

between his two brothers. Beyond this, there is little information.<sup>72</sup> The apparent 'disappearance' of the descendants of Ḥujr from Roman literary sources in conjunction with the rise in favour of the Jafnids as Roman allies raises the question of whether or not part of Ma'add had fallen under further direct or indirect Roman influence, perhaps through the Jafnids; but the evidence suggests that it is the Naṣrids who should be preferred as the new powerbrokers in central Arabia, during a period when Ḥimyar was experiencing difficulty controlling its clients. In 548, according to the inscription at Marib, Abraha had received embassies from Axum, the Romans, Sasanians, al-Mundhir, and two Jafnids, al-Ḥārith and Abu-Kārib; but problems were emerging and in the same year Abraha was forced to deal with a revolt by the man he had posted to control Kinda, Yazīd ibn Kabasha.<sup>73</sup> Only four years later, on the basis of Ry 506, Abraha campaigned successfully against Ma'add. The same inscription suggests that a son of the Naṣrid al-Mundhir, 'Amr, had become leader of Ma'add at about the same time, and that the Naṣrids provided hostages to Abraha after they were defeated.<sup>74</sup> The power of Ḥimyar was on the wane, though, and the poaching of the Ḥujrids by the Romans and the attempts by the Naṣrids to gain influence over Ma'add should perhaps be seen as a symptom. Any decline of Ma'add, or even Kinda, had more to do with the fortunes of the Ḥimyarites than with those of the Jafnids.

The Ḥujrids were a multi-generational family dynasty who seem to have owed a large part of their position to the Ḥimyarites. Alongside the Ḥujrids, there were also groups such as Muḍar and Ma'add who were influenced by Ḥimyar and took part in its wars. We might include Kinda in this, as they also received a Ḥimyarite deputy. These different groups covered large areas in central Arabia, and allowed the Ḥimyarite state which influenced them to extend its power well beyond its main base of power in Yemen. Control of Muḍar via al-Nu'mān, or Ma'add, via Ḥujr, extended Ḥimyarite political authority over a vast area, bordering on both the Roman and the Sasanian empires. Yet we might wonder about the

<sup>72</sup> Phot. Bib. 3.

<sup>73</sup> CIS 4. 541; Hoyland, *Arabia*, 55; Smith, 'Events in Arabia', 440.

<sup>74</sup> See the extensive discussion of Ry 506 in Zwettler, 'Ma'add', 246–57, particularly Zwettler's interpretation of the end of the inscription, which describes negotiations between al-Mundhir and Abraha over hostages, 'for (al-Mundhir) had invested ('Amr) with governorship over Ma'add.'

consequences of Ḥimyarite policies in this regard, and also of the attempts made by the Romans to develop a diplomatic relationship with the Ḥujrid dynasty. The fact that the Ḥujrid leaders were open to Roman overtures and the apparent switch in leadership of Ma'add to the Naṣrids suggests that Ḥimyarite control was not total. Did the efforts of the state, encapsulating smaller, less powerful groups or individuals, who were supported by the state but beyond its ability to rule directly, encourage them to develop greater political power? In Arabia, this question is difficult to answer with certainty, but the history of the Ḥujrids suggests that it was certainly possible, and these events are worth keeping in mind as we turn to examine the Naṣrids and the Jafnids.

### The Naṣrids, Lakhm, and Tanūkh

The Naṣrids, the ruling dynasty at al-Ḥīrah, also derived some measure of their support and the ability to control local populations from their imperial patrons, the Sasanians. The genesis of this relationship and the ways in which the Naṣrids came to be associated with the Sasanians are somewhat unclear, especially if the Imru' l-Qays buried at Nemāra is to be considered part of this lineage.<sup>75</sup> The Paikuli inscription from Kurdistan shows that a king named 'Amr was under Iranian patronage as early as the reign of Narseh, and the Arab Muslim tradition (reflected by al-Ṭabarī, for example) describes a rich heritage of Arab Naṣrid kings at al-Ḥīrah.<sup>76</sup> It is the Paikuli inscription which furnishes evidence for a connection between the successors of 'Amr and the Lakhmid tribe, a link which is also evoked in a Manichean text, but to what extent this continued is highly debatable.<sup>77</sup> The situation thus recalls that discussed above for Ḥujr and Kinda, whereby the leaders may have come from a particular tribal group and even maintained some form of an association with it, while actually ruling or leading an entirely different group of people. For the Naṣrids, this new group might have been a mixed set of people, and may have included Tanūkh. On the basis of two Ḥimyarite inscriptions, it may be plausible to place Tanūkh in north-east

<sup>75</sup> So Sartre, *Trois études*, 137.

<sup>76</sup> Rothstein, *Dynastie*, esp. 41–125.

<sup>77</sup> M. Tardieu, 'L'arrivée des Manichéens à al-Ḥīrah', in Canivet and Rey-Coquais, *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, 15–24; Robin, 'Les Arabes de Ḥimyar', 182, 189.

