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THE WORD SARACEN (CΑΡΑΚΗΝΟC) IN THE PΑPYRI

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### The Word Saracen (Cαρακηνός) in the Papyri

Prior to the Islamic conquest, the word "Saracen", so prominent from the fourth century on in western literary sources, was a catchall to designate an Arab nomad (i.e., a bedouin) who could be found ranging at large within and beyond the eastern frontiers of the empire. To the settled populations that came into contact with Saracens, they were a bane and a boon, but mostly a bane. In general, Saracens were either raiders or traders: they raided settlements for prisoners and plunder; they fought against Roman and Persian forces, and at other times they served as mercenaries in units of both camps. On the other side of the ledger, Saracens served as messengers, as guides, as sellers of animals, as suppliers of provisions for travelers and remote settlements, and as providers of transportation for people and commodities.<sup>1</sup> As a paradigm for this uncommon polarity, there are two events in connection with the monastery of St. Antony in Egypt's eastern desert that illustrate the contrasting lifestyles of the Saracens. In Athanasius' biography of the proto-monk of Egypt, we learn (PG 26.913; 916) that when a voice told Antony to go to the inner desert, he joined a Saracen caravan that brought him to his famous retreat, where, for a period of time, Saracens provided him with a supply of bread. Some years later, Jerome records (PL 27.689-690) that in 357, Saracen marauders raided Antony's monastery and killed one of his disciples. However, despite some of the more socially acceptable pursuits of the Saracens, rarely did anyone have a good word to say for them. Cyril of Scythopolis (24, 97 ed. Schwartz) called these pagan nomads "the wolves of Arabia ... barbaric in conduct; intent on doing evil."

Both aspects of the Saracen character are reflected in the papyri, although references to them are hardly plentiful. The lack of citations is understandable since most documents deal with the legal and commercial concerns of settled individuals and communities, and with their relationship with officials representing the imperial government.

Of a total of some 15 Greek documents that cite the Saracens, 9 or 10 are pre-Islamic.<sup>2</sup> Of these, *SB I 4769.3* (byz), is a fragment without a meaningful context. Similarly, *P. Fuad I Univ. 29.17-18* (IV?) refers without a context to the "cloaks of the Saracens" (παλλίων Cαρακηνῶν). The remaining documents reflect the Janus-like aspect of the Saracens' service and disservice to settled populations. *SB XVI 1.12284.4-5* (VI/VII) is an order to a *notarius* to see to it that a herd of goats, the property of the *dux*, was to be taken from a Saracen (goatherd?) who was in Singkerē (ἀποσπάσει τὰ αἰγίδια ... ἐκ τοῦ Cαρακηνοῦ τοῦ ὄντος εἰς Cιγκερή).

<sup>1</sup> See P. Mayerson, "Romans and Saracens: Micro-Macro Relationships," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (1989) [forthcoming].

<sup>2</sup> In addition, *Stud. Pal. VIII 703.3* (V) has been suspected of hiding Cαρακηνῶν behind the spelling Cαλαγηνῶν. This is very unlikely. T. Gagos was kind enough to send me two additional citations for the word Saracen from *O. Douch 85.7* and *86.3* (IV), both in uncertain contexts and with variant spellings of Cαραγη[ός and Cαρακηνός.

*Stud. Pal.* VIII 780 and 945 (VII), apparently connected with monastic establishments, are orders in which Saracens are used to pick up money and quantities of wheat and oil. *P. Ness.* 51, dated by the editor to the early VII, is a letter from the bishop of Aila to a resident of Nessana and refers (line 2) to something that the resident "received from the Saracen" to give to a church in Nessana and Elusa. It is clear that the Saracen was the messenger who brought the letter and its attachment from Aila to Nessana.

