


Strangers *par excellence*. Arabs in the Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions

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ABSTRACT: The basic questions posed in the article were: what characteristics caused Arabs to be perceived by the elites of the Neo-Assyrian Empire as strangers, and whether such classification resulted in their treatment differently from other peoples? Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions and correspondence with the court were analysed to answer these questions. On this basis, three features that together are unique only to Arabs were distinguished: nomadism, camel farming and the presence of queens. These traits are unique to Arabs, so they are strangers *par excellence* from Assyria's perspective. Interestingly, these features generally do not result in exceptional treatment. Only in a situation of conflict and defeat of the Arabs can one perceive their specific treatment, marked by exceptional cruelty even for Assyrians. For example, mainly Arab rulers were chained along with wild animals to the gates of the Assyrian capital. Moreover, only Arab women were subjected to tearing unborn children out of their wombs. This shows that Arabs were treated as half-humans against whom the most heinous crimes could be committed because Assyrians were not bound by the standards applicable to other peoples.

KEYWORDS: Assyria, Arabs, nomadism, camel, queen, cruelty, stranger

Each community develops certain characteristics that allow it to distinguish itself from others. They are particularly pronounced when dealing with 'strangers' and make it possible to distinguish between them and 'our people.' Much of the scientific work focuses on demonstrating these characteristics. While this is most certainly important, in reality, it is only half the job. The next step is to ask ourselves what results from becoming aware of the 'strangeness' of these other people. According to the cultural pattern, how should you treat these 'strangers,' especially when they fundamentally differ from 'our people'? This article focuses on royal sources from the Neo-Assyrian period. The Assyrians found it easy to determine who was a 'stranger.' Both the written sources and the iconography show that the 'stranger' category includes such peoples as the Elamites, the Uartians and various Western Semitic states of the Levant. Even if they differed ethnically, all of them had a similar social organisation to the Assyrians. This was different when it came to nomadic tribes, which were portrayed not only as 'strange' but also 'savage.' As such, they were strangers *par excellence*. This article focuses on this very issue, i.e. how the 'savage stranger' was perceived and treated in Neo-Assyrian sources. In other words, it aims to find the distinguishing characteristics of the 'savage stranger' and determine if he was treated in some specific way or simply deemed yet

another ‘stranger.’ The ‘savage stranger’ group included various peoples, including the Cimmerians and the Scythians. Yet it was the Arabs who appeared in the Neo-Assyrian sources most often, and as such, they are the key focus of this article. The royal inscriptions were chosen as primary source material because they perfectly reflect the outlook of the Assyrian elite and, importantly, are relatively numerous, which allows us to avoid relying on random, isolated mentions that could distort the picture. Another argument for using them is the RINAP series edition of the royal Neo-Assyrian inscriptions, which is nearing completion.¹ The SAA series letters have also been added to the set of inscriptions,² thus presenting the whole outlook of the same milieu of Assyrian elites associated with the royal court.

Analysis

1. Introductory Remarks

First, it must be noted that the division between the civilised, settled inhabitants of Mesopotamia and the savage, nomadic inhabitants of the deserts, steppes and mountains had always been present. It is already evident in mythological texts. One merely needs to recall the description of Enkidu in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*: “he knows not at all a people nor even a country” (i.e. he is not a member of a settled people), “jostling at the water-hole with the herd,” “he wanders over the hills all day” (see *Epic of Gilgamesh* I:108.111.126 and parallel texts).³ This is a typical image of a savage man – a nomad wandering with his herds – as opposed to settled farmers. Part of civilising the ‘savage’ includes introducing him to a cult he does not know – in this case, the cult of Ishtar – through seduction by the hierodule Shamhat. The appearance of nomads among the settled inhabitants of Mesopotamia inevitably brought about conflict. Worse still, if the nomads managed to dominate civilised farmers for whatever reason, the ‘savages’ were portrayed in a clearly negative light in the sources. For example, the Guteans were described in historical texts in the following manner: “Gu[tium], the fanged serpent of the mountain, who acted with violence against the gods, who carried off the kingship of the land of Sumer to the mountain land, who fi[l]ed the land of Sumer with wickedness, who took away the wife from the one who had a wife, who took away the child from the one who had a child, who put wickedness and evil in the land (of Sumer) ... Gutium, the fanged serpent of the mountain – drank water (from[?]) the watercourses.”⁴ Thus, the image of Arabs in Neo-Assyrian sources is not isolated but somewhat of a continuation of Mesopotamian traditions of contrasting settled, civilised farmers and savage nomads.

1 Available both in a book version and at <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap/>.

2 Also available at <http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/saao/>.

3 A.R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003) I, 544–545.

4 RIME 2, Utu-hegal E2.13.6.4:1–14.124–126.

It is important to note that the term ‘Arabs’ in Mesopotamian sources defines the Arabs not so much in an ethnolinguistic sense but rather in a social sense. In practice, the term ‘Arabs’ in Neo-Assyrian texts simply means (semi-)nomads, primarily from northern Sinai, northern Arabia and the Syrian Desert. They did not necessarily have to speak a language belonging to the South-West Semitic group. They may also have spoken a language closer to Aramaic from the North-West Semitic group.⁵ Their way of life was a much more crucial factor than their language. They lived primarily in tents or temporary, non-fortified encampments and travelled from one place to another along with their herds. They mainly kept sheep and camels, and their livelihood was animal breeding. At times, they would raid permanent settlements in areas adjacent to the steppe/semi-desert that was their home.⁶ The names of Arabia and Arabs were recorded differently in cuneiform sources but always close enough that recognising them was not an issue.⁷

With the above introductory remarks in mind, we may now proceed to the next part of this article, which aims to find the characteristics distinguishing Arabs from other peoples in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions. It is possible to provide a preliminary list of such features:

- A. Living in portable encampments (usually tents) in desert areas.
- B. Using camels.
- C. The supreme authority of queens.

Although the individual features mentioned can sometimes be attributed to other peoples, together, they only apply to the Arabs. They will be discussed below, along with examples from the sources in which they occur.

2. Nomadism

The Arabs’ first specific characteristic is nomadism, the expression of which was generally living in tents. As mentioned above, nomadism had been seen as a distinguishing feature of strangers since the beginning of Mesopotamian civilisation and, of course, does not apply only to Arabs.⁸ The Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions also refer to other peoples as tent dwellers, i.e. nomads (e.g. Arameans and Suteans, see RINAP 2, Sargon II 74; VII 57–58). Yet nomadism remained a constant distinguishing feature of the Arabs since, unlike peoples such as the Arameans, the Arabs residing in areas within reach of the Assyrians did not

5 R. Zadok, “Arabians in Mesopotamia during the Late-Assyrian, Chaldean, Achaemenian and Hellenistic Periods Chiefly According to the Cuneiform Sources,” *ZDMG* 131 (1981) 44.

