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## Arabian Onomastics at Athens

An epitaph discovered in the clearing up of the archaeological site of the Library of Hadrian in 1980–1982 was recently published in this journal.<sup>1</sup> The reading of the inscription on the white marble stele is clear:

Σοβώτης  
Σαραπίωνος  
Ἄραψ.

The editor dated the inscription to the first or second century CE. The lettering as shown by the photograph accompanying the edition contains earlier forms, in particular a horseshoe-shaped omega, four-bar sigma with slanting strokes without distinct serifs, which in combination with later ones (alpha, beta, pei, rho) indicate a date in the first century BCE or CE.<sup>2</sup> An earlier date is also indirectly suggested by two other attestations of the ethnic Ἄραψ in epitaphs of a similar formulary from Athens, *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 8361 and 8362, assigned to the third and second centuries BCE respectively.<sup>3</sup> Sobōtēs and his father Sarapiōn would join either the three foreign residents of Hellenistic Athens from Arabia so far known, or the four from the Roman Imperial period.<sup>4</sup>

The editor considered that the otherwise unparalleled name of the deceased may be a Greek compound. That is, of Greek verb σεύω and the suffix -βώτας, or, according to the suggestion of A. P. Matthaïou, of the Greek noun σόβη (applied to part of the tail of a horse or bull, or the feathered plume of a helmet) and a suffix -ώτης, in which case Sobōtēs may have gotten his name from the appearance of his hair.

The latter possibility is more phonetically plausible, and a name based on physical characteristics would not surprise, but names formed from σόβη are so far unattested. If Sobōtēs instead owed the core of his name to a transliteration from a name of Semitic origin, with only a suffix added as a form of Hellenization, one could look to several parallels in Sob- from the Near East, especially southern Syria and northern Arabia, closer to where a self-identified Arab (Ἄραψ) might be expected to originate: the

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I thank Prof. Nikolaos Papazarkadas for bringing this inscription to my attention and discussing it with me, and Dr. Angelos Matthaïou for comments on this article. All remaining errors are my own responsibility.

1. M. Diakoumakou, Ἀττικὲς ἐπιτύμβιες ἐπιγραφές, *Γραμματεῖον* 6 (2017) 81-88 at 83-84 no. 7.

2. A. P. Matthaïou is thanked for this proposal.

3. Matthaïou is thanked for the proposal of a more precise dating after photographs: *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 8361 (EM 11972) to the late fourth or very early third century, *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 8362 (EM 10977) to the late second or first half of the first century. The Roman-period *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 8360 has a contrasting formulary, which omits the patronym and adds the epithet χρηστός; *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 8363 has the same formulary as the epitaph of Sobōtēs but is assigned to the Roman period apparently by letterforms. On Ἄραβες abroad see recently *SEG* 63, 1758.

4. Respectively M. J. Osborne and S. G. Byrne, *The Foreign Residents of Athens: An Annex to the Lexicon of Greek Personal Names: Attica*, Leuven 1996 (*FRA*), 49 nos. 1189-1190, 1192, and *ibid.* nos. 1187-1188, 1191, 1193.

probably homophonous Σοβαίος/Σοβεός and Σωβαίος/Σωβεός. The attestations may be given as follows:

## Σοβαίος

Bostra (area of: Umm al-Jimal), later Imperial period, *I.Jordanie* V.1 269

## Σοβεός

Emesene (Sachama), 1st/2nd cent. CE, *IGLS* V 2566 ([Σο]βεός)

Damaskos, 162/3 CE(?), *SEG* 7, 238 (Σοβ[εός])

Hauran (Berroka), 335/6 CE, *PAES* III A 173

Hauran (‘Awās [mod.]), 387/8 CE, *I.Syrie* 2046 (*PAES* III A 693)

Adraa? (area of: Ḥirbat Ġazāla [mod.]), later Imperial period, *IGLS* XIII.2 9908

Hauran (area of: Malaḥ [mod.]), later Imperial period, *PAES* III A 709 (Σοβ[ε]ός)

Hauran (Soada–Dionysias [terr.]), later Imperial period, *IGLS* XVI 49 (COCE- lapis)

## Σωβαίος

Berytos (area of: Qal‘at Faqrā [mod.]), Imperial period, *SEG* 49, 2022

## Σωβεός

Mt. Hermon (Rachla), 1st/2nd cent. CE, *IGLS* XI 21

Some more distant assonances may also be mentioned with Σεβᾶν, on record in the Trachon (*IGLS* XV 69), Σουββᾶς at Zoara (*I.Zoora* Ia 134), and the Latin *Sibbaeus*, a member of the *cohors I Ituraeorum* buried at Mogontiacum (*CIL* XIII 7042).

Caution is in order, as this evidence is later than the epitaph of Sobōtēs on the new dating proposed here. Greek inscriptions from Arabia and southern Syria are rare before the Roman Imperial period, however, and the indigenous onomastics that they reflect has deep roots. The Nabataean Aramaic evidence in particular, to be considered in due course, goes back to Hellenistic times.

