form.

The second species of tree found in *Qaṭrāyīth* is the tamarisk, another hardwood species which can be used for carpentry. The Syriac term for a shrub, *sīḥā*, is given in both the Peshitta Genesis 21:15 and in the *DC* and *AC*, where it is glossed citing Rabban Gabriel Qaṭraya who states that the shrub referred to in this verse is in fact the *bīnā*, or tamarisk in Syriac, using the unidentified semantic equivalent *asl/atal* to clarify it to his readers.⁴⁴

However, Rabban states that it $(s\bar{\imath}h\bar{a})$ is the tamarisk, that is to say: asl/atal, which provides good shade despite not bearing fruit.⁴⁵

Since the anonymous author directly cites Rabban Gabriel Qaṭraya, who also generally glosses using his native <code>Qaṭrāyīth</code>, there is evidence here to suggest that <code>asl/atal</code> is from this author's own Arabic vernacular from Eastern Arabia and that of his readers, particularly given the absence of any Pahlavi semantic equivalent or gloss. It is particularly

 $^{^{41}}$ MS Diyarbakır 22 f. $95^{\rm r}$ l. 15.

⁴³ Payne-Smith 1903: 539.

⁴⁴ MS Diyarbakır 22 f. 18^r l. 26.

⁴⁵ Diyarbakır 22 f. 18^r l. 25–6:

نح دم فیک مخذ دمماهمور ه. مملا/ معلد هن دمع عمد مل محدد مل ععمة الملاه.

relevant that Ḥenanishoʻ bar Seroshway, cited in the Lexicon of Bar Bahlul, clearly relies on Rabban Gabriel Qaṭraya's gloss here, but conflates the definitions of both $b\bar{n}n\bar{a}$ and $s\bar{n}h\bar{a}$ as meaning tamarisk. ⁴⁶ Furthermore, bar Seroshway records Rabban's $Qaṭr\bar{a}y\bar{\imath}th$ into Arabic as asl/athl (not atal as witnessed in the AC), following the DC, thereby proposing in athl an Arabic derivation of the term. ⁴⁷ If this is indeed a $Qaṭr\bar{a}y\bar{\imath}th$ noun meaning tamarisk, then it appears to be derived, as bar Seroshway implies, from the Arabic athl used to signify the tamarisk.

Further extra-textual supporting evidence that this *Qaṭrāyīth* noun is derived from the Arabic of the Arabian Peninsula is found in Letter 2 of the Syriac Himyarite letters, 48 where it appears recorded in the Syriac script as adam, corresponding to Arabic athala, "a tamarisk". The final /a/ vowel of the Arabic noun has been written not by the phonetic but by the graphical equivalent of the $t\bar{a}$ marbūta /t/ ending, which is characteristic of later Garshūnī and suggests that the dating of the Syriac Himyarite letters may be no earlier than the eighth century (the period in which the DC was composed). If, furthermore, this Qatrāyīth gloss is Arabic recorded using the Syriac script, and not in fact Syriac, then the noun asl/atal would be the local Arabic vernacular pronunciation of the Classical Arabic athl, where the dental stop /t/ in the Qatrāyīth atal or the alveolar fricative /s/ in asl found in the DC, both suggest a degree of Syriac influence on the pronunciation, or an Arabic where the /t/ or /s/ pronunciation rather than the inter-dental fricative /th/ features. Qaṭrāyīth, spoken in the region from at least the seventh century, may then have been a dialect in which the interdentals of Classical Arabic were realized as dentals or even sibilants pointing to a sedentary urban dialect of the type that existed in the period after the Islamic conquests, somewhat like the Shiite dialect of present-day Bahrain.⁴⁹ Alternatively, the letter taw in atal may simply be indicating the Classical Arabic inter-dental fricative /th/, as it can do in later Garshūnī, in which case the Qatrāyīth lexeme would be pronounced exactly the same as the Classical Arabic athl, differing perhaps only in the possible addition of a short /a/ vowel. The likelihood, then, that this unidentified gloss derives from Rabban Gabriel Qatraya's own Qatrāyīth from Eastern Arabia and that of the DC readers is further supported by the fact that asl / atal appears to come from the Arabic, as with the majority of the newly discovered *Qatrāyīth* vocabulary.

In terms of tools which may have been used to construct these chariots and carts, the *Qaṭrāyīth* vocabulary at our disposal presents us with the word for "saw" or *aṣīr*, clearly indispensable for such a task, if indeed it took place in Beth Qaṭraye, in addition to its key use for the shipbuilding activities that undoubtedly did take place there. The Syriac term for saw, ṭūrnūs, ⁵⁰ is given in both the Peshitta 1 Kings 7:9 and in the *AC* of MS Diyarbakır 22 where it is glossed using the *Qaṭrāyīth* semantic equivalent *aṣīr*.