6 I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs. Nomads on the Border of the Fertile Crescent 9th–5th Centuries B.C.* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1984) 5.

7 ^{kur}a-ri-bi, ^{kur}a-ru-bu, ^{kur}a-ra-bi, ^{kur}ar-ba-a-a, ^{kur}ar-bá-a-a, ^{kur}ár-bá-a-a, ^{lú/kur}a-ri-bi, ^{lú}ari-bi, ^{lú}a-ru-bu, ^{lú}a-ra-bi, ^{lú}a-ra-bu, ^{lú}ar-a-bi, ^{lú}ar-ba-a-a, ^{lú}ár-ba-a-a, see Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs*, 6.

8 For more, see Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs*, 10–11.

shift towards a settled lifestyle.⁹ Hence, Assyrian art portrayed the Arabs as people living in tents. A good example of this is a relief from Ashurbanipal's North Palace (Room L, Slab 9, BM 124927), showing the pillage and destruction of an Arab camp.¹⁰ Attempts by the Assyrian rulers to force a settled lifestyle upon the conquered tribes failed to change the nomadic nature of the Arabs (see RINAP 2, Sargon II 1:120–123 below and the parallel slightly shorter text of Sargon II 43:20).

Notably, some texts mention Arab 'strongholds' (URU *dan-nu-tu* LÚ *a-ri-bi*, RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 1 IV 1); however, such mentions are not only exceptional but also the character of these 'strongholds' remains difficult to determine. The remarks on cities where the Arabs took shelter are no less questionable. It is unclear whether these cities actually belonged to the Arabs and, more importantly, what exactly the sources refer to as a 'city.' The doubt about the term 'city' in the context of the Arabs is well illustrated by a passage in Sennacherib's inscription, stating that: "They (=Arabs) abandoned their tents and fled for (their) lives [to the city ...] and the city Adummatu. [(As for) the city... and the city Ad]ummatu, which are located in the desert, [...] a place of thirst in whi[ch] there is no pasture (or) watering-place, [...]" (Sennacherib 35:r.55'–58'). Based on this source alone, it is difficult to determine what Adummatu and the other city, whose name has not survived, actually were. Undoubtedly, both lay in the desert and were not the permanent home of the Arab tribes – after all, they lived in 'their tents.' It seems that this fragment may refer to oases, some of the more common places of stay for nomads, though it would still be rather difficult to refer to them as 'cities,' construed as permanent habitats surrounded by walls. One source implying that oases may have been referred to as cities is Ashurbanipal's inscription, which mentions that Ashurbanipal set up guardposts: "In the cities Manḥabbi, Apparū, Tenuqurī, Ṣayuran, Marqanā, Saratein, Enzikarme, Tā'nā, (and) Sarāqa, where(ever there was) a spring (or) a source of water..." (Ashurbanipal 11 IX 27–31). Significantly, none of the inscriptions that mention Arab 'cities' occupied by the Assyrians refers to the demolition of walls or palaces, which would indicate the existence of typical urban buildings and would be in line with the standard descriptions of captured cities in the Levant. All this suggests that Arabs are not actually portrayed as settled urban dwellers, despite the use of the pre-determinative URU to denote their settlements in the inscriptions. Instead, it signifies a place of a long-term encampment at water sources (in oases), probably with partly permanent buildings that would be left behind once the tribe moved to another location for some reason.

9 This does not mean that all inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula were nomads during the Neo-Assyrian period. There were also settled or semi-settled peoples among them; see J. Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity. Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (Abingdon – New York: RoutledgeCurzon 2003) 107–108. For example, the origins of the Saba state in today's Yemen date to the mid-eighth century BC, possibly influenced by Assyrian models. However, it does not seem realistic that the Assyrians would have ventured that far south, see E. Frahm (ed.), *A Companion to Assyria* (New Haven, CT: Blackwell 2017) 302.

10 J. Reade, "Assyrian Illustrations of Arabs," *Arabia and her Neighbours. Essays on Prehistorical and Historical Developments. Essays Presented in Honour of Beatrice de Cardi* (eds. C.S. Phillips – D.T. Potts – S. Searight) (Turnhout: Brepols 1998) 226.

Besides pointing out that Arabs were nomadic (they lived in tents), Neo-Assyrian sources also emphasise that they inhabited the desert (*madbaru*). Occasionally, the inscriptions also mention that this is an area where one suffers thirst, e.g. "[the de]sert, a place (where one is always) thirsty"; "the desert, [...] a place of thirst in whi[ch] there is no pasture (or) watering-place"; "a land of parching thirst," etc.). They also speak of the extraordinary numbers of dangerous animals (snakes and scorpions) inhabiting the desert: "where snakes and scorpions fill the plain like ants" (RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 1 IV 56 and parallel texts). It is noticed a complete absence in the desert of any land animals or even birds: "the desert, a distant place where there are no creatures of the steppe and (where) no bird of the heavens makes (its) nest" (RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 VIII 108–110). Certainly, human habitation in the desert was so important (astounding? – who could possibly live in a desert, and permanently at that!) to the Assyrian rulers that the Assyrian kings repeatedly found it worthy of inclusion in their inscriptions. Thus, in the eyes of the Assyrians, the Arabs were not just nomads – there were, after all, more such tribes – but nomads from the depths of the desert, which lent them uniqueness. This made them an unusual kind of 'strangers'.

As was usually the case with nomads, the Arabs not only moved with their flocks as shepherds but also engaged in trade and plunder. While the former posed no threat from the perspective of the Mesopotamian people¹¹ – indeed, it was even desirable – the latter was clearly viewed negatively. Assyrian sources (though not royal inscriptions) make several mentions of the plundering raids of the Arabs. Letters from the time of Sargon II mention Arab robberies several times. The first letter vaguely refers to an attack on Sippar (SAA 1, 84:o.11–rev.8). Another mentions problems with hungry Arabs who had nowhere to graze their flocks due to drought and thus resorted to robbery (SAA 1, 82:rev.1–7). Another speaks of an attack by a 300 camel-strong Arab raiding party on an Assyrian caravan with loot. Although the attack was repulsed, the pursuit of the assailants was unsuccessful, as the terrain proved too tricky for Assyrian horsemen and chariots (SAA 1, 175:4–37). A letter from the era of Ashurbanipal also indirectly mentions attacks by Arabs – it states that attacks on cities ceased after the Qedarites were defeated (SAA 18, 144:rev.4'–7'). Other letters from the time of this ruler explicitly mention the capture of fifty Assyrian merchants by Arabs in Babylonia. However, this time, the intervention of the governor of the city of Birati resulted in some of the kidnappers being captured and impaled. Further investigation into the matter was ongoing (SAA 18, 148:o.7–rev.12; SAA 18, 149:o.8–rev.11). Bearing in mind the above references to Arab assaults on settled city dwellers, it is possible to reconstruct the stereotypical image of the Arab during the Assyrian empire: one of a savage desert nomad who slept in a tent and could be as much a merchant as a robber. Indeed, this image was sufficiently 'strange' to create distrust.