Nasriler

140166

Lahmiler

120027

MADEDE YATIMLANDIKTAN  
SONRA GELEN DOKÜMAN

21-35

of the education he received at the Lakhmid court. In this regard, Bahrām's mastery of these two peoples' languages is a pervasive motif. For example, the anonymous author of the *Nihāyat al-irab* wrote, "He became proficient in Arabic and became most eloquent at speaking it. He also mastered Persian," while al-Mas'ūdī proclaimed that as a result of his upbringing with the Arabs in al-Ḥīra, "he [learned to] recite poetry in Arabic and spoke the rest of the languages.... He composed much poetry in both Arabic and Persian."<sup>71</sup> Al-Tha'ālibī similarly listed the 11 languages which Bahrām mastered, including Arabic, and the various functions which he applied each one of these for.<sup>72</sup> Both al-Mas'ūdī and al-Tha'ālibī preserve specimens of Bahrām's poetry in order to demonstrate his eloquence. One illustrative example is the following verse which Bahrām allegedly recited after defeating the Turks and slaying their Khāqān:

I recite to him upon routing his *soldiers*: "It is as if you haven't heard of the attacks of Bahrām.

I am the protector of the whole kingdom of Persia. What good is kingship without a defender?"<sup>73</sup>

In Chapter 3, I discussed how the proverbial eloquence of the Arabs and the beauty of the Arabic language were pervasive themes in the discourse of intercivilizational competition marking the early 'Abbasid period.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, the image of a Sasanian prince eloquently reciting Arabic poetry, the prized art among the Arabs, surely would have captured the imagination of the contemporaneous Muslim reader. For the nostalgic admirers of the Arab tradition like al-Jāhiz, Arabic poetry, the vehicle by which the desert Bedouin expressed their rustic eloquence, served as proof of the Arabs' cultural sophistication. In this context, we might view through the same lens the heroic tribesmen of the *ayyām al-'Arab* literature, expressing their *murūwa* (virility) in the heat of battle through the medium of verse, as accounts such as this of Bahrām Gūr reciting Arabic poetry in the thick of fighting or during the chase. The picture of Bahrām Gūr that emerges from the sources, therefore, is not only of a skilled hunter and warrior, but of an educated, sophisticated gentleman. The moral of this episode is that the Arabs could indeed produce brave rulers. As a Sasanian prince raised amongst the Arabs, Bahrām Gūr serves in the Islamic conquest narrative as a precursor to the conquering Arabs, who would take over the reins of empire from the Iranians.

#### **Al-Mundhir I b. al-Nu'mān: the guardian of the Prince**

In our analysis of this episode, we should also underline the seminal part played by the wise Lakhmid king al-Mundhir, who raises Bahrām in such a laudable way, and is an unwavering supporter and guide to the prince in his quest to become king. Al-Mundhir serves a similar role as 'Amr, the sheikh of Tamīm, i.e., of a sage-like counselor to the king. However, whereas 'Amr could only warn Shāpūr II to desist from killing the Arabs, al-Mundhir took an active role

in mediating the affairs of Bahrām, aiding the young prince in reclaiming his royal birthright. Indeed, the sources lead us to believe that al-Mundhir was the architect of this enterprise. According to al-Ṭabarī's rendition of these events, it was al-Mundhir who devised the stratagem for bringing Bahrām to the throne, first sending his own son al-Nu'mān to the Sasanian capital with a force of 10,000 men, and then going himself with Bahrām and al-Nu'mān with a larger army. It was al-Mundhir, the sources relate, with whom the Sasanian nobles initially negotiated, and it was only after being prompted by his guardian, that Bahrām directly addressed his countrymen.<sup>75</sup> The notion that al-Mundhir directed this affair is likewise communicated by al-Dīnawārī, who stated in his rather truncated rendition of these events, that when news arrived that another had been selected to be king, "al-Mundhir ordered [*ammara*] Bahrām to go out and demand the birthright of his father."<sup>76</sup>

By emphasizing al-Mundhir's influence in shaping the affairs of the Iranian state, the chroniclers were clearly trying to illustrate the increasing importance and prestige of the Arabs amongst the late antique empires. In contrast to the passive sheikh 'Amr, al-Mundhir's active role in Sasanian politics shows that the Arabs were beginning to become a major force for the Iranians to reckon with. In this context, al-Tha'ālibī writes that upon becoming king, Bahrām elevated the rank of al-Mundhir, putting under his authority all of the lands from al-Ḥīra to the Ḥijāz. He then states, "This was the first wind which blew for the Arabs and a sign of their coming turn [*iqbālīhā*]."<sup>77</sup> What is significant about this clearly kerygmatic statement is that al-Tha'ālibī uses the term *iqbāl*, which literally means a "turn," thus conveying the same idea as its synonym, *dawla*. Of course, al-Tha'ālibī here is forecasting the rise of Islam and the Arabs' political hegemony, which was now on the distant historical horizon.

In general, the Bahrām Gūr episode represents an important turning point in the Islamic conquest narrative, in which the destinies of the Arabs and Sasanians are now beginning to converge. In his *Faql al-'Arab*, Ibn Qutayba portrays this episode, as well as the Arabs' defeat of the Persians at the Battle of Dhū Qār in the following century, as among the major events linking Arab and Persian history.<sup>78</sup> In this context, Ibn Qutayba, along with other historians, likewise attach seminal importance to the first major defeat of the Sasanians and the death of the king Pīrūz I at the hands of the Hephthalites.

