

# Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity

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Edited by

F. M. CLOVER and  
R. S. HUMPHREYS

The University of Wisconsin Press

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## *The Role of Nomads in the Near East in Late Antiquity (400–800 C.E.)*

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FRED M. DONNER

Nomads were an essential feature of life in the Near East in Late Antiquity and have remained so since. They interacted continuously with the settled population of the region and were one of the prime reasons that the history and society of the Near East differed markedly from those of contemporary Europe. Europe, after all, has never (at least in historic times) supported a significant population of nomads—by which I mean indigenous people who undertook regular, cyclical migrations in order to pursue pastoralism. We must distinguish this kind of pattern from massive “folk migrations” (*Völkerwanderungen*). Europe had such folk migrations, to be sure, but these represented either the intrusion of alien peoples onto the European scene (e.g., the Avars or Magyars), or the movement of an essentially settled European people from one part of Europe to another in search of new areas of settlement (e.g., the Visigoths, Vikings, or Normans). In all such instances, however, the migration, though drawn out over years, was fundamentally a single operation and resulted in the definitive settlement of the migrants into a new abode, where they led the settled life of village farmers or townsmen, with fixed habitations.

The Near East also had its share of “intrusive” migrations of alien groups and of internal movements of populations. Among the former, the thirteenth-century invasions of the Mongols, or even more the incursions of the Turks from the eleventh century onward, come most readily to mind. Among the latter, the clearest example is probably the movement of Arabians, many of them townspeople or oasis villagers, from the Yemen, the Hijaz, and other parts of the peninsula, to new settlements in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran in the course of the Islamic conquest movement of the seventh century.

As important as such mass migrations have been in Near Eastern history, however, they are not the object of my present concern. I wish instead to as-

sess the role of indigenous nomadic pastoralists in settled society in the Near East. Before doing so, however, it is appropriate to describe, in very simplistic terms, some of the main forms of nomadic pastoralism found in the region from about the third century B.C.E. on.

Three main varieties of Near Eastern nomadic pastoralism can be identified. The first, sometimes called "transhumance," is found in mountainous regions such as the Zagros and Anatolia. The pastoralists of these regions, who herd primarily sheep and goats, move between low-lying winter pastures in the plains or foothills and high summer pastures in the mountains. These main pasturing areas are fixed and reserved; that is, a particular pastoral group normally returns to the same summer and winter pastures year after year, and other pastoral groups may use them only with their permission, or by exerting superior force. For one reason or another, these summer and winter pastures are agriculturally marginal—for example, the winter pastures may be too hot and arid in summer, and too difficult to irrigate, to permit cultivation, while the summer pastures may be sufficiently cold that the growing season is shorter than needed for successful cultivation. Both the summer and winter pastures are fairly extensive, and because of their low agricultural utility, they tend to be essentially unpopulated, except when the pastoralists themselves are present. The routes followed by the nomadic pastoralists in moving from summer to winter pastures and back are usually well defined; they are frequently dotted with villages, and the pastoralists, in their predictable passages back and forth, establish customary agreements with the villagers about such matters as grazing privileges, trade, social contacts, and so on.

The second general variety of nomadic life is found where a large river valley or otherwise well-watered district adjoins an extensive tract of arid or otherwise agriculturally marginal land. Pastoralists in such settings can keep sheep and goats, which they graze in the arid tract during the winter and spring, when the seasonal rains "make the desert bloom" with short-lived herbage. As the pasture fails with the coming of summer they drive their livestock closer to, and ultimately into, the better-watered river valley, where water and fodder for their flocks are always available. The arid district is normally unpopulated, and the pastoralists may disperse very widely in it while exploiting its spring grasses; in the riverain district, on the other hand, the ready availability of fodder and water permits the nomads and their flocks to come together in large concentrations. Moreover, the riverain district is likely to be filled with villages, and the pastoralists must keep their flocks well under control during the long summers to prevent them from ruining the villagers' crops. The pastoralists' fairly long stay among the villagers results in very intimate social ties between the two groups. Indeed, the two sometimes become virtually one social group, part of which stays in the village year round and part of which takes the flocks into the steppe in the proper season. Such

arrangements are found mainly along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and their tributaries in parts of northern Syria and Iraq, along the agricultural fringe of the steppe in inland Syria from Aleppo south to the Gulf of Aqaba, and in other areas that are agriculturally marginal but still fairly close to some permanent source of water.