Another document from the same archive, *P. Ness.* 89, is an unusual one for it takes us directly into the milieu of the desert and the Saracen nomad. Dated to the late VI or early VII, the document, barely literate, is an account of a caravan of traders — or quite possibly of pilgrims — making its way to and from the Holy Mountain (Mount Sinai) during which time a number of transactions were conducted with nomads. In addition to the purchase of a slave boy and a slave girl, and of camels and donkeys, presumably from desert nomads, the account mentions a substantial sum of money,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  *solidi*, paid to a Saracen. The transaction is stated in these words (lines 22-23): δοθ(έντα) τῷ Καρακαίνῳ κικοφαντέσαντι ἐμᾶς ἰς τὸ ἅγιον ὄρος (νομ.) γς. To give full force to the meaning of the participle κικοφαντήσαντι, I translate the sentence as follows: "Paid to the Saracen who extorted  $3\frac{1}{2}$  *solidi* from us (en route) to the Holy Mountain." The likelihood is that the Saracen was not a passing nomad but the sheikh of a tribe who demanded the money so that the caravan would travel under his protection and be free from harassment, or worse, by his tribesmen. It is unlikely that the money was given for the services of a guide since *P. Ness.* 72 and 73 show that the town of Nessana provided guide service to the Holy Mountain. At a later time, following the visit to the monastery at Mount Sinai, it appears that the caravan recovered the sum of 4 *solidi* (line 35) in lieu of a camel that was stolen by the Saracens of the bani al-Udayyid. On the credit side, however, the account records (line 40) that  $1\frac{1}{6}$  *solidi* was paid to the Saracen 'Adī for "the money we borrowed for the price of wool."

The two remaining pre-Conquest documents are more in accord with the popular view of the Saracen's character as often expressed in literary sources. *P. Cairo Masp.* I 67009 (VI) is a complaint of the residents of Antaeopolis directed to the *dux* of the Thebaid concerning an officer who had not responded to their grievances, one of which had to do with the "nefarious Saracens" (line 23) [ἀλιτηρί[ω]ν Καρ[α]κηνῶν]. The pejorative ἀλιτήριος is applied to other offending raiders such as the Blemyes, Nobades, and *barbaroi*. On the verso of the same document (lines 18-19) is the complaint made against the "nefarious barbaric Blemyes," ἀλιτη[ρίων] Βλέμυων βαρβάρων (see also *W. Chr.* I 6,5 [V]). The antagonism of the settled population against Saracens, as well as the Blemyes, was put into verse by the poet Dorotheus of Aphrodito (fl. 560) in his eulogy of the *dux* Athanasius, praising the result of his campaigns against them (*P. Cairo Masp.* I 67097 C, 1-2): "You will no longer see the race of the Blemyes nor that of the Saracens. You will not gaze with fear upon the murdering thieves."

The Islamic conquest in the decades following the 630's produced another kind of Saracen, a Muslim who was dedicated to the principles of Islam which held that nomadic life was incompatible with Islam, and that to be a Muslim one had to live a settled life.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the Saracen

<sup>3</sup> F.M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton 1981) 79-82.

nomad who attacked settlements but never occupied them, the Muslim Saracen overran the Roman provinces and settled on the land. To the conquered population, however, there was no distinction between the two; the Arab, whether a nomad or a settled Muslim, was called a Saracen. In the post-Conquest documents none has surfaced with the telltale words ὀλιτήριος Cαρακηνός although the free-ranging nomad — pagan or Muslim — must have continued his nefarious practices.<sup>4</sup>

In general, the Greek papyri employ the word Saracen when the Arab name was not known, or when the writer had no need or inclination to provide it. This can best be seen in an early bilingual document dated 22 A.H. (643 A.D.).<sup>5</sup> The Greek portion states, "I have taken over from you the maintenance of the Saracens being with me in Herakleopolis, 65 sheep ..."; the Arabic on the other hand is considerably expanded: "This is that what has taken 'Abdallah ibn Gabîr and his mates of the sheep of Ehnâs: we have taken from the representative of Teodhoraq, the younger son of Abû Qîr, and from the representative of Iştafan, the elder son of Abû Qîr, 50 of the sheep for slaughter and 15 other sheep."