Below are those excerpts from Assyrian royal inscriptions which indicate that the Arabs were desert nomads (living in tents).

¹¹ For a more extensive account of Arab-Assyrian trade contacts, see R. Byrne, "Early Assyrian Contacts with Arabs and the Impact on Levantine Vassal Tribute," *BASOR* 331 (2003) 11–25.

- i) RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 42:22'–25' (= Tiglath-pileser III 48:25'–26'; = Tiglath-pileser III 49:rev.19–20): “Moreover, she (= Samsi, queen of Arabs), in order to save her life, [... (and) set out] like a female onager [to the de]sert, a place (where one is always) thirsty. [I set the rest of her possessions] (and) her [ten]ts, her people's safeguards within her camp, [on fire].”
- ii) RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 44:4' (= Tiglath-pileser III 49:rev.17): “[As for Samsi, queen of] the Arabs, at Mount Sa[urri, I ...] her [en]tire camp [...].”
- iii) RINAP 2, Sargon II 1:121: “(As for) the Tamudu, [I]bādidi, Marsīma[ni], (and) Ḫayappa (tribes), faraway Arabs who live in the desert, did not know (either) overseer (or) commander, and had never brought their tribute to any king, I struck them down with the sword of the god Aššur, my lord, deported the remainder of them, and (re)settled (them) in the city Samaria.”
- iv) SAA 1, Sargon II 82:o.5–9. rev.12–18: “As to the A[rabs concerning whom the king, my lord] wrote to me: ‘[Why] do they graze [their sheep and] camel[s in the desert where they must resort to plundering] when hungry?’ ... they should (then) ask me for a territory where to gra[ze]. All the same, [their] tents should [remain] in the territory of the [governor] of Calah (while) they are grazing in [.....]”
- v) RINAP 3/1, Sennacherib 35:53'–58': “[... Te'elḫu]nu, queen of the Arabs, in the middle of the desert [...] I took away [...] thousand camels from her. She [...] with Hazael. [Terror of doing battle wi]th me overwhelmed them. They abandoned their tents and fled for (their) lives [to the city ...] and the city Adummatu. [(As for) the city... and the city Ad]ummatu, which are located in the desert, [...] a place of thirst in whi[ch] there is no pasture (or) watering-place, [...].”
- vi) RIANP 4, Esarhaddon 1 IV 53–57 (= Esarhaddon 2 III 9–14; = Esarhaddon 3 III 13'–17'; = Esarhaddon 4 II' 25'–29'; = Esarhaddon 8 I' 13'–16'): “(As for) the land Bāzu, a district in a remote place, a forgotten place of dry land, saline ground, a place of thirst, one hundred and twenty leagues of desert, thistles, and gazelle-tooth stones, where snakes and scorpions fill the plain like ants.” It is worth noting that the land Bāzu has a name very close to the noun *bāṣu*, meaning ‘sand.’
- vii) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 3 VII 88 – VIII 4 (= Ashurbanipal 4 VIII 2–7; = Ashurbanipal 7 X 10–16): “I se[n]t troops of mi[ne who] were stationed [on the border of his land against him (and) (viii) 1) they brought about their defeat. They struck down with the sword the people of the land of the Arabs, as many as had risen up against me, (and) set fire to pavilion(s and) tents, their abodes, (and thus) consigned (them) to the god Gīra.”
- viii) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 8 IX 1"–3" (= Ashurbanipal 172:r8'–9'; = Ashurbanipal 194 II 46–48): “[I inflicted a heavy] defeat on A[diya, the queen of the land of the Arabs. I burned] her tents [with fire. I captured] her alive (and) brought her [to Assyria], together with the plunder of [her land].”

- ix) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 VII 121–122: “They (my troops) set fire to pavilion(s) and tents, their (= Arabs) abodes, (and thus) burned (them) with fire.”
- x) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 VIII 87–96 (= Ashurbanipal 194 III 27–34): “(Over) desert — a place of parching thirst in which no bird of the heavens flies (and) where no onagers (or) gazelles graze — a distance of one hundred leagues from Nineveh, the city loved by the goddess Ištar — the wife of the god Enlil — they advanced (and) marched in pursuit of Uaite’, the king of the land of the Arabs, and Abī-Yate’, who had come with forces of the land of the Nabayateans.”
- xi) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 VIII 104–110 (= Ashurbanipal 194 III 43–50; = Ashurbanipal 22 I’ 6’–7’): “My troops drew water to (fill) their drinking vessel(s), and (then) advanced (and) marched (through) a land of parching thirst (lit. ‘a land of thirst (and) a place of parching’) as far as the city Ḥurārīna, (which is) between the cities Yarki and Azalla, in the desert, a distant place where there are no creatures of the steppe and (where) no bird of the heavens makes (its) nest.” The war against the confederation of Atar-samayin and Nabayateans.
- xii) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 VIII 120 – IX 2 (= Ashurbanipal 194 III 59 – IV 4): “They (my troops) advanced (and) marched from the city Azalla to the city Quraṣiti, a distance of six leagues (through) a place of parching thirst. They (lit. ‘I’) surrounded the confederation of the god Atar-samayin and the Qederites of Uaite’, son of Bir-Dada, the king of the land of the Arabs.” The war against the confederation of Atar-samayin and the Qederites of Uaite’.
- xiii) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 IX 25–37 (Ashurbanipal 22 I’ 6”–9” is very similar): “The fugitives who had fled from my weapons became frightened (and) took to Mount Ḥukkūrūna, a rugged mountain. In the cities Manḥabbi, Apparu, Tenuquri, Ṣayuran, Marqanâ, Saratein, Enzikarme, Ta’nâ, (and) Saraqa, where(ever there was) a spring (or) a source of water, as many as there were, I had guards stationed over (them) and (thus) I withheld (from them) the water (which) sustains their live(s). I made drink scarce for their mouths (and) they laid down (their) live(s) from parching thirst. (As for) the rest (of them), they cut open the camels that they rode (and) drank the blood and the liquid from the excrement to (quench) their thirst.” The war against the confederation of Abi-Yate’ the Qederite.