The saw in Qaṭrāyīth is aṣīr51

Given that no Pahlavi gloss is given, nor is there a Pahlavi semantic equivalent that resembles the Qatrayth term for saw, one is left with the possibility that the Arabic $ma^3\bar{a}sh\bar{t}r$, or "saws", may ultimately be the source of $a\bar{s}r$, ⁵² although no clear semantic path is immediately apparent.

In a fascinating article entitled "Wheels in a land of camels: another look at the chariot in Arabia", 53 Michael Macdonald concludes at the very outset that the existence of rock

⁴⁶ Duval 1901: 1340.

⁴⁷ Duval 1901: 384.

⁴⁸ L2 xxii.3. See Shahîd 1971: 90.

⁴⁹ Holes 1983: 36.

⁵⁰ Sokoloff 2009: 522; Costaz 1963: 125. The term also has the sense of a lathe chisel (Payne-Smith 1903: 170).

⁵¹ Diyarbakır 22 f. 104^r l. 33: نه جد المحتاب المعتادة المعتا

⁵² Ar. مَنْشِر pl. مِنْشَار mi'shār pl. maʾāshīr saw, instrument with which wood is divided (Lane 1863: 62); saw (Hava 1915: 9).

⁵³ Macdonald 2009.

drawings of carts and chariots in the north of the Peninsula "is not proof that they were used in the areas where the drawings are found", given that the terrain in the Arabian Peninsula is mostly unsuitable for the use of wheeled vehicles.⁵⁴ Seemingly alluding to Richard Bulliet's argument in his well-known book The Camel and the Wheel that wheeled vehicles disappeared from the Middle East "after the third and before the seventh century A.D.", 55 Macdonald appears to support this position by proposing that the existence of cart and chariot rock drawings in Arabia is not the result of their actual use there but based on knowledge acquired by the artists who produced them who "might have travelled to Egypt or Mesopotamia and seen wall paintings or reliefs of chariots".56 Furthermore, given the occurrence of mrkbt in the inscription by 'b'hl, the artist of one of the chariot rock drawings he is describing, Macdonald argues that the artist probably "took the word for 'chariot' (mrkbt) from the same source as his image of the chariot and his awareness of 'foreign' artistic conventions", concluding that it is most likely a loanword from the Aramaic markabtā', meaning "chariot", which was "widely used in Mesopotamia and the Levant by at least the mid-first millennium BC, while ... even in Egypt a North-West Semitic loanword for 'chariot' (merkobt) had been in use since the second millennium".57

Clearly, what applies to northern Arabia in terms of it being unlikely that a native word would exist for cart or chariot in the languages spoken by the nomadic inhabitants of a region of sand and basalt desert⁵⁸ and where such forms of wheeled transport were unlikely to develop was not the case in Beth Qatraye. Indeed, the fact that Qatrayīth maintained two specific words for two different modes of wheeled transport, gawzag for chariot and shagar for cart/wagon, likely suggests a practical need for these names in everyday communication or their preservation in communal memory from an earlier generation among the inhabitants of the Beth Qatraye region. Could this be because chariots and carts were still being used in the seventh/eighth centuries, or had been within recent memory? Moreover, their use in an Arabic dialect reveals that native words were in fact developed for wheeled vehicles in the local language spoken by the inhabitants of the area well before the adoption of markabah as a neologism to mean chariot in nineteenth-century Arabic. This, according to Macdonald's stimulating article, came about through Jewish and Christian translations of the Hebrew and Syriac Bible into Arabic by foreign missionary societies.⁵⁹ Thus, the various rock drawings of two-wheeled carts and chariots in northern Arabia may in fact not only have been known but also actually used at some point between the fourth and seventh/eighth centuries in eastern Arabia, and rather than being inaccurate representations reflecting a distant awareness of the existence of chariots elsewhere, such as in Mesopotamia and Egypt, they may in fact be depictions of wheeled vehicles from a neighbouring locality within the Arabian peninsula itself.

References

Al Thani, Haya, Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, Saif Al-Murikhi, Abdul Rahman Chamseddine, Tobias Scheunchen, David A. Michelson, William L. Potter and Mario Kozah. 2021. "A toponymical survey of Beth Qaṭraye", in Mario Kozah, George Kiraz, Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, Haya Thani and Saif al-Murikhi (eds), Beth Qaṭraye. A Lexical and Toponymical Survey, 107–74. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Audo, Thomas. 1897. Treasure of the Syriac Language. Mosul: Imprimerie des pères dominicains. Brock, Sebastian P. 1999. "Syriac writers from Beth Qatraye", ARAM 11/1, 85–96.

```
    Macdonald 2009: 156.
    Bulliet 1990: 22.
```

⁵⁶ Macdonald 2009: 190.

⁵⁷ Macdonald 2009: 188.

⁵⁸ Macdonald 2009: 188.

⁵⁹ Macdonald 2009: footnote 73, 97.