Similarly, *P. Lond.* IV 1433, an extensive account dated to 706-707, records requisitions of various kinds from a number of χωρία, and lists some 17 unnamed Saracens who were to be provided with wages in connection with travel by ship (lines 56, 83, 172, 190, 220, 239, 259, 273, 335, 394, 408, 414, 429, 442, 514, 525 [545]). Two entries (lines 360 and 433) concern the δαπάνη of a certain Arab official, Szourae son of Al-Ouasel "through the Saracen of Szourae" (his courier?) or "through (his) Saracen." Szourae son of Al-Ouasel surfaces once more in *P. Lond.* IV 1521.10, a Coptic<sup>6</sup> guarantee-declaration dated to 709 where he is cited as "Szourae son of Al-Ouasel, the Saracen set over the Thebaid" (i.e., the Muslim administrator of the Thebaid). Since the writer of the guarantee-declaration records that certain families had been sent home on the authority of an official, it was necessary for him to provide his name.

*P. Lond.* IV 1518, 7-8 (708/9), a Coptic guarantee-declaration referring to fugitives, names another Arab administrator, "Abdella son of Shourae the Saracen" who was "set over" the nome of Ptolemais. Two other Coptic documents *P. Lond.* IV 1508.15 and 1509.2,5, cite a certain "Garah the Saracen" who apparently was an official concerned with payments for workmen. Somewhat like the above, 1510.3, a fragment of a Coptic declaration, mentions a Saracen.

The remaining citations from *P. Lond.* IV, all in Greek, are isolated words or names. In 1441.53, the name Cελημ Cαρακιν' appears, unlike others in the same document, without a patronymic. In 1464, the word "Saracen" has no context; and in 1457.24 there is a questionable restoration.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g., "Le text grec des récits du moine Anastase sur les saints pères du Sinâï," F. Nau, ed., *Oriens Christianus* II (1902). Written after 650, the monk records (p. 65) that "barbarians" controlled the road to Mount Sinâï and caused a scarcity of oil on the Holy Mountain. He also tells (pp. 75-76) of a Christian who was enslaved by a Saracen. (Cf. Jerome, PL 73.55-56.)

<sup>5</sup> A. Grohmann, *From the World of Arabic Papyri* (Cairo 1952), 113-114 = SB VI 9576.

<sup>6</sup> Cited here are only those Coptic documents in *P. Lond.* IV that offer sufficient context.

*P. Apoll.* 33 (c. 713?) contains a tantalizing reference (l. 16) to someone who is annoyed by Saracens (ὁ δεσπότης ἡμῶν ὁ Πανεύφημος Ἀμιρῶς χάριν τῶν ναυτῶν (x letters) ] αὐτὸς παρενοχλεῖται ἐκ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν). The editor notes (p. 84) that "la remarque serait intéressante si nous savions qui est représenté par αὐτός."<sup>7</sup> In the same collection, *P. Apoll.* 37.10, reference is made to messages carried for the Emir "by four Saracens of the Emir of the Believers" regarding the purchase of several articles.

*SB I* 5609, a conveyance of a house, is dated (line 8) by this unusual formula: "in the year of the Emperor Diocletian 451 and in the year of the Saracens 114," ἔτους Διοκλη[τιανοῦ] βασιλεὺς ὕνα καὶ ἔτους Σαρακηνῶν ριδ, i.e. 734.<sup>8</sup>