The third variety of nomadism in the Near East is really a further refinement of the second, involving the herding primarily of camels (the dromedary or one-humped variety) rather than sheep and goats. In comparison with sheep and goats, camels are much faster, can go much longer without watering, and can eat much-less-desirable fodder plants; they can also live entirely without water if succulent herbage is available and can carry loads far exceeding that of the donkey, horse, or ox. These qualities of the camel freed camel pastoralists to undertake much longer annual migrations, to penetrate much-more-arid areas in search of pasture, and to stay "in the field" for a much greater part of the year than sheep and goat herders, whose movements are quite narrowly restricted by their animals' needs. In some areas, camel pastoralists may roam from one seasonal pasture to another in a well-established pattern for almost the whole year and may have very little contact with settled communities. Much more frequent, however, is a pattern in which the camel-herding groups spend several of the driest months of summer at an oasis, along a river, or elsewhere where permanent water can be found—usually in the company of other pastoral groups and some villagers. Such nomadic patterns are best attested in the Arabian and Syrian deserts, in the Eastern and Western Deserts of Egypt, and in the Sahara.

The three basic patterns just described are, of course, grossly oversimplified "ideal types," and variations and hybrid forms abound; above all, these simplified models tend to obscure that "nomadic" and "sedentary" ways of life are really but the opposite ends of a spectrum of ways of life, with many groups falling somewhere in between. Nonetheless, these models do, I think, reflect some of the essential characteristics of Near Eastern nomadic life. These include the rhythmic, even predictable nature of the nomads' movement in response to seasonal changes in pasture; their lack of a permanent, fixed habitation, and their having regular contact with settled people, especially villagers, in the course of their annual migratory cycle. Two additional points need to be emphasized, however. The first is that nomads have always been a minority of the population of the Near East; this is not particularly surprising, since their goal of exploiting tracts of land too poor to support any concentrated population requires them to be spread exceedingly thinly, albeit over vast areas, for much of the year. The second is that nomads, despite their relatively small numbers, have exercised a profound influence on the evolution of Near Eastern society. Indeed, it is not going too far to say that the presence of nomads in the Near East was one of the decisive factors that made life and

history in the Near East evolve so differently from in Europe—at least in the period from about the third century B.C.E. until recent times.

This paradox of the nomads' limited numbers but disproportionately profound impact can best be appreciated by looking, very quickly, at some of the ways in which nomads have interacted with settled society in the Near East. It will soon become evident that many aspects of this interaction remain poorly known, and as a consequence we shall, in many cases, have to be satisfied for the present with questions raised rather than answers given. My further comments, moreover, are restricted mainly to the interaction of nomads and settled people in the Arabian Peninsula and Fertile Crescent. The rather different ecological conditions facing the nomads in mountainous regions (Iran, Anatolia), or in North Africa have generated patterns of interaction that are different in some ways from those in Arabia and the Fertile Crescent, although some similarities and parallels can doubtless be found as well.

#### ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The economic interaction of nomads with their settled neighbors has long been acknowledged, but the importance of such interactions has not always been fully appreciated. The older, one-sided view of nomad-sedentary relations as constituting an endless struggle between "the desert and the sown" has more recently given way to one stressing the economic interdependence of nomads and settled people. It is recognized that nomadic and seminomadic pastoralists depend on village communities for most agricultural staples (grain, dates, etc.) as well as for numerous manufactured items essential to their life in the desert—weapons, cooking utensils, clothing, tent material, and other indispensable items. In turn, the nomads provide the villagers with livestock—sheep and goats for food, camels and horses for hauling and riding—as well as with a limited range of products of animal origin, such as hides, wool, hair, and milk products. In some instances, the nomads effectively "own" lands which peasants work as sharecroppers. The nomads may also undertake important transport functions on which depend the survival of peasant communities, and even of larger towns; it was often with the nomads' camels and under the nomads' protection that urban manufactures or imports were borne from one town to another, or that a village's crops were taken to market. The ability of nomads to pass, under appropriate conditions, through inhospitable areas, and the necessity of securing their protection or acquiescence in entering certain tribes' territories, made their cooperation fundamentally important to the opening of certain resources, such as mines, that happened to be located there. Needless to say, the nomads benefited greatly from these transport functions, which brought payment in cash and goods to participating *shaykhs* and their followers. In many areas, it was only with the

cooperation of nomadic pastoralists that long-distance and even much local trade could be pursued.