3. Camels

Camel breeding was the second trait that was peculiar to the Arabs in the eyes of the Assyrians.¹² This is not to say that camels appear in Neo-Assyrian sources only in association with the Arabs; however, they are by far the most commonly associated with camels. Thus, an

¹² Cf. Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity*, 116: “The ‘arab, from their first appearance in the sources, are connected with the camel and this animal follows them through their history.”

image emerges of a desert nomad who wanders around with an animal unknown to the civilised world – the camel. Notably, archaeozoological data indicate that the camel (*Camelus dromedarius*) was not domesticated until after 1000 BC, somewhere in the south of the Arabian Peninsula,¹³ and was previously known only as a wild animal. Thus, the arrival of the domesticated camel (10th century BC) roughly coincides with the appearance of the Arabs in Neo-Assyrian sources (9th century BC). By no means does this imply that only Arabs bred camels; however, there is no doubt that they were the ones who used these animals most extensively, thus leading to an association between themselves and camels. Even the Akkadian terms for camels (*gam(m)alu*, *bakkaru*, *anaqātu*, *ibilu*) seem to be borrowings from Arabic.¹⁴ The very first chronological mention of the Arabs in a royal inscription concerning the Battle of Qarqar (853 BC) also mentions camels – as many as one thousand. The Arabs' unique relationship with this animal is further underlined because none of the other contingents of the alliance that fought the Assyrians at Qarqar had camels in their ranks. Indeed, the camel appeared in Assyrian iconography almost simultaneously. Admittedly, this is not a representation related to the Battle of Qarqar but a depiction of Assyrian spoils being brought into an Assyrian city five years earlier, which included a pair of camels.¹⁵ Later, during the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, there were claims of as many as 30,000 camels captured as booty from the Arabs. Characteristically, camels as Assyrian war loot are by far mentioned the most frequently in the context of battles with Arab tribes. They appear only sporadically in the accounts of clashes with other peoples (e.g. Chaldeans). The close connection between Arabs and camels is also evident in Assyrian art, where one can find depictions of Arabs fighting on camels and camels captured during battles against them. These widely known depictions appeared during the reigns of both Tiglath-pileser III and Ashurbanipal.¹⁶ The association between the Arabs and camels was not evident to the Assyrians alone. In this regard, it is worth pointing to a description dating back to the mid-8th century (the moment of Assyria's weakness), which describes the deeds of Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur, a governor of the land of Suḥu that had closer ties to Babylonia. The governor mentions his ambush on an Arab merchant caravan from the land of Tema and Saba, resulting in the capture of 200 pack camels (RIMB 2, Ninurta-kudurri-uṣur S.O.1002.2 IV 26'–38'). Thus, in the first half of the first millennium BC, the Arabs appeared as the most prominent camel

13 P. Magee, "When Was the Dromedary Domesticated in the Ancient Near East?," *ZOA* 8 (2015) 272; cf. "There is no evidence for a wide-spread adoption of the camel into Near Eastern economies until the beginning of the first millennium BCE" (M. Heide, "The Domestication of the Camel: Biological, Archaeological and Inscriptional Evidence from Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel and Arabia, and Traditional Evidence from the Hebrew Bible," *UF* 42 [2011] 368). For the Negev, an even more precise date has been proposed: no earlier than the last thirty years of the 10th century BC; see L. Sapir-Hen – E. Ben-Yosef, "The Introduction of Domestic Camels to the Southern Levant: Evidence from the Arava Valley," *TA* 40 (2013) 277–285.

14 M. Krebernik, "Von Gindibu bis Muḥammad: Stand, Probleme und Aufgaben altorientalistisch-arabistischer Philologie," *Studien zur Semitistik und Arabistik. Festschrift für Hartmut Bobzin zum 60. Geburtstag* (eds. O. Jastrow – S. Talay – H. Hafenrichter) (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz 2008) 259.

15 L.W. King, *Bronze Reliefs from the Gates of Shalmaneser King of Assyria B.C. 860–825* (London: British Museum 1915) pls. XXIII–XXIV.

16 See Reade, "Assyrian Illustrations of Arabs," 221–223, 227.

breeders among all peoples of Mesopotamia. It must be noted that Mesopotamia's peoples associated both the Arabs' way of life (nomadism) and their most characteristic livestock animal – the camel – with savagery and strangeness.

Below are excerpts from Assyrian royal inscriptions which indicate that the Arabs bred camels and that camels were taken from them as war booty.¹⁷

- i) RIMA 3, Shalmaneser III A.O.102.2:94: “1,000 camels of Gindibu of the Arabs” are mentioned among the opponents at the Battle of Qarqar.
- ii) RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 15:4–5: Among tribute-paying rulers is “Zabibe, queen of the Arabs.” The following are listed as part of the tribute: “camels, she-camels together with their young.”
- iii) RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 35 III 22–23: A slightly different list of tribute-paying rulers mentions: “Zabibe, queen of the Arabs.” The following are listed as part of the tribute: “camels, she-camels.”
- iv) RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 42:19'–22:25'–26' (only the second part of inscription = Tiglath-pileser III 48:27'; = Tiglath-pileser III 49:rev.21–22): “As for Samsi, queen of the Arabs, at Mount Saqurri, [I] de[feated 9,400 (of her people)]. I took away (from her) 1,000 people, 30,000 camels, 20,000 oxen, [...] ..., 5,000 (pouches) of all types of aromatics, ..., thrones of her gods, [the military equipment (and) staffs of her goddess(es)], (and) her property. ... [Samsi] became startled [by] my mighty [weapon]s and she brought camels, she-camels, [with their young], to Assyria, befo[re] me.”
- v) RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 42:32' (= Tiglath-pileser III 44:13'–14'; Tiglath-pileser III 49:rev.21–22): “The people of the cities Mas'a (and) Tema, the (tribe) Saba, the people of the cities [Ḥayappa, Badanu], (and) Ḥatte, (and) the (tribes) Idiba'ilu, [...], who are on the border of the western lands, [whom none (of my predecessors) had known about, and whose country is remo]te, [heard about] the fame of my majesty (and) [my heroic deeds, and (thus) they beseeched] my lordship. As one, [they brought before me] gold, silver, [camels, she-camels], (and) all types of aromatics] as their payment [and they kissed] my feet.”
- vi) RINAP 2, Sargon II 1:125a (slightly shorter version = Sargon II 7:27): “[I] received as tribute from Pir'u (Pharaoh), king of Egypt, Sa[m]si, queen of the Arabs, (and) It'amar, the Sabaeen, kings from the seashore and desert, gold — ore from the mountain(s) — precious stones, elephant ivory, seed(s) from ebony tree(s), every kind of aromatic, horses, (and) camels.”
- vii) SAA 1, Sargon II 82:o.7: “As to the A[rabs concerning whom the king, my lord] wrote to me: ‘[Why] do they graze [their sheep and] camel[s] in the desert where they must resort to plundering] when hungry?’”

¹⁷ Apart from the royal inscriptions, mention can also be made of the above letter to Sargon II, describing an attack by an Arab raiding party riding 300 camels (SAA 1, 175:4–37).

