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## Chariots, mail coaches and wagons in the Arabic dialect of *Qaṭrāyīth* (“in Qatari”) in early Islamic eastern Arabia

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### 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 Qaṭraye 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.<sup>1</sup> Best known among them is the ascetic and mystical author Isaac of Nineveh, or Iṣḥāq Qaṭraya, who was born and lived for some time in Beth Qaṭraye, before Catholicos Giwargis took him to Beth Aramaye (Syriac for the

<sup>1</sup> Brock 1999.

southern Iraqi region). After a short-lived episcopate in Nineveh, he withdrew to an eremitic life in Beth Huzaye (al-Ahwaz province, Iran).<sup>2</sup> Another very important monastic author from this region is Dadishoʿ Qaṭraya.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> His work on the liturgy was probably the main source for the short commentary attributed to Abraham Qaṭraya bar Lipeh.<sup>5</sup> Another biblical interpreter frequently quoted in later sources is Aḥub Qaṭraya.<sup>6</sup> 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 Shemʿon of Rev Ardashir.<sup>7</sup>

Newly published research collecting and analysing information on the pre-Islamic and early Islamic historical geography and toponyms of the Beth Qaṭraye 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.<sup>8</sup> 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 *Qaṭrāyīth* 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 *Qaṭrāyīth* 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 *Qaṭrāyīth* 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, *Qaṭrāyīth* 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 Qaṭraye, suggesting that there may have been a Syriac school of exegesis originating from that region in this period, the School of Beth Qaṭraye, dating back to the seventh century at least, with high standards of

<sup>2</sup> For further biographical details see Kozah 2017: 459–62.

<sup>3</sup> For a number of studies on Dadishoʿ Qaṭraya see Kozah et al. 2014. For a selection of his writings see Kozah et al. 2015: 155–253 and Kozah et al. 2016.

<sup>4</sup> See Brock 2014.

<sup>5</sup> For a full edition and translation see Kozah 2015a.

<sup>6</sup> See Romeny 2014: 133–55.

<sup>7</sup> For an edition and translation of the preface see Kozah 2015b.

<sup>8</sup> See Kozah 2021.

learning, comparable in sophistication to the School of Nisibis.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

The source of this gathered *Qaṭrāyīth* vocabulary is a number of East-Syriac biblical commentaries and in particular the so-called East-Syriac *Anonymous Commentary* (AC), a ninth-century work which in its most extended form covers both the Old and New Testaments.<sup>11</sup> The AC contains quotations from two seventh-century biblical commentators from Beth Qaṭraye mentioned above, Aḥub Qaṭraya and Rabban Gabriel Qaṭraya, the latter relied upon as an authority for both the Old and New Testaments, who is at times referred to as Gabriel Qaṭraya, or simply Gabriel or Rabban.<sup>12</sup> 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 Qaṭraye (Qataris) 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 Qaṭraye and the “School” which he refers to throughout the text was one headed by Rabban Gabriel Qaṭraya himself in the Beth Aramaye region.<sup>13</sup> 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 Qaṭraye<sup>14</sup> who would therefore have benefitted from further elucidations and glosses in their own dialect of *Qaṭrāyīth*, a language also used by Aḥub 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, *qarūkhā*, appears in the Peshitta Exodus 14:6,<sup>15</sup> and is explained in the AC,<sup>16</sup> where it is described as being of the type that is drawn by two

<sup>9</sup> Kozah 2022.

<sup>10</sup> See Al Thani et al. 2021.

<sup>11</sup> 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-Diyarbakır 13 (<https://www.vhmmml.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 Irbil (ACE) 21.

<sup>12</sup> Not to be confused with the liturgical commentator Gabriel Qaṭraya bar Lipeh (also sixth/seventh century); see Brock 2011: 171.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Brock 2014: 165–6.

<sup>15</sup> Exodus 14:6 = ܩܪܘܚܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ ܕܥܝܪܐ: “He made ready his chariots, and took his people with him”.