These are some well-known aspects of this symbiosis, which was sufficiently important that neither group—nomad or sedentary—could probably have existed in the absence of the other without a radical transformation in its way of life. What needs greater emphasis, however, is that this interdependence influenced the lives of settled people (particularly villagers) just as greatly as it did the lives of nomads. It has long been clear that the nomad could not survive without the villager and townsman, but the economic impact of nomads on villagers and townspeople may go far beyond the few aspects noted in the preceding paragraph. Unfortunately, these influences must remain for the moment hypothetical, because so little of the essential spadework that might verify them has been done. We can, however, formulate a few of them at least as questions that merit closer examination in future research.

The role of nomads in providing transportation has been noted already, but several aspects of this function seem hardly to have been explored. Did it influence significantly the location or distribution of villages in certain areas and in relation to certain market centers? Did the limitations or advantages of the forms of transport used influence the kinds of products villages produced? Did these influences, if they existed, take regular enough form to permit us to generalize about them?

Similarly, the possible impact of nomadic groups on market structures has not been sufficiently explored. To what extent did the nomad's production of some things (livestock, etc.) but not others (manufactured goods, some agricultural products) shape the economic life of villages? Did the nomads provide a sufficient market for certain types of goods (e.g., tents) to enable some (many?) villages to specialize in the production of those goods? Did the specialization of nomads in stock raising cause villagers to pursue other aspects of agricultural life in a more specialized way by freeing them of the need to tend flocks?

In other respects, too, the presence of nomads may have had profound effects on the agrarian evolution of the region under study. We know that the agricultural evolution of Europe was influenced significantly by fertility of land, and that the latter was greatly affected by the manuring rate (amount and kind of manure per unit area per annum). Was the fertility of agricultural land in the Near East adversely affected, viewed over the long term in comparison with Europe, because nomads herded livestock in areas distant from farm settlements for much of the year? Did this factor or the rather rigid timing of the nomads' migratory cycle, which in many agricultural districts fixed the season when the nomads' flocks would arrive to graze on the stubble left after harvest, hinder technological changes that might have transformed agricultural relationships, such as the shift from two-field to three-field rotation that

was undertaken in Europe? In making these comparisons it is not my intent to suggest that the European patterns were "better," of course, but to show that other agricultural arrangements than those that prevailed in the Near East (e.g., a more fully mixed farming regime, or a different annual agricultural cycle) are theoretically conceivable but may have been thwarted in their development by the exigencies of the nomadic cycle.

Finally, we might ask whether the periodic raids launched by nomadic groups on agricultural settlements might not have had repercussions far more serious than the obvious disruption of agriculture on the local level that they caused. For example, might these raids, by periodically ruining marginally productive peasants, have contributed to sharecropping arrangements by furthering the consolidation of agricultural plots in the hands of larger landowners after the raiders had withdrawn? Might the nomads' penchant for taxing certain areas have had a similar effect in a less sensational manner? Did the raiding pattern significantly increase the risk of investing in agricultural land and consequently force more investment into other sectors of the economy (commerce, crafts) than might otherwise have been the case?

In short, there are numerous possible economic relationships between nomads and their settled neighbors that remain to be explored on the basis of a careful study of both historical records and more-recent ethnographic data.

### SOCIETY AND CULTURE

In turning our attention to the social and cultural dimensions of the nomads' impact on Near Eastern society, it is perhaps appropriate to begin by reminding ourselves of what seems to be virtually a natural law—or is at least as close to a natural law as one can come in the human sciences: that the social isolation of a group generates social and cultural conservatism, or put the other way round, that continuous contact of one group with others tends to engender social and cultural change as the community comes to terms with "alien" social and cultural practices. What I wish to propose here is that nomadic groups, despite their almost constant movement and their periodic contact with "outsiders," tended to be socially and culturally isolated.