- viii) SAA 11, 162:rev.4: The letter mentions – in addition to the captured fugitives – about “125 stray camels” captured by Assyrians.
- ix) RINAP 3/1, Sennacherib 1:27 (= Sennacherib 213:29): “I captured alive Adīnu, a nephew of Marduk-apla-iddina (II) (Merodach-baladan), together with Basqānu, a brother of Iatī’e, queen of the Arabs, along with their troops. I seized the chariots, wagons, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, (and) Bactrian camels that he had abandoned during the battle.”
- x) RINAP 3/1, Sennacherib 35:54’: “[... Tē’elḥu]nu, queen of the Arabs, in the middle of the desert [...] I took away [...] thousand camels from her.”
- xi) RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 1 IV 17–21 (= Esarhaddon 4 II’ 23’–24’; = Esarhaddon 6 III 11’–14’; = Esarhaddon 31:r.4–6): “I added sixty-five camels (and) ten donkeys to the previous tribute and imposed (it) on him (= Hazael, the king of the Arabs). Hazael died and I placed Iautā’, his son, on his throne. I added ten minas of gold, one thousand choice stones, fifty camels, (and) one hundred bags of aromatics to the tribute of his father and imposed (it) on him.”
- xii) RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 34:r.2 “I col[lected] camels from all of the Arab kings”.
- xiii) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 3 VIII 5–15 (= Ashurbanipal 4 VIII 8–18; = Ashurbanipal 7 X 17–27; = Ashurbanipal 11 IX 42–52; slightly shorter version = Ashurbanipal 22 I’ 10”–14”). After the war against the Arabs led by Uaitē’: “They (= Assyrian soldiers) carried off without number oxen, sheep and goats, donkeys, camels, (and) people. They fi[l]led (with them) the whole extent of the land, in its entirety, to all of its border(s). I apportioned camels like sheep and goats (and) divided (them) among the people of Assyria (so that) within my country they (the Assyrians) could purchase a camel for one shekel (or even) a half shekel of silver at the market gate. The female tavern keeper for a serving, the beer brewer for a jug (of beer), (and) the gardener for (his) bag of vegetables were regularly receiving [cam]els and slaves.”
- xiv) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 3 VIII 29 (= Ashurbanipal 4 VIII 33; = Ashurbanipal 6 X 11’; = Ashurbanipal 7 X 10’): “Abi-Yatē’, son of Tē’ri, came to Nineveh and kissed my feet. I concluded a treaty with him to do obeisance to me. I installed him as king in place of Iautā’. I imposed upon him gold, eyestones, pappardilū-stone, kohl, camels, (and) prime quality donkeys as annual payment.” The fragment of the above-mentioned treaty with Abī-Yatē’ can be found in SAA 2, 10.
- xv) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 VIII 114: “They (lit. ‘I’) brought about the defeat of the Yisamme’, the confederation of the god Atar-samayin, and the Nabayateans. They (lit. ‘I’) plundered countless people, donkeys, camels, and sheep and goats.”
- xvi) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 IX 5 (= Ashurbanipal 194 IV 7): “They (lit. ‘I’) surrounded the confederation of the god Atar-samayin and the Qederites of Uaitē’, son of Bir-Dāda, the king of the land of the Arabs. (As for) his gods, his mother, his sisters, his wife, his family, the people of the land Qedar, all (of it), donkeys, camels,

and sheep and goats, as many as I had captured with the support of (the god) Aššur and the goddess Ištar, my lords, I made their feet take the road to Damascus.”

- xvii) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 IX 36 (very similar is Ashurbanipal 22 I’ 10”). The war against a confederation of Abī-Yate’ the Qederite: “I made drink scarce for their (= Arab) mouths (and) they laid down (their) live(s) from parching thirst. (As for) the rest (of them), they cut open the camels that they rode (and) drank the blood and the liquid from the excrement to (quench) their thirst.”
- xviii) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 IX 65: “The foal (of camels), the foal (of donkeys), the calf, (and) the spring lamb sucked more than seven times at (their) wet nurses and (yet) they could not satisfy their stomachs with milk. The people of the land of the Arabs constantly asked one another: (ix 70) ‘Why have evil deeds such as these (lit. ‘this’) befallen the land of the Arabs?’”

4. Queens

Another factor that very clearly distinguishes the Arabs from the Assyrians, but also from other Middle Eastern peoples, is female leadership. Neo-Assyrian sources repeatedly refer to Arab queens (*šar-rat* KUR *a-ri-bi*). In total, the Assyrian sources mention seven such queens: Zabibe, Samsi, Yati’e, Apkallatu,¹⁸ Te’elḥunu, Tabū’a and Adiya. At the same time, one can be certain that they refer to actual female rulers and not the wives of kings.¹⁹ It is worth mentioning that apart from the Assyrian sources, the phenomenon of queens ruling over the Arabs is also mentioned in the Bible, which speaks of the Queen of Saba (1 Kgs 10:1–13 // 2 Chr 9:1–12). Undoubtedly, the patriarchal societies of the Middle East must have seen female leadership as part of an alien tradition. Since this tradition was also associated with savage nomads, it must be assumed that the reign of women was also seen as a sign of otherness and primitivism. The isolated instances where women briefly

18 There is debate as to the name of this queen since this word may also be the title ‘wise woman’; see M. Maraqtēn, “Der Afkal/Apkallu im arabischen Bereich: eine epigraphische Untersuchung,” *Assyriologica et Semitica. Festschrift für Joachim Oelsner anlässlich seines 65. Geburtstages am 18 Februar 1997* (eds. J. Marzahn – H. Neumann) (AOAT 252; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag 2000) 264–266. The author in question suggests that this term denotes a priestess. Eckart Frahm (*A Companion to Assyria*, 301) also agrees with Mohammed Maraqtēn in this regard. Nonetheless, in the phrase *‘ap-kal-la-tū šar-rat LÚ a-ri-bi*, Apkallatu serves as a name. Even if it was the title of an Arab queen-priestess, the Assyrian scribes apparently recognised it as a proper name. Another puzzling issue is that this term does not appear in relation to other Arab queens. Most important, however, is the fact that the sources do not recognise Queen Apkallatu and Queen Te’elḥunu to be one and the same, contrary to Maraqtēn’s claims (“Der Afkal/Apkallu,” 264). He also unjustifiably suggests combining the term *apkallatu* with *kumirtu* (Te’elḥunu was the *kumirtu* of the goddess Dilbat). Furthermore, Maraqtēn’s linking of the goddess Dilbat with the deity Atar-samain (¹*a-tar-sa-ma-in*, ²*a-tar-sa-ma-a-in*) is incorrect, as this is the male deity called Ashtar of Heavens (see RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 1 IV 10 = 6 III 5’ = 97:10; RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 3 VII 82 = 4 VII 85 = 7 IX 69’ = 86 III 7’), which should be identified with Ashtarū (‘*itr*’), for instance, known from Ugarit or with Ashtar-Chemosh appearing on the Mesha Stele (‘*štr-kms*’), l. 17.