#### **Pīrūz I and the *Hayātīla*: the first major Sasanian defeat**

In the Islamic historiographical tradition, the first major Sasanian defeat, which resulted in the death of the ruler Pīrūz I, came at the hands of the *Hayātīla*.<sup>79</sup> This group is generally associated with the contemporaneous Central Asian confederation of the Hephthalites (also known as the "White Huns").<sup>80</sup> However, according to some accounts it is not the Hephthalites, but rather the same "Turks" which had fought Bahrām that defeat Pīrūz. In what follows, I provide a synopsis of both traditions, which portray this defeat from a moralistic perspective as divine retribution for the violation of a covenant between the two

- 62 Several modern scholars have studied the evolution of this term. See Sharon, *Black Banners* 1: 19–27; Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*, XI–XXV; “The ‘Abbasid *Dawla*: An Essay on the Concept of Revolution in Early Islam,” in *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, eds. F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys, 247–270 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Bernard Lewis, “Islamic Concepts of Revolution,” in *Islam in History: Ideas, People, and Events in the Middle East*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), 311–322; Franz Rosenthal, “*Dawla*,” *EI*, 2nd ed.
- 63 On this tradition, see Sharon, *Black Banners* 1: 76, 87, 94–95.
- 64 One such set of traditions contained in the *Akhbār al-dawla al-‘Abbāsīyya* purports that black, the color of the ‘Abbasid revolution, was the preferred color of the Prophet, the early Muslims, and even some biblical heroes. For example, the *Akhbār* relates that Gabriel revealed to the Prophet that “a time will come when your nation will wear it [black] and will take glory in it.” See the section, *Dhikr al-sawād* (On the color black) in the *Akhbār* for this and other traditions. A. A. al-Dūrī and A. J. al-Muṭṭalībī, eds. *Akhbār al-dawla al-‘Abbāsīyya wa-fīhi akhbār al-‘Abbās wa-waladīhi* (Beirut: Dar al-Ṭalī‘a 1971), 245–247. On this theme in ‘Abbasid apologetics, see further, Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*, 2–4; *The Shaping of ‘Abbāsīd Rule*, 28.
- 65 On this application of *dawla*, see Lewis’ reference in his “Islamic Concepts of Revolution” to Ya‘qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī’s *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-ṣafā’*, 312.
- 66 Al-Ṭabarī, II, 2004–2005. On this speech, see “The Significance of Wooden Weapons in al-Mukhtār’s Revolt and the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution,” 185; Zakeri, *Sāsānid Soldiers*, 280–281; Sharon, *Black Banners* 2: 187–188; Lassner, *The Shaping of ‘Abbāsīd Rule*, 277, n. 16.
- 67 *Faḍl al-‘Arab*, 51.

## 4 Bahrām V Gūr, the Lakhmids, and the Hephthalite disaster

Lahmiler  
120027

Al-Ḥīra was built on that day when ‘Amr [son of Rabī‘a] settled it.... From that point, the people of Lakhm became connected both to al-Ḥīra, as well as to the *akāsira* [pl. of *kisrā*] who gave them rule over the Arabs.<sup>1</sup>

With seminal events of the fifth century, the plot of the Islamic conquest narrative further develops, while its trajectory becomes ever clearer. To this end, I will focus in this chapter on the depiction of two key episodes. I will first analyze the character of the Sasanian king Bahrām V Gūr (r. 420–438), paying particular attention to the depiction of his relationship with the Lakhmid suzerain, al-Mundhir I, who was given the responsibility of rearing the young Bahrām, and later aided in his taking the throne. I will show how the Muslim authors intended to emphasize both the high culture of the Lakhmids and their influence in Sasanian imperial affairs, as well as to demonstrate that Bahrām’s bravery and eloquence stemmed from his hearty Arab upbringing. I will then briefly examine the report of the disastrous defeat of Bahrām Gūr’s grandson Pīrūz I (r. 459–484) at the hands of the Hephthalites (Turks in some accounts). I will argue that the Hephthalites’/Turks’ routing of the Iranians is portrayed in the early Islamic narrative tradition as an ominous precursor for later battles between the Iranians and the Arabs. The main theme of this chapter is to show that in the framework of the Arab-Sasanian drama, this period forms a new chapter, in which the Arabs gradually become active players in the affairs of the Sasanians, and in which the Iranian kings begin to lose some of their prestige. Before turning to the legendary history of Bahrām Gūr, however, I will first provide a brief summary of the origins and rise of the Lakhmid kings according to the Islamic sources.

### The origins and rise of the Lakhmids of al-Ḥīra in the Islamic historical tradition

The account of the origins and early kings of the Lakhmids, for which we are primarily indebted to Ibn Ishāq and Ibn al-Kalbī, is muddled, often contradictory, and is heavily steeped in lore.<sup>2</sup> According to Ibn Ishāq, the progenitors of the Lakhmid family were southern Arabs who left Yemen as a result of the

81-101