As good settled people, we may find it a bit hard to accept the idea that these "people on the move" could really be called isolated, and it is true that many nomadic groups had social contact with other communities (whether settled people or other nomads) that were, geographically at least, far more wide-ranging than those experienced by many sedentary people, particularly villagers. Villagers, after all, frequently spent their whole lives and died within a few miles of their birthplace, whereas some nomads undertook annual migrations between summer and winter pastures that were hundreds of miles apart. But in this calculus of contact versus isolation, the mere geo-

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graphical range of these contacts is of less significance than their timing or rhythm; and here a great difference between the social interactions of settled peoples and those of nomads becomes apparent. Villagers in particular, and even townsmen, may be largely limited to contact with outsiders from nearby regions—the next village or town—and only occasionally meet a truly alien traveler from a wholly different region or country; but this kind of contact continues on an almost daily basis among settled communities, and through it, new ideas and customs can trickle into the community almost unnoticed as they are handed on from one neighboring settlement to another. Nomads are subject to the same kind of cultural “infiltration” during the months they spend in close proximity to settled communities or living among them; but unlike their sedentary neighbors, nomads also spend part of the year—maybe the greater part of it, in some cases—in search of pasture, in a setting that for those months not only isolates them from almost all contact with outsiders but also places them in the sole companionship of others like themselves, in small groups among whom long familiarity and the exigencies of life reinforce their time-honored values and customary ways of doing things. Although there is no way to prove it, we can assert that the “desert” phase of the nomads’ annual cycle may have had a kind of culturally purifying effect by which the various cultural and social “contaminations” to which individuals had succumbed during their sojourns amid settled society were annually diluted or forgotten or cast off, and the old values reaffirmed.

The implications of this social and cultural isolation are, it seems to me, quite far-reaching. On the one hand, it helped make nomads culturally conservative, that is, slow to change their ways; on the other hand, it gave them a far greater impact on settled society and culture than their numbers would lead us to expect, because their cultural conservatism meant that in their relations with settled communities they were continually reemphasizing the same values and customs. In exploring this proposition, I would like to select two instances in which we may suspect both that nomads showed themselves to be culturally conservative, and that this conservatism translated into a significant influence on social or cultural practices of the Near East as a whole.

The first involves the problem of language diffusion, in particular the diffusion of Arabic at the expense of other vernaculars. The survival of archaic linguistic usages among nomads—at least among Arabic-speaking ones—is quite well known, but we must yet consider the degree to which this linguistic conservatism influenced language usage in the Near East as a whole. Arabic first came to prominence in the aftermath of the Islamic conquests of the seventh century, of course, when it emerged as the official language of the new state, partly because the ruling elite of that state was of Arabian origin and had Arabic as its mother tongue. But Arabic had been quite widely used before the conquests, at least in parts of Iraq and Syria, as well as in the Eastern Desert

of Egypt; and concentrating on the apparent relationship between the rise of Islam and the spread of Arabic obscures other strands of evidence that are perhaps just as meaningful in understanding how, and why, Arabic spread.

Many factors, obviously, contributed to the spread of Arabic in some areas and to its failure to spread in others. They included not only the use of Arabic as the language of administration and literary culture, but also the relative weight of immigration in certain regions (usually applicable only to a very small area, e.g., the environs of Merv, where a small island of Arabic speakers survives to this day, surrounded by speakers of various Iranian and Turkish languages). Another very important variable, however, was the presence or absence of Arabic-speaking nomads in a given region. The eventual Arabization of much of the Fertile Crescent—particularly of the settled communities there—was, I think, made possible partly by the presence of Arabic-speaking nomads in this area long before the rise of Islam. An expansion of these Arabic-speaking nomads into Iran, on the other hand, was obstructed both by the terrain, which did not suit the migratory patterns of Arabic-speaking nomads, and by the presence of other nomadic groups, already adjusted to this terrain, who spoke various Iranian languages; not surprisingly, then, Arabic for the most part never supplanted various Iranian languages on the Iranian plateau, despite long centuries of Arab rule and long use of Arabic as an administrative and cultural (especially religious) language.