Brock, Sebastian P. 2011. "Gabriel Qaṭraya", in Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz and Lucas Van Rompay (eds), *The Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, 171. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Brock, Sebastian P. 2014. "Gabriel of Beth Qaṭraye as a witness to Syriac intellectual life c. 600 ct", in Mario Kozah, Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, Saif Shaheen Al-Murikhi and Haya Al Thani (eds), The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century, 155–69. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Bulliet, Richard. 1990. The Camel and the Wheel. New York: Columbia University Press.

Butts, Aaron Michael. 2016. Language Change in the Wake of Empire. Syriac in Its Greco-Roman Context. (Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic, 11.) Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns.

Ciancaglini, Claudia A. 2008. Iranian Loanwords in Syriac. (Beiträge zur Iranistik, 28.) Wiesbaden: Reichert.

Costaz, Louis. 1963. Dictionnaire syriaque-français/Syriac-English Dictionary. Beirut: Librairie Orientale / L'Imprimerie Catholique.

Duval, Rubens. 1901. Lexicon syriacum auctore Hassano bar Bahlule: Voces syriacas græcasque cum glossis syriacis et arabicis complectens. Paris: Leroux.

Hava, Joseph-Gabriel. 1915. Arabic-English Dictionary for the Use of Students. Beirut: l'Imprimerie catholique.

Holes, Clive. 1983. "Bahraini dialects: sectarian differences and the sedentary/nomadic split", Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik 10, 7–38.

Kazimirski, Albin de Biberstein. 1860. Dictionnaire arabe-français. Paris: Maisonneuve.

Kozah, Mario, Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, Saif Shaheen Al-Murikhi and Haya Al Thani (eds). 2015. An Anthology of Syriac Writers from Qatar in the Seventh Century. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Kozah, Mario, Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn and Suleiman Mourad (ed. and trans.). 2016. *Dadisho' Qaṭraya's Compendious Commentary on the Paradise of the Egyptian Fathers in Garshuni*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Kozah, Mario, Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, Saif Shaheen Al-Murikhi and Haya Al Thani (eds). 2014. The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Kozah, Mario, George Kiraz, Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, Haya Thani and Saif al-Murikhi (eds). 2021. Beth Qaṭraye. A Lexical and Toponymical Survey. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Kozah, Mario. 2015a. "Abraham Qaṭraya bar Lipah's Commentary on the Liturgical Offices", in Mario Kozah et al. (eds), An Anthology of Syriac Writers from Qatar in the Seventh Century, 97-Lan147. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Kozah, Mario. 2015b. "Preface to Mar Shem'ūn's Law Book by an anonymous monk from Beth Qaṭraye", in Mario Kozah et al. (eds), An Anthology of Syriac Writers from Qatar in the Seventh Century, 147–55. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Kozah, Mario. 2017. "The fourth part of Isaac of Nineveh's ascetical homilies in Garshuni", in Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn et al. (eds), In the House of Understanding. Histories in Memory of Kamal S. Salibi, 449–62. Beirut: AUB Press.

Kozah, Mario. 2022. "New evidence for an early Islamic Arabic dialect in Eastern Arabia? The Qaṭrāyīth ('in Qatari') spoken in Beth Qatraye", Journal of Near Eastern Studies 81/1, 71-83.

Lane, Edward William. 1863. An Arabic-English Lexicon. London: Williams and Norgate.

Levene, Abraham. 1951. The Early Syriac Fathers on Genesis from a Syriac Ms. on the Pentateuch in the Mingana Collection. London: Taylor's Foreign Press.

Macdonald, Michael C.A. 2009. "Wheels in a land of camels: another look at the chariot in Arabia", *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 20/2, 156–84.

MacKenzie, David Neil. 1971. A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Payne-Smith, Jessie. 1903. A Compendious Syriac Dictionary. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reinink, Gerrit J. 2013. "The School of Seleucia and the heritage of Nisibis, the 'Mother of Sciences'", in Carla Noce, Massimo Pampaloni, and Claudia Tavolieri (eds), Le vie del sapere in ambito siro-mesopotamico dal III al IX secolo, 115–31. Rome: OCA 293.

Romeny, Bas. 2014. "Syriac biblical interpretation from Qatar: Ahob of Qatar", in Mario Kozah et al. (eds), The Syriac Writers of Qatar in the Seventh Century, 133–55. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Shahîd, Irfan. 1971. The Martyrs of Najrân: New Documents. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes.

Silverstein, Adam. 2007. Postal Systems in the Pre-Modern Islamic World. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Sokoloff, Michael. 2009. A Syriac Lexicon. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Van Rompay, Lucas. 1986. Le commentaire sur Genèse-Exode 9,32 du manuscrit (olim) Diyarbakir 22, CSCO 483-4. Louvain: Peeters.

Van Rompay, Lucas. 2011. "Ḥenanisho' bar Seroshway", in Sebastian P. Brock et al. (eds), The Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage, 195. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press.

Cite this article: Kozah M (2024). Chariots, mail coaches and wagons in the Arabic dialect of *Qaṭrāyīth* ("in Qatari") in early Islamic eastern Arabia. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 87, 87–96. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X23000976