There remains among the Egyptian documents *BGU II* 366 (arab), a guarantee regarding the delivery (lines 12-14) "... for the account of the Saracens, one τονάχιον and three τρώματα according to Saracen specifications," ... εἰς λόγον τῶν Σαρακηνῶν τονάχιν ἕν καὶ τρώματ[α] τρι[ί]α τῷ μέτρῳ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν. The three τρώματα "according to Saracen specifications" seem to be something other than simple mattresses. Since failure to deliver on the due date would result in a heavy penalty — 3 *solidi* for each τρώμα— I suggest that the mattresses referred to are "saddle blankets" of the kind that are stuffed with straw and that are used on mules and camels.<sup>9</sup> The word τονάχιον, which in the form τοναχίου also appears in line 18 and *BGU II* 403.6, is unattested. In spite of the fact that it altogether occurs three times, it may well be a poor spelling for γονάχιον, the prayer-carpet that is found several times in papyri of the Arab period.<sup>10</sup> In any case, the object was of value. Failure to deliver it on the due date would incur a stiff penalty of 6 *solidi*.

The documents up to this point show the Umayyad calphs occupying Egypt, taking over the administrative machinery of the Byzantines, and exploiting, as had their predecessors, the resources of the country. To this extent the Arab conquerors settled on Egyptian land, but they did not work the land. The situation is different in Palestine where the Muslims not only settled but worked the land.<sup>11</sup> *P. Ness.* 58 (late VII), from the semi-arid Negev of Southern Palestine, when taken together with two false prophesies and recent archaeological work in the region, provides a specific instance — a very early one, if not the earliest — of Muslim Arabs

<sup>7</sup> In spite of the preceding lacuna, it is tempting to see the Emir as the one being troubled by the Saracens, probably in matters concerning shipping.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the 7 bilingual *entagia*, *P. Ness.* 60-66, where the dates are cited by indiction and by the "year according to the Arabs," κ[α]τ' Ἀραβ[ῶν] ἔτους.

<sup>9</sup> See *'ukâf* "saddle" in E.W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut 1968) I 71. H. van Herwerden in *Lexicon Graecum suppletorium et dialecticum* (Leiden 1910) II 1461, offers "lectulus?" without any meaningful support other than its association with τρώμα.

<sup>10</sup> This is Preisigke's suggestion (Wörterbuch s.v. τονάχιον. To the examples he quotes for γονάχιον we may add *P. Apoll.* 49 r. 4 and 50 r. 1; cf. also Lampe, *Patr. Greek Lex.* who with reference to Leontius Neop., *vita Iannis Elem.* 21 (p. 38.9f. and 39.14) explains the word as "covering, prob. cloak." Otherwise, an Arabic word may be hidden here and the word refer to another article "according to Saracen specification" connected with a Saracen mount.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the art. "Israel, Land of (History)" in *Encyclopedia Judaica* IX col. 261: "The conquest was followed by the migration of Arabs into the area... The number who became landlords and engaged in agriculture increased when Mu'ayya became governor of Syria and Erez Israel. Arabs bought estates, settled down and became peasants throughout the country."

settling into an agricultural community.<sup>12</sup> The document from Nessana records (lines 8, 10) a sum of money given by Meslem the governor<sup>13</sup> "in consequence of the land survey of the Saracens" (ἐκ τῆς γεωμετρίας τῶν Σαρακηνῶν) and "in consequence of the sub-division of (the property of) the bani Ouar," ἐκ τῆς γεωμορίας τ[ῶ]ν β(αν)υ Ουαρ.

In sum, although the documents cited above are limited in number, they illustrate all the characteristics attributed to Arabs prior to and following the Muslim Conquest. They also reveal the semantic transition of the word Saracen from a nomadic Arab to the occupying and settled Arab following the conquest.

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<sup>12</sup> See P. Mayerson, "P. Ness. 58 and Two Vaticinia ex Eventu in Hebrew," forthcoming in *ZPE* 77, 1989, 283-286. This writer has taken this position rather than viewing the document, as has the editor, as a receipt for tax on assigned land. The two Hebrew prophesies and the archaeological evidence are discussed in the same article.

<sup>13</sup> τοῦ δεσπότου ἰμῶν (read ἡμῶν) Μελεμ συμβούλου. This may be better translated as "our Lord the Muslim governor." The scribe did obviously not know his real name.