Jews in Arabia
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We’ve Been There: Jewish Communities from Around the World
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The Jewish Revolts
66 – 73 C.E. – The Great Revolt
132 – 135 C.E. – Bar-Kokhba Revolt

Map of Arabia

Map of Arabia
1. This is the memorial of Isaiah, the Councillor, son of Yosef, chief citizen of Tayma which erected over him Amram and Ashmu his brothers in the month of Iyar year 20 + 20 + 20 + 10 + 5 + 1 + 1 + 1 of the Province.

Year 98 (+105) = 203 C.E.

Aramaic Inscription in Nabatean Script
Tayma, Northern Arabia, 203 C.E.

1. This is - - - which - - -
2. 'Adyon son of Honi son of Samuel chief citizen
3. of Hagra for [lit. over] Mawyah his wife, daughter of
4. 'Amru son of 'Adyon son of Samuel
5. chief citizen of Tayma, who died in the month of
6. 'Ab in the year two hundred and fifty-
7. one at the age of thirty-
8. eight.

Aramaic inscription in Nabatean script
Hagra (= al-Hijr) – 251 (+105) = 356 C.E.
Hegra sundial
Manasseh bar Natan “peace”
( Gesture of Shalom in Aramaic)
Istanbul Museum

Darb al-Bakra (NW Arabia)

Jewish Nabatean-Aramaic-Arabic inscription (197 + 105 = 302 C.E.)

Region of Northwest Arabia

“Yea, may Šolay son of Awšo be remembered well and be secure before the Lord of the World. And this writing he wrote on the day of Passover, the year one hundred and ninety and seven.”

Jewish Nabatean-Aramaic-Arabic inscription (197 + 105 = 302 C.E.)
Samuel ibn Adiya (1st half of the 6th century C.E.)

Jewish poet and warrior of Tayma

built a castle near Tayma – al-Ablaq

castle is described by A'shā Maymūn

A qaṣida poem of Samuel – presumably Samuel ibn ‘Adiya

Cairo Geniza collection – Cambridge

The two leading products and exports from southern Arabia in ancient times

Kingdom of Ḥimyar (in red)

Several kings, including Yūsuf Dhū Nuwās (r. 517-525 C.E.), converted to Judaism

Kingdom of Aksum (Christian) (in green)

Myrrh

Frankincense

The two leading products and exports from southern Arabia in ancient times
Excavations at Zafar, Yemen (2008)

Rock-cut chambers, Zafar, Yemen

Sabaic inscription mentioning a man named ‘Judah’, ‘his people of Israel’ and ‘the synagogue’

lord of life and death, lord of heaven and earth

Hebrew graffito at the center of the inscription:

“Judah wrote this, may he be remembered for good, amen, shalom, amen”

Sabaic inscription mentioning ‘their people of Israel’

Zafar (Yemen) – 460 C.E.
South Arabian Synagogue Dedication Inscription
Rayda, Yemen (70 km north of Ṣan’a)
August 433
Ry 534 + MAFY/Rayda 1

1 Marthadhīlān Yarīm ibn Hamdān, Suʾrān, Ašwafand Agra’. . . have built and completed this synagogue (mikrāb) Barīk for Īl, 2 lord of the Sky and the Earth, for the salvation of their lords Abīkarib Asʿad, Ḥaššā[ān Yu]hāmin, Maʿdīkarib Yuhunʿim, Marthadhīlān Yazāʾan and Shuribʾīl Yaʿfur, kings of Sabaʾ, Ḥaḍramawtand [Yamn]at, and so that God, Lord of the Sky and the Earth, may grant them 4 fear of his name and the salvation of their selves, of their companions and of their subjects[,] in times of war and peace. In the month 5 of dhu‐khirāfān{August}, of {the year} five hundred and forty‐three {=433 C.E.}. Shalom, shalom, synagogue (mikrāb) Barīk.

South Arabian Synagogue Dedication Inscription
[no photo available]

8 . . . In compensation, they {the Jews} have given, chosen and yielded to the lineage dhu‐ʿĀ‐mir (um) a plot of same importance and same value, and to the lineage dhu‐ʿĀmirum, they have conceded a well and land which produces summer harvests and autumn harvests, {having} the importance and value of this well and of (this) land. With the guarantee, the prohibition and the threat of the Lord of the Sky and of the Earth, one shall avoid burying a Gentile on these plots, between Him and against those who do not give to the mikrāb bits land and to the Jews their plots.

Concerning the incumbent of Ṣūrīʾīl, his subsistence has been provided for, as well as {that} of all who will serve the mikrāb, with a well made of masonry downhill from the (wādī) Akbadī, with the guarantee that he will use the well {which is} at the place of those who will be used for Ṣūrīʾīl.
South Arabian Jewish Cemetery Dedication Inscription
Hasi, Yemen (250 km southeast of San'a)
[photos of the general excavations]

Aramaic seal: Yiṣḥaq bar Ḥanina
(Ẓafar, Yemen)

Philostorgius
(368 – 439),
Ecclesiastical History, reports that the
Christian missionary Theophilus found
many Jews living in Yemen c. 350

Aramaic seal: Yiṣḥaq bar Ḥanina
(Ẓafar, Yemen)

Bilingual Aramaic/Hebrew-Sabaic tomb inscription
Tomb of Leah the daughter of Judah
Southern Arabia – 5th century C.E.
(exact provenance unknown / private collection)

Tomb of Isaac, 5th century C.E.
Himyar – Southern Arabia – Yemen
(Sabaic inscription)
Christian Robin
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (C.N.R.S. – Paris)

"Le judaïsme de Himyar,"


Hebrew inscription from Bayt Hāḍir (15 km east of Ṣan‘ā’)

List of the 24 mishmarot

9 of the names appear in 1 Chronicles 24

Zoar, Jordan

location of Zoar at the southern end of the Dead Sea
Zoar, Jordan

Thousands of Jewish and Christian burials at Zoar, Jordan, 3rd-6th centuries C.E.

Konstantinos Politis (British Museum)

Thousands of Jewish and Christian burials at Zoar, Jordan

Sample burials at Zoar, Jordan

Jewish tombstones from Zoar
Aramaic tomb inscription found in Zoar, Jordan

“Yosef son of Awfa, of the town of Zafar in the land of Himyar, who moved to the land of Israel”

Dated to the 400th year of the destruction of the Temple = 470 C.E.

Tombstone of Saridas Pitholaou, archisynagogos (head of the synagogue)
Zoar, Jordan

Bet She’arim burial caves (northern Israel)

Stone sarcophagi inside the catacombs of Bet She’arim

Section of the Himyarites in the catacombs of Bet She’arim

Greek inscription at Bet She’arim ‘of the Himyarites’
Greek inscription at Bet She’arim
‘of the Ḥimyarites’
ΟΜΗΡΙΤΩΝ

2600 km from Ḥimyar to Bet She’arim

Mecca and Medina in central Arabia

Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahānī (897–967 C.E.)
Kitāb al-Ağānī
“Book of Songs”
Mentions that Jews arrived in the Hijaz in the wake of the Roman-Jewish wars.

Jewish tribes in or near Medina
7th century C.E., mentioned in the Qur’ān and other sources
Banū Naḍīr
Banū Qaynuqāʾ
Banū Qurayẓah

Jewish tribes in or near Medina
7th century C.E.
Banū Naḍīr (P)
Banū Qaynuqāʾ‘
Banū Qurayẓah (P)
al-kāhinān ‘the priests’
Jews in Arabia
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תודה!