My second example in the realm of social and cultural phenomena involves that institution called "the tribe"—which, in the Near East, can be described as a unit of social solidarity defined along lines of real or supposed kinship in the male line, and embracing as well some rather distinctive social practices, such as parallel cousin marriage. The "tribal ideal" is most closely followed among isolated social groups, particularly nomadic groups, and tends to be diluted in towns and cities, where many nonkin affiliations assume great social importance and to some extent counterbalance kin-based "tribal" ties.

It is perhaps not particularly surprising that nomads should adhere so closely to the "tribal" approach to social organization; for this basis of social organization satisfies especially well some of the social and other needs of people pursuing nomadic pastoralism. These include (1) the need for effective protection of small, isolated groups against aggression by others in areas outside the effective control of any state, (2) the need to establish more or less predictable social relationships with groups besides one's own (small) tenting group, (3) the need to maintain one's access to specific pastoral resources (grazing grounds, wells, etc.) and other localities visited during the migratory cycle by establishing the claim in the name of a corporate entity, (4) the need to preserve the stability of the pastoral group through different seasons in order to assure proper maintenance of the herds, and (5) the need to maintain the stability of the camping unit from year to year/cycle to cycle, despite peri-

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odic changes in membership due to death, birth, marriage in or out, and so on, so that the economic basis of life for the individual continues.

Similar needs are felt by peasants and others, of course, but because of the spatial fixity of the individual peasant and of the people around him, it is possible for him to establish relations with others that meet these needs without recourse to kin-based arrangements, and this doubtless contributes to the breakdown of "tribal" institutions in settled regions. But nomads almost always have "tribal" ties to settled people; that is, nomadic pastoralists will consider themselves to be members of a "tribe" that also includes some settled people, usually in localities with which the nomads of the tribe have periodic contact. This naturally generates considerable cooperation among nomads and sedentary members of a given tribe; there is even considerable movement back and forth from settled to nomadic life by individuals within a tribe in response to pressures affecting the prosperity of the pastoral or agricultural economy—what is usually called "sedentarization" or "desedentarization." Thus part of the settled population is intimately involved in the nomads' social world—which is "tribally" organized. We must ask, I think, whether the "tribal" social order would be nearly as prominent in the Near East without the presence of nomads, who maintain this "tribal" order in a relatively pure form and reinforce it in the course of their continuing interactions with settled communities.

#### POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The kinds of nomadic influence on Near Eastern society that we have examined so far have tended to operate toward the base of the social pyramid, even though they sometimes had far-reaching repercussions. It is clear, however, that nomadic groups sometimes exercised a powerful influence also on the organization of political power in the Near East in a more direct way, and it is to this theme that I would now like to turn our attention.

I will begin by drawing a distinction between what can be called *zones of state power* and *zones of nomadic power*. The Fertile Crescent and South Arabia are regions whose ecological conditions have historically permitted the rise of highly centralized, hierarchical, and bureaucratized political structures ("states") based on an agricultural tax base. Northern and central Arabia, on the one hand, because of their vast extent, difficulty of access, and meager resources, have generally lain outside state control, and in them successive confederations of pastoral nomads were, from about the third century B.C.E. onward, able to establish their control over local settlements.

Within the zone of nomadic power, the political life of towns and villages was shaped in its essentials by the vicissitudes of power among the nomadic population. In some cases, towns or villages were simply subjugated by

nomads and forced to pay taxes. In others, a town was ruled by a leading family that kept its position by maintaining a network of alliances with local nomadic groups who served as agents of the family's influence in exchange for economic or other benefits. In some cases, a nomadic group might "capture" a town and establish its own leaders as the town's ruling family—a family that ruled partly by utilizing its close ties to its erstwhile nomadic followers. Examples of this process abound from Late Antiquity (Palmyra, Hatra, Edessa) right up to modern times.