19 Frahm, *A Companion to Assyria*, 301.

held power in the Middle Eastern states (e.g. Hatshepsut), and only on behalf of men, could not change this outlook. Apart from the queens, Arabs kings (Hazeal, Iauta', Uabu, Abi-Yate', Uaite') also appear in the sources. The increase in the role of kings at the expense of queens among the Arab tribes seems evident since the time of Esarhaddon and may have been due to the influence of Assyrian patterns.²⁰ Notably, while kings of various localities or lands (e.g. Bazu, Saba), which can be recognised as areas inhabited by Arabs, also appear in the sources, they do not bear the title of the 'King of the Arabs.' The queens of individual cities are also portrayed similarly. Further, some of the mentioned leaders do not bear the title of king and yet appear to serve in such a capacity (e.g. Gindibu, Idibi'ilu). Finally, one mention suggests the Assyrians believed that some Arabs were so primitive that they knew nothing of supreme authority: "(As for) the Tamudu, [I]bādidi, Marsīma[ni], (and) Hayappa (tribes), faraway Arabs who live in the desert, did not know (either) overseer (or) commander, and had never brought their tribute to any king, I struck them down with the sword of the god Aššur, my lord, deported the remainder of them, and (re)settled (them) in the city Samaria." (RINAP 2, Sargon II 1:120–123). This mention is, however, one-of-a-kind and the Arab tribes were typically portrayed as having their own rulers (sheikhs). Of course, the presence of kings could in no way have been surprising to the peoples of Mesopotamia, and as such, it will be omitted from this discussion of Arabs as 'strangers.' The reason the Assyrians deemed them alien was the unique phenomenon of female leadership. It seems to have been reflected in iconographic representations as well: the reliefs in the palace of Tiglath-pileser III, which depict his campaign against the Arabs, show a richly dressed woman bringing him gifts (a vessel of perfume?), with camels visible behind her.²¹ Perhaps it is Queen Samsi herself, just like on one of the palace's other reliefs depicting the defeat of the Arabs.²² The latter shows a woman riding a camel among a group of warriors fleeing on foot.²³ It is also worth noting that, on at least one occasion, the sources confirm the theocratic nature of the reign of Arab queens. Indeed, Ashurbanipal's inscription mentions that his father Esarhaddon did something (unfortunately, the text is damaged) that was related to Te'elḥunu, who was described as the 'former priestess' (MUNUS *kumirtu mahritu*) of the goddess Dilbat, during the visit of the Arab king Hazeal (RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 156:o.12). This is likely the very same Te'elḥunu as the one mentioned in Sennacherib's inscription and called the queen of the Arabs (*šarrat LÚ arabi*, RINAP 3, Sennacherib 35:rev.5"). As mentioned above, whether the word Apkallatu should be regarded as a proper name or a term denoting a queen-priestess is debatable.

Below are excerpts from Assyrian royal inscriptions which indicate that the Arabs had female rulers bearing the title 'Queen of the Arabs' or similar. Also included is an excerpt

20 Frahm, *A Companion to Assyria*, 307.

21 R.D. Barnett – M. Falkner, *The Sculptures of Aššur-Našir-Apli II (883–859 B.C.), Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.), Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.) from the Central and South-West Palaces at Nimrud* (London: British Museum 1962) pl. XXV–XXVI.

22 As suggested by Jan Retsö (*The Arabs in Antiquity*, 133).

23 Barnett – Falkner, *The Sculptures*, pl. XVII.

from RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 1 IV 53–77 (= Esarhaddon 8 I' 13'–24') concerning the land of Baz, which lists eight rulers of specific localities. Two queens appear among them.

- i) RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 15:2 (= Tiglath-pileser III 27:7; = Tiglath-pileser III 32:8; = Tiglath-pileser III 35 III 19): Among tribute-paying rulers mentioned is "Zabibe, queen of the Arabs."
- ii) RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 20:18': "Samsi, queen of the Arabs, who had transgressed her oath (sworn by) the god Šamaš."
- iii) RINAP 1, Tiglath-pileser III 42:19' (= Tiglath-pileser III 44:3'; = Tiglath-pileser III 48:24'; = Tiglath-pileser III 49:rev.17): "As for Samsi, queen of the Arabs, at Mount Saqurri, [I] de[feated 9,400 (of her people)]."
- iv) RINAP 2, Sargon II 1:125a (= Sargon II 7:27): "[I] received as tribute from Pir'û (Pharaoh), king of Egypt, Sa[m]si, queen of the Arabs, (and) It'amar, the Sabaeen, kings from the seashore and desert."
- v) SAA 11, 162:o.1–8: "[... Ya]-rapâ, [cohort co]mmander, will bring the [fugitives] of the Arabs [up t]o the lady Samsi; (and) he will bring those [o]f the lady Samsi up to the Arabs." Lady Samsi could well be the very same 'queen of the Arabs' mentioned in the annals of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon.
- vi) RINAP 3/1, Sennacherib 1:28 (= Sennacherib 213:28): "I captured alive Adīnu, a nephew of Marduk-apla-iddina (II) (Merodach-baladan), together with Basqānu, a brother of Iatī'e, queen of the Arabs, along with their troops."
- vii) RINAP 3/1, Sennacherib 35:53': "[... Te'elḥu]nu, queen of the Arabs, in the middle of the desert [...] I took away [...] thousand camels from her."
- viii) RINAP 3/1, Sennacherib 35:5": "[... I carried] off [Te'elḥunu, que]en of the Arabs, together with [her] god[s, ...] ..., pappardilû-stones, pappar[mīnu]-stone[s, ...] ḥašūru-wood, all types [of] aromatics, [...] ... and kings ..."
- ix) RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 1 IV 4.15: "(As for) the city Adumutu, the fortress of the Arabs, which Sennacherib, king of Assyria, (my) father, who engendered me, conquered and whose goods, possessions, (and) gods, together with Apkallatu, the queen of the Arabs, he plundered and brought to Assyria — Hazael, the king of the Arabs, came to Nineveh, my capital city, with his heavy audience gift and kissed my feet. He implored me to give (back) his gods, and I had pity on him. I refurbished the gods Atar-samayin, Dāya, Nuḥāya, Ruldāwu, Abirillu, (and) Atar-qurumâ, the gods of the Arabs, and I inscribed the might of the god Aššur, my lord, and (an inscription) written in my name on them and gave (them) back to him. I placed the lady Tabū'a, who was raised in the palace of my father, as ruler over them and returned her to her land with her gods."
- x) RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 1 IV 53–77 (= Esarhaddon 8 I' 13'–24'): "(As for) the land Bāzu, ... By the command of the god Aššur, my lord, I marched triumphantly in its midst. I defeated Kīsu, king of the city Ḥaldisu (Ḥandasu), Akbaru, king of the city Ilpi'atu (Alpiyana), Mansāku, king of the city Magalānu, Iapa, queen of the city Diḥrānu, Ḥabīsu, king of the city Qadaba' (Qatabu'), Niḥaru, king of the

city Ga'uani, Baslu, queen of the city Ihilu, (and) Ḥabaziru, king of the city Puda' (Padê), eight kings from that district (and) laid out the bodies of their warriors like (drying) malt. I carried off their gods, their goods, their possessions, and their people to Assyria. (As for) Laialê, king of the city Yadi', who had fled before my weapons, unprovoked fear fell upon him, and he came to Nineveh, before me, and kissed my feet. I had pity on him and put that province of Bāzu under him."