Various roots have been proposed to explain these comparanda, but there is general agreement that the names are Semitic.<sup>5</sup> They do not all necessarily share a single root, especially given their geographical distribution: both Aramaic and pre-Islamic Arabic may have contributed. On the assumption of an Arabic derivation for the name of the bearer of the ethnic Ἰσραῦν in the Athenian inscription, the many occurrences of ṢWBW in the Nabataean inscriptions of the Negev and Sinai<sup>6</sup> are an appealing comparison. Via an Arabic diminutive pattern,<sup>7</sup> further parallels in names with the root ṢWB or ṢB(B) might also be identified, which would reach back in turn to the Hellenistic period to which the Sobōtēs commemorated at Athens might belong:

5. In the translation to *PAES* III A 173, “Ṣubaih [*sic*] (or Subai‘)” is offered for Σοβεός, suggesting an assumed ṢBH or SB‘; H. Wuthnow, *Die semitischen Menschnamen in griechischen Inschriften und Papyri des vorderen Orients*, Leipzig 1930, 110, 162, refers Σοβαίος/Σοβεός to ṢBH (a verbal root connected with “dawn,” “morning”), so too J. Aliquot, *IGLS* XI p. 124 for Σωβεός; *Sibbaeus* is related to SBY on record in Safaitic by J.-B. Yon, *L’histoire par les noms: Histoire et onomastique, de la Palmyrène à la Haute Mésopotamie romaines*, Beirut 2018, 97 n. 193; Σουββᾶς along with Σοβεός/Σοβαίος are related to Σαβᾶς by Y. E. Meimarīs and K. I. Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou (*I.Zoora* p. 231), and Σοβαίαθος and Σοββᾶθος (discussed below) to a series of Jewish names related to the Sabbath by R. Dussaud and F. Macler, *Voyage archéologique au Ṣafā et dans le Djebel ed-Drîz*, Paris 1901, 146 and L. T. Geraty, The Khirbet el-Kôm Bilingual Ostrakon, *BASOR* 220 (1975) 55-61 at 58, respectively.

6. A. Negev, *Personal Names in the Nabatean Realm*, Jerusalem 1991, 56 no. 994.

7. The vocalization CuCayC(at): see A. Al-Jallad, Graeco-Arabica I: The Southern Levant, in id. (ed.), *Arabic in Context: Celebrating 400 Years of Arabic at Leiden University*, Leiden 2017, 99-186 at 170-171.

Σοββαθος <sup>8</sup>	Marisa (area of: Al-Kūm), 280 BCE, <sup>9</sup> <i>SB XVIII</i> 13299
Σοβεαθη	Adraa, later Imperial period, <i>IGLS XIV</i> 181
Σοββαιαθος	Hauran (Sakkaia–Maximianopolis), later Imperial period, Dussaud and Macler, <i>op. cit.</i> (n. 3) 146 no. 4 ter <sup>10</sup>

Such a form might, in the final consonant /t/, give an even closer assonance with Sobōtēs.

The patronym Σαρραπίων seems initially more difficult to reconcile with an Arabian origin. It is better attested in coastal regions of the Near East (e.g., a native of Laodikeia at Athens: *FRA* 3291). From Roman times it is nevertheless on record at Amman–Philadelphia (*I.Jordanie* II 10) and Gerasa (*I.Gerasa* 49); a Greek–Phoenician bilingual from Hellenistic Tyre (*CIS I* 122) shows that Σαρραπίων could render Semitic theophoric names, in that case, for a homonymous father and son, the hybrid 'SRŠMR of the Phoenician verbal root ŠMR “watch over” and a transliteration of an Egyptian divine name (Osiris),<sup>11</sup> contained in the Egyptian etymon of the god Sarapis (Wsr-Hp). Such hybrid anthroponymy ran in these men's family, as the Phoenician version gives an 'BD'SR in the previous generation.

The parallels presented here for a Semitic name in Σοβ- or Σωβ- cluster in northern Arabia and southern Syria. Speculatively, the Negev, southern Idumaea, or the coastal strip between Gaza and Egypt, a known trans-shipment point for Arab traders (see already Hdt. 3.5.1), could have provided a site of cultural contact with Ptolemaic Egypt, for such a mixture as yielded a son with an Arab name to a father with a theophoric name of a god whose cult was promoted by the Ptolemies. One could speculate that sea-going trade also brought Sobōtēs to Athens. In this respect the Σοββαθος on record in the Hellenistic ostrakon from the vicinity of Marisa in Idumaea is especially suggestive. Visits and more permanent residency of Idumaeans and Arabs in Graeco-Roman Egypt are also known:<sup>12</sup> the father in that case might have acquired this Ptolemaic name in Egypt but preserved a name traditional to his family by the principle of papponymy.

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8. The ostrakon is bilingual, but the Aramaic version omits this name (a patronym). Compare also Βαρσοββαθος, of unspecified but probably Near Eastern origin, in a list of soldiers from later Roman Egypt: *P.Messeri* 33.22.

9. 12 Panemos (12 Tammuz in the Aramaic version) in a sixth regnal year, placed in the reign of Ptolemy II by the first editor (Geraty, *op. cit.*) but wrongly converted to 277 BCE.

10. According to *IGLS XIV* p. 151, this inscription will be included in the forthcoming *IGLS XVI* as no. 533.

11. F. L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions: A Catalog, Grammatical Study and Glossary of Elements*, Rome 1972, 272-273.

12. Idumaeans: D. J. Thompson Crawford, *The Idumaeans of Memphis and the Ptolemaic Politeuma*, in *PapCongr.* XVII, 1069-1075; Arabs: for the Ptolemaic period see the attestations of the ethnics Ἄραψ and Ἄραβισσα collected by C. La'da, *Foreign Ethnicities in Hellenistic Egypt*, Leuven 2002, 21-25; for Roman times, e.g., M. Zellmann-Rohrer, *Arabian Onomastics in Roman Alexandria*, *ZPE* 208 (2018) 226-228.