<sup>16</sup> MS Diyarbakır 22 f. 30<sup>r</sup>; Vat. Sir. 578 f. 14<sup>r</sup>.

Notable is the fact that Henanisho<sup>c</sup> bar Seroshway (ninth century),<sup>18</sup> 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 *leṭṭiqīn*. He is cited as stating that *leṭṭiqīn* is a *gawrag*, misspelling the *Qaṭrāyīth* noun *gawzag*, followed by the Arabic transliteration *jawrak*, confirming that it is a misspelling rather than a scribal error.<sup>19</sup> According to Aaron Butts, *leṭṭiqīn* is itself a Greek loanword meaning “small litter” (< Gr *lektikion* < Lat *lectica*).<sup>20</sup> 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), *leṭṭiqīn* 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 *bīspaḳā*, which is itself another loanword ultimately derived from Parthian and referred to in the same AC gloss.

With regard to “He made ready his chariots”, Scripture calls *qarūkhā* that (chariot) which is drawn by two horses which are skilfully fastened and harnessed. Upon them (two horses) there is a *bīspaḳā* which is a certain (type of) litter known in Qatrāyīth as *qawzaq*.<sup>21</sup>

The noun *bīspaḳā* is in fact a loanword in Syriac ultimately derived from the Parthian, specifically meaning wagon or mail coach,<sup>22</sup> a type of litter<sup>23</sup> as the AC commentator defines it. Furthermore, Claudia Ciancaglini reveals the connection of *bīspaḳā* to specifically Sasanian contexts of messengers, postal systems and even hearses,<sup>24</sup> suggesting that the commentator understands the Syriac word for litter (*leḳṭīqīn*) as including both wheeled and wheelless vehicles, unlike the original meaning of the loanword.<sup>25</sup> According to Adam Silverstein the mail coach or royal post-horse (*badespanik*) in

<sup>18</sup> Ḥenanishoʿ bar Seroshway (probably second half of ninth century), the Church of the East bishop of Ḥirta was a lexicographer and biblical interpreter; see Van Rompay 2011: 195.

<sup>22</sup> Syr. ܠܡܥܬܐ *bīspaqā* wagon, mail coach < Parth bayaspak < OIr dvai-aspaka (Sokoloff 2009: 142).

<sup>23</sup> Syr. **ܠܡܝܩܝܢ** *leqtīqīn* litter, bier, pyx, portable altar (Payne-Smith 1903: 245); small litter (Sokoloff 2009: 697).

<sup>24</sup> Ciancaglini 2008: 127.

<sup>25</sup> Notable in this regard is Audo's definition of *leqtīqīn* as “a chariot; wagon”:  (Audo 1897: 29).

Sasanid times probably transported a courier in two-horse teams: the Pahlavi *bayaspanīg* (“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.<sup>26</sup> Since in both versions of the gloss the commentator explains that *bispaqā* is a type of litter,<sup>27</sup> whether the *Qatrāyīth* noun *gawzag* is specifically the semantic equivalent of the wheeled *bispaqā* or more general *leqtīqīn* can only be gleaned by analysing its possible etymological and morphological origins.

It is most likely that the Syriac noun *zawgā*, meaning a two-horse chariot<sup>28</sup> and, therefore, a semantic equivalent of *bispaqā*, is the origin of the *Qaṭrāyīth* 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.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the Persianate ending in *gawzag* might suggest that the noun may have been indirectly borrowed into the *Qaṭrāyīth* via Pahlavi, although no Pahlavi semantic equivalent could be found resembling it. If *zawgā* is indeed the origin of *gawzag* then the gloss in both versions of the AC commentary would indicate that *bispaqā* is known as *gawzag* in *Qaṭrāyīth*, where the connection between them is reflected in the shared sense of “two” (horses) found in both nouns (as *bī* 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 *leqtīqīn* is specifically mentioned as meaning *gawzag* in *Qaṭrāyīth*, we have either a clarificatory intervention by the scribe who is unaware of the meaning of *bīspaḳā* in Syriac and its semantic and morphological connection with *gawzag*,<sup>30</sup> 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 (*leqtīqīn*) 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, *ʿaḡaltā*,<sup>31</sup> is given in both the Peshitta Genesis 45:19/21<sup>32</sup> and in the AC and MS (olim) Diyarbakır 22,<sup>33</sup> where it is first glossed using the unidentified

<sup>26</sup> Silverstein 2007: 24.