- xi) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 8 IX 1" (= Ashurbanipal 172:r8'; = Ashurbanipal 194 II 46): "[I inflicted a heavy] defeat on A[diya, the queen of the land of the Arabs. I burned] her tents [with fire. I captured] her alive (and) brought her [to Assyria], together with the plunder of [her land]."
- xii) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 156:o.12: "Hazaël, the king of the land of the Arabs, with hi[s] audience gift [...] came before him and kissed [his] f[et]t[er] [...]. He appealed to him to give (back) his goddess, and he (Esarhaddon) had mercy on him and agr[eed] ... He ... Te'elḥunu, her former priestess, to [...]. Regarding Tabū'a, he inquired of Šamaš, saying, '[Should] she [...]'? He returned (her/them) with his goddess and [...]."

5. Specific Treatment

Having outlined the basic features that portray Arabs as different and strange in the sources, it is vital to consider whether this difference and strangeness resulted in different treatment. First, it should be noted that the royal inscriptions focus on issues relevant from the perspective of the ruler, namely loyalty to Assyria, possible rebellions, and finally, defeating and punishing the enemy. In the case of the first two issues, it is impossible to see any differences. The obedient subjugated rulers were portrayed as sending tribute or personally visiting the court and kissing the feet of the Assyrian king. In contrast, rebellious rulers were depicted as unfaithful, disobedient to the gods and deserving of punishment. A rebellion resulted in a war expedition that always ended in success for the Assyrian king. The rebellious ruler is often described as overcome with fear, with their army fleeing after losing the battle. The final chord is usually a description of increasing the tribute or humiliating the ruler or their successor, sometimes including the looting of statues depicting the defeated people's deities. The descriptions of victorious (Assyrian) battles against the Arabs also fit into the above pattern. They include no unique features, apart from frequently pointing out that the Arabs inhabited remote desert regions, which was where the fighting took place. However, it is worth pointing to one distinguishing factor that appears to be linked to the Arabs and their punishment after rebellions. It refers to the chaining of a defeated ruler to the gates of the Assyrian capital. Sources mention that such punishment was used against defeated opponents of the Assyrian king several times. Of the six rulers punished in

this manner, as mentioned in the royal inscriptions, as many as four were Arabs (Asuḫili, Uabu, Iauta', Ammu-ladin). The others were the Babylonian ruler Nergal-uṣeziba, tied to the gates of Nineveh by King Sennacherib (RINAP 3/1, Sennacherib 34: 33b), and the chieftains Dunan, Samgun and Aplaya from the Aramaic tribe of Gumbal inhabiting the borderlands between Babylonia and Elam, captured after the Elamite campaign by Ashurbanipal (RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 161 II 10'–12'; = Ashurbanipal 165:rev. 4'–6'). Occasionally, the punishment description is supplemented by a statement that the humiliated ruler was chained together with animals, such as dogs, pigs or bears. This cruel punishment was sometimes made worse still by tying the victim to the gates by their pierced jaw instead of using a collar or wooden pillory. Some controversy may arise in regard to Esarhaddon's texts about Asuḫili, the ruler of the land of Arzâ, which was located south of Gaza, near the 'Brook of Egypt.' The very name of this ruler appears to be Arabic.²⁴ Although the source does not explicitly identify him as an 'Arab,' he was apparently considered an Arab sheikh by the Assyrians due to the remote, desert location of his dominion. Besides, it is probably not without reason that one version of the inscription describes Asuḫili's defeat just before speaking of the battles with Hazael and Uabu, who were undoubtedly Arab rulers (RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 31). In any case, Asuḫili also met his end while chained to the gates of Nineveh. Below are texts describing the chaining of Arab rulers to the gates of the Assyrian capital.

- i) RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 1 III 39–42 (= Esarhaddon 2 I 57–63; = Esarhaddon 3 II 11'–15'; = Esarhaddon 31:o.14'–rev.2'): "The one who plundered the land Arzâ, which is in the district of the Brook of Egypt – I threw Asuḫili, its king, into fetters along with his counselors and brought (them) to Assyria. I seated them, bound, near the citadel gate of (the city of) Nineveh along with bear(s), dog(s), and pig(s)."
- ii) RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 1 IV 25–31 (= Esarhaddon 6 III' 18'–24'): "I, Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, king of the four quarters, who loves loyalty and abhors treachery, sent my battle troops to the aid of Iauta', and they trampled all of the Arabs, threw Uabu, together with the soldiers who were with him, into fetters, and brought (them) to me. I placed them in neck stocks and tied them to the side of my gate."
- iii) RINAP 4, Esarhaddon 31:rev.8–11: "[I, Esarhaddon, who loves loyalty and] abhors treachery, [sent] archers, cavalry (and) forces to [the aid of Iauta' (Iata)]. I subdued and subjected Uabu for him. [I threw] Uabu, together with all of [the soldiers who were with him, into fetters and] brought (them) here and [bound them] to the left side of the citadel gate of the city of Nineveh."
- iv) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 VIII 11–14: "I placed him (Iauta', king of Arabs, son of Hazael) in a neck-stock, bound him with a bear (and) a dog and (then) made him guard the Citadel Gate of Nineveh, (whose name is) the Entrance to the Place Where the World Is Controlled."

24 As suggested by Ran Zadok ("Arabians in Mesopotamia," 66).

- v) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 VIII 27–29: “By the command of the great gods, my lords, I placed him (Ammu-ladin, king of the land Qedar) in a dog collar and made him guard the gate.”
- vi) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 IX 103–114 (= Ashurbanipal 109 I’ 6’–9’; = Ashurbanipal 156:r.10–12; = Ashurbanipal 215 V 1–5): “Through my entreaties that I had constantly made to (the god) Aššur and the goddess Mullissu in order to conquer my enemies, I pierced his (Uaite’s) jaw with the ... of the ... that my (own) hands hold. I put a lead-rope through his gums, placed him in a dog collar, and (then) made him guard the door of the eastern gate of the citadel of Nineveh, whose name is the Entrance to the Place Where the World Is Controlled. (So that he could) sing the praise(s) of (the god) Aššur, the goddess Ištar, and the great gods, my lords, I had mercy on him and spared his life.”
- vii) RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 109 I’ 6’–9’: “[(As for) Uaite’, the king of the land S]umu’il, who [had sided] with him [(and) had cast o]ff the yoke of my lordship, [... h]e was placed [*in a dog collar*] and (then) [I made him guard th]e gate [...].”