In the zone of state power, of course, we might expect that relationships between nomadic groups and local power structures would be somewhat different, because the nomads living in the state zone could not be autonomous foci of power but instead fell under the surveillance and the taxing power of the state. Clearly the state prevented nomads from controlling settled communities directly, or at least seriously limited the character and extent of that control (although it seems that states often allowed nomads to work out among themselves power relationships with other nomadic groups). The states of the region under consideration have generally taken it to be of high priority to prevent nomads from raiding, "capturing," or taxing towns within their territory.

Where the two zones adjoined one another, there arose an intense competition between the neighboring state and the nomadic confederation, each trying to wrest from the other the exclusive power to tax the villages or to exploit the pastures of the border district. A powerful state could hold the nomads at bay by direct military action, or by establishing ties of alliance with other, more manageable nomads in the intermediate zone. It could thus push its control and influence into the desert and so secure in the intermediate zone the stable political conditions needed for fruitful agriculture and effective tax collection. When a state's power deteriorated, on the other hand, nomadic confederations could extend their influence or power from the desert into the intermediate zone. Sometimes this took the form of quick raids to carry off booty; at other times, the nomads might seize towns and reduce them to tributary status or coax settled people and other pastoral groups away from their support for the faltering state and into alliance with them. (We can note in passing that the fullest historical extension of the "state zone" at the expense of autonomous nomadic tribes occurred during the early Islamic period. This was no accident, for the leadership of the Islamic state, which sprang up unexpectedly in Medina, in the middle of an area frequently dominated by nomads, realized most acutely the challenge that independent nomads posed to their power and made concerted efforts to keep the Arabian tribesmen who formed the bulk of their armies firmly under the state's control.)

Even within the zone of state power, however, nomadic groups have been able to shape many aspects of the local power structure of towns and villages. In some cases, this influence was direct, a result of the instability of the border

dividing the zone of state power from the zone of nomadic power—that is, the zone of state power shrank and expanded over time, so that a particular town could fall under state control for a certain period and fall within the zone of nomadic power at other times. Depending on the degree of “shrinkage” of the state zone, the relative strength of the nomadic groups and of the town, and other factors, the nomads might raid the town or extort short-term payments from it, or they might enter into longer-term relations with it—whether by “capturing” it and establishing a dynasty of their own there, or by entering into alliances with the town’s leading families. In the latter cases in particular, it is clear that the nomads could come to exercise considerable political influence, if not direct control, over the political life of the settlement, and that this influence could remain operative even after the settlement had once again been absorbed into a revitalized and newly expanding state zone.

In indirect ways, too, the presence of nomads often had a decisive impact on the power structure of towns and villages in the state zone. The continuous processes of sedentarization of nomads and desedentarization of settled people meant that most settlements had residents who belonged to tribes the majorities of which were nomadic, and such settled tribesmen kept in close touch with their nomadic kinsmen, who could lend important support in personal or political conflicts, regardless of the position of the settled tribesmen in the town. Furthermore, even urban families with no direct kinship links to one of the nomadic groups in the vicinity might nevertheless establish ties of alliance or mutual support with certain nomads.

An examination of examples of these kinds of interactions between nomadic and settled people—mostly from the early Islamic period, the sources for which provide us with considerable information on this theme—makes it clear that we cannot hope to understand the politics of many towns or cities without reference to the tribes in the vicinity of the city, their alliances, relative strength, and relations to urban factions. Whether such relationships applied in all places must remain open to question—it is, for example, hard to imagine that they had much direct impact in a place like ‘Abbasid Baghdad. We would expect, of course, that such relationships would be more important in smaller towns and villages rather than in larger ones, where presumably the organs of state control (e.g., garrisons) would be stronger and the nomads’ influence over local urban politics correspondingly less. Unfortunately, it is only the politics of the larger towns that our sources tend to describe, and then only in summary fashion. The smaller towns, where nomads may in fact have been overwhelmingly the dominant factor in the local power structure, are seldom described by our sources at all.