<sup>27</sup> Notwithstanding Thomas Audo's later definition of *leqtīqīn*.

<sup>28</sup> Yoke, chariot for two horses (Payne-Smith 1903: 111–2); yoke, pair, two-horse chariot (Sokoloff 2009: 369);

കർമ്മങ്ങൾ പിൽ നില പൂർണ്ണമാക്കി (Audio 1897: 260).

<sup>29</sup> Ar.  $\text{zawj}$   $\text{zawj}$  a pair, or couple, i.e. any two things paired or coupled together (Lane 1863: 1266);  $\text{jawz}$   $\text{jawz}$  (for  $\text{zawj}$ ) husband, pair (Hava 1915: 100).

<sup>30</sup> That this may be a case of dittography (unintentional repetition of *leqṭiqin* by the scribe) is possible but unlikely given the clear punctuation.

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

[illegible]

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







relevant that Henanisho<sup>c</sup> bar Seroshway, cited in the Lexicon of Bar Bahlul, clearly relies on Rabban Gabriel Qaṭraya's gloss here, but conflates the definitions of both *bīnā* and *sīhā* as meaning tamarisk.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, bar Seroshway records Rabban's Qaṭrāyīth 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.<sup>47</sup> If this is indeed a Qaṭrāyīth 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,<sup>48</sup> where it appears recorded in the Syriac script as ܐܬܪܐܬܐ, 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 *tā' 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 Qaṭrāyīth 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 Qaṭrāyīth *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 interdental fricatives 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.<sup>49</sup> 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 Qaṭrāyīth 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 Qaṭraya's own Qaṭrāyīth 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 Qaṭrāyīth 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*,<sup>50</sup> 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 *aṣīr*<sup>51</sup>

Given that no Pahlavi gloss is given, nor is there a Pahlavi semantic equivalent that resembles the Qaṭrāyīth term for saw, one is left with the possibility that the Arabic *ma'āshīr*, or "saws", may ultimately be the source of *aṣīr*,<sup>52</sup> 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",<sup>53</sup> Michael Macdonald concludes at the very outset that the existence of rock

<sup>46</sup> Duval 1901: 1340.

<sup>47</sup> Duval 1901: 384.

<sup>48</sup> L2 xxii.3. See Shahīd 1971: 90.

<sup>49</sup> Holes 1983: 36.

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

<sup>51</sup> Diyarbakır 22 f. 104<sup>r</sup> l. 33: ܐܬܪܐܬܐ ܡܥܬܐܬܐ ܡܥܬܐܬܐ ܡܥܬܐܬܐ.

<sup>52</sup> Ar. مَشَار pl. مَشَائِر *mi'shār pl. ma'āshīr* saw, instrument with which wood is divided (Lane 1863: 62); saw (Hava 1915: 9).

<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> 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.”,<sup>55</sup> 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”.<sup>56</sup> 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”.<sup>57</sup>

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 desert<sup>58</sup> and where such forms of wheeled transport were unlikely to develop was not the case in Beth Qaṭraye. Indeed, the fact that *Qaṭrāyīth* maintained two specific words for two different modes of wheeled transport, *gawzag* for chariot and *shaqar* 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 Qaṭraye 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.<sup>59</sup> 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.

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<sup>54</sup> Macdonald 2009: 156.

<sup>55</sup> Bulliet 1990: 22.

<sup>56</sup> Macdonald 2009: 190.

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