The first text above (I) is about Asuḫili. The next two (II–III) describe the punishment inflicted on Uabu, who rebelled against the Assyrian-established king Iautā, in a slightly different form. Texts IV, VI and VII refer to the very same Iautā, who later rebelled on his own and was thus punished in the same way as Uabu. The only difference is the mention in Text VI that Iautā’ survived because the victorious Ashurbanipal spared him. It is reasonable to assume that the punishment described usually ended in the ignominious death of the victim (especially when bound together with a bear), and the case of Iautā’ is somewhat of an exception. It should be added that his punishment had previously been expanded to include participation in a kind of triumphal procession of the Assyrian king. Ashurbanipal rode into the capital on a cart drawn by the defeated Elamite rulers and Iautā’ himself (RINAP 5, Ashurbanipal 11 X 29–30; = Ashurbanipal 145:rev.6’–7’). It was probably only after this show that Iautā’ was chained to the gate and eventually released – after an unspecified time. Finally, Text V briefly describes the humiliation of Ammu-ladin.

The execution site itself is by no means unique. Assyrian royal inscriptions speak of such things as throwing the severed head of a defeated ruler next to the gate (Teumman, king of Elam), skinning (Ilu-bi’di, king of Hamath), impaling (Nabû-ušabši, king of Bit-Šilani) or forcing the sons of a deceased rebel ruler to ground their father’s bones (Nabû-šuma-ēreš, governor of Nippur). As the city’s main centres, the gates and their surroundings were naturally chosen as the location for public executions. Nonetheless, when speaking of the Arabs, it is puzzling that the executions of captured rulers were of such a specific nature. The chaining to the city gates was used almost exclusively against captured rulers of Arab descent. Considering the number of rulers defeated by the Assyrians, the chaining to the city gates alongside animals was certainly not an oft-used retribution. Naturally, this punishment was meant as the ultimate humiliation of the defeated rulers to show them that in the face of the power of the Assyrian king, they were mere animals – they lost their human

status. This may be the reason why it was used against Arab rulers. The Assyrian rulers only saw them as half-human anyway, considering them savage desert nomads who rode wild animals. The act of disobedience against the civilised kings of Assyria excluded them, as it were, from humanity itself. As such, they could be treated like wild beasts. The chieftains of the Aramaic tribe of Gambulu, who suffered the same punishment, were likely viewed similarly. However, the use of such retribution against the Babylonian king Nergal-ušeziḫ is somewhat puzzling. It seems to be due to Sennacherib violating all rules of war after the Elamites killed his firstborn son Ašur-nadin-šumi. After conquering rebellious Babylon, the Assyrian ruler had the city demolished, the gods abducted and the usurper chained like an animal to the gate. This treatment of Babylon was unparalleled in Assyrian history and was regarded as inappropriate even by subsequent rulers – after all, Esarhaddon decided to rebuild Babylon. It seems that the case of Nergal-ušeziḫ should be seen as the exception that proves the rule, resulting from a deeply wounded fatherly love. The other instances of defeated rulers being chained to the city gates seem to be due to their low status in the eyes of the Assyrian king. Apparently, he wanted to show that there was little difference between animals and the Arabs and that the latter hardly deserved to be called human.

Conclusions and Discussion

The above analyses provide us with a list of features that were characteristic of the Arabs during the period of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. In the eyes of the royal court, the Arabs appeared to be desert nomads living in tents. They were as likely to engage in breeding and trade as in robbery. Thus, they were ‘savages’ living outside the circle of civilisation. They were known for breeding camels, which they were the first to domesticate. As such, they were seen as the best specialists in breeding these animals, which had previously only lived in the wild. Not only were the Arabs themselves a ‘wild’ people, but they also used ‘wild’ animals. Thus, they were no less alien than the elephant-riding Hindus were in the eyes of Alexander the Great. Finally, yet another trait specific to the Arabs was female leadership. This means that they differed from the ‘normal’ Middle Eastern peoples not only in terms of their living environment (desert) and livestock (camels) but also with regard to their peculiar political structure. This image of the Arabs certainly earned them absolute uniqueness in their contemporary world. It was impossible to confuse the Arabs with any other people. The above certainly fits into the image of a ‘savage alien,’ i.e. someone living outside the circle of civilisation. It was natural for the Assyrian elite to consider the Arabs inferior to the inhabitants of the Nineveh palaces.

The status of the Arabs as ‘strangers *par excellence*’ resulted in their specific treatment, although only in exceptional situations. After defeating Arab rulers, the Assyrian kings punished them by chaining them to the gates like wild animals. Since this form of retribution was applied almost exclusively to Arab rulers (once also to the similarly ‘savage’ rulers of the Gambulu tribe), it must be surmised that it resulted from the Arabs’ exceptionally

lowly status in the eyes of the Assyrians. The exceptional case of the chaining of the Babylonian ruler Nergal-ušešib, resulting from the murder of the firstborn son of the king of Assyria, should be excluded here.

This explanation for the use of the chaining to the gates alongside animals as punishment for ‘savages’ seems to be confirmed by another practice applied to defeated Arabs, or rather Arab women. As mentioned above, one of the reliefs from Ashurbanipal’s North Palace shows soldiers ripping open Arab women and tearing out their unborn babies in a captured camp.²⁵ This scene appears twice, so one can hardly speak of a coincidence. In analysing this scene, unique in its brutality even by Assyrian standards, Peter Dubovský emphasises that no other women were subjected to similarly cruel torture. While royal reliefs show various types of torture and elaborate ways of killing men, women and children were treated as the spoils of war and therefore spared. Dubovský puts this brutality down to the fierce resistance of the Arabs and the breaking of their oath of allegiance to the Assyrian kings, which seemingly entitled the latter to all sorts of cruelty.²⁶ It must be noted that it was not only the Arabs but also other peoples who fought fiercely against Assyrian aggression. There were also many occasions when a conquered ruler rose to fight again, thus breaking the oath of allegiance to his Assyrian overlord, yet we do not know of such brutal representations against other peoples. Perhaps one should look to the status of Arabs in the eyes of the Assyrians to find answers – after all, they were deemed savage strangers who were only half-human and could be treated inhumanely. Hence, Arab rulers were equated with wild animals, and women became the objects of the most elaborate cruelties that no other peoples had to endure.

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²⁵ Reade, “Assyrian Illustrations of Arabs,” 226, Fig. 6.

²⁶ P. Dubovský, “Ripping Open Pregnant Arab Women: Reliefs in Room L of Ashurbanipal’s North Palace,” *Or* 78 (2009) 416–418.

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