In conclusion, there is reason to believe that the role of nomads in the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the Near East during the period under examination was more far-reaching than commonly supposed. This observa-

tion applies, I think, to the centuries preceding the Islamic conquest as much as it does to those following it. We should perhaps add here a word of reservation, if not of caution, however: nomads cannot be expected to have influenced *every* aspect of life in the Near East. Architecture, for example, is a realm in which there is little to be anticipated by way of direct nomadic influence, since nomads have no true architectural tradition—after all, nothing could be more useless to a nomad, who must keep his culture portable, than a fixed habitation! Nevertheless, their influence was of profound importance to many aspects of life, as I have tried to show. If our picture of these influences is still in many ways incomplete or uncertain, this is partly because our sources for this subject, having been written by settled people with little understanding of and less sympathy for nomads, seldom provide us with the kind of detailed information we need to delineate more clearly the history of these relationships; instead, our sources are content to note, on occasion, the unwelcome incursion of the “Sarakēnoi,” “Ṭayyāyē,” “Aʿrāb,” and so on, giving us no sense of who exactly they were, whence they had come, why they had been set in motion, or whither they vanished after withdrawing from the pages of our chronicles. Viewed in the broad context of social relations in the Near East, however, the importance of these evasive figures—intruders in our sources, perhaps, but nonetheless an integral part of the societies that produced those sources—can hardly be doubted.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The present essay provides only a rough outline of a vast topic. In view of its general nature, I have made no effort to provide detailed references for specific points; but for those readers who wish to explore the subject further I have here included a bibliographical orientation to guide them to a few selected references that may be of assistance.

From the vast bibliography on nomads and nomadism in the Near East, the following selections can serve as an introduction and cover some of the points raised in the foregoing essay, which determines the order in which the items are listed below. On the Mongols, see Bertold Spuler, *The Mongols in History* (New York: Praeger, 1971), which provides a brief, clear overview of the expansion of Mongol power and their intrusion into many areas, including the Near East. On the Turks, see Claude Cahen, “The Turkish Invasions: The Selchūkids,” in *A History of the Crusades*, ed. Kenneth M. Setton, vol. 1 (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 135–76. On the Islamic conquests, for a general survey of their overall scope, see C. H. Becker, “The Expansion of the Saracens,” *Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. H. M. Gwatkin et al., vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1913), chaps. 11–12; a much more detailed examination of the first stages of the conquest, with special attention to the role of

nomads in the process, is Fred M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981). On nomadic pastoralism in the Near East, see by way of introduction Emanuel Marx, "The Ecology and Politics of Nomadic Pastoralists in the Middle East," in *The Nomadic Alternative*, ed. Wolfgang Weissleder (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 41–74. On transhumance, see Xavier de Planhol, "Caractères généraux de la vie montagnarde dans le Proche-Orient et dans l'Afrique du Nord," *Annales de géographie* 71 (1962): 113–30; and Frederik Barth, *Nomads of South Persia* (New York: Humanities Press, 1961). On sheep and goat nomads, see Henri C. Charles, *Tribus moutonnières du Moyen-Euphrate* (Damascus: Institut Français d'Etudes Arabes, n.d. [ca. 1937]), as well as the next entry. On camel (dromedary) nomadism, see Robert Montagne, *La civilisation du désert* (Paris: Hachette, 1947); and Alois Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1928)—both classic studies, though the latter tends to romanticize a bit. On economic symbiosis of nomads and settled people, see the references in Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 26ff. On the general evolution of European agriculture, see B. H. Slicher van Bath, *Agrarian History of Western Europe, 500–1850* (London: E. Arnold, 1963). On the diffusion of the Arabic language, see A. N. Poliak, "L'arabisation de l'Orient sémitique," *Revue des études islamiques* 12 (1938): 35–63, and several chapters in Speros Vryonis, ed., *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975). On the "tribe" and political relationships, see discussion and references in Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 20ff., as well as the essay by E. Marx noted above. On the distorted view of nomads prevailing in literary sources written by settled peoples, from the ancient Near East to recent times and including the writers of the Late Antique Near East, see Brent D. Shaw, "'Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk': The Ancient Mediterranean Ideology of the Pastoral Nomad," *Ancient Society* 13/14 (1982–83): 5–31. Although this essay focuses mainly on nomads in the Near East, readers of this volume with a special interest in North Africa will find the following article of interest: Brent D. Shaw, "Fear and Loathing: The Nomad Menace and Roman Africa," in *L'Afrique romaine/Roman Africa*, ed. C. M. Wells (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1982), 29–50.