INTRODUCTION

There is a certain elusiveness about history; always contingent on those who both shape and interpret events, it is subject to accurate and well-considered reporting or inaccuracy and distortion. In the first century BCE people of the ancient Near East were witness to the end of the Seleucid Empire, a consolidation of power and the rise of the Roman Empire in the East. For the ancient world of Syria-Palestine it was a period of inevitable change and accompanying instability in the midst of which, of the many peoples of the affected region, were the Ituraeans. Their involvement in and contribution to events of this period is portrayed in the historical record as relatively minor, the written sources that have survived to the present day being minimal, and often only a fleeting mention. As a result, in part, the Ituraeans remained largely obscure, occasionally acknowledged by scholars when in reference to affairs recorded by the classical writers. In recent history, from the nineteenth century to the present, it became an accepted belief that Ituraeans were an Arab, unruly people, usually associated with brigandage and robbery endemic to the ancient world. A more detailed history of these enigmatic and almost invisible people was yet to be written.

This book attempts to reassess the textual sources relevant to Ituraeans, and how the sources are understood and interpreted in modern scholarship. It will endeavour to place the Ituraeans within the larger context of the ancient Near East as opposed to being understood as a people subordinate to the greater Hellenistic and Roman world of which they were an integral part. A brief history of scholarship over the past century outlines important contributions made by scholars to the study of ancient Syria-Palestine, and of Ituraeans who were a part of that world. The source material is divided into four main sections: literary texts, archaeology, coins and inscriptions. Until recent scholarship began to enrich our knowledge, it was only through texts of the classical writers that a people

called 'Ituraean' and a territory named 'Ituraea' were known to have existed. There is a risk, however, in relying entirely upon these diverse and varied texts, as often they reflect little more than the fundamental aims of the original authors, and ever present in the mind of the reader are questions of language and context, the author's intended aim and audience. Both past and present scholarship frequently reflects a tendency to repeat early assumptions and ideas without adequate consideration of their reliability and context. The problem is whether to accept implicitly what the primary texts state, or attempt to understand the text in light of the original author's intent and circumstance.

Throughout the twentieth century archaeology has introduced a new dimension to historical studies, and in particular with reference to the Ituraeans. On this foundation modern scholarship has formulated new and occasionally challenging conclusions regarding Ituraean settlement. The inherent problems in formulating any comprehensive understanding of who the Ituraeans were, or even what language they spoke, are yet to be fully resolved. Both the challenge and the risk are in the interpretation: on what basis do we come to any conclusion in respect to a site or to a text? Mentioned in the early texts are three large geographical areas: the Biqa' Valley of present-day Lebanon, the Anti-Lebanon including the Hermon massif, and the region known today as the Golan Heights with its natural extension into what is now southern Syria. Surveys and excavations in each of these three regions, although varying in extent, have contributed in recent years to research on their settlement history. Each region presents its own unique geographical landscape in which, according to the early writers and modern scholars, the Ituraeans were present in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods. Although certain specific sites have been identified as 'Ituraean', there is need to clarify what archaeology can or cannot say about an 'Ituraean' occupation of the land in relationship to the historical sources.

Among the primary sources, coins preserve evidence for an Ituraean principality formed under rulers who bore the titles of ΤΕΤΡΑΡΧΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΑΡΧΙΕΡΕΩΣ, tetrarch and chief priest, both titles reflecting the prevailing cultural milieu in which Ituraeans interacted. In the late Hellenistic and early Roman period the title of tetrarch indicates the rank of a minor prince whose political power was less than that of a king. It was particularly popular in Roman Syria with the term 'chief priest' occurring frequently in inscriptions from the Roman provinces. In this context the translation of αρχίερεως as 'chief priest' is more suitable, the term 'high priest' used more

specifically for Jerusalem. As well as confirming the names and titles of Ituraean rulers, the coins also provide a dating on which an Ituraean historical chronology can be framed.

The corpus of Greek and Latin inscriptions offers a diverse and occasionally enigmatic assemblage of information. The majority of inscriptions that mention Ituraeans are concerned with Ituraean auxiliary units in the Roman military, the name for the unit being taken from the original Ituraean tribe or tribal leader. Initially these first units would have comprised Ituraean men recruited from their towns and villages, along with Syrians and other eastern tribes known for their skill in archery. These inscriptions offer a glimpse, albeit brief, into lives of individual soldiers, but do not elucidate a specific Ituraean identity. Along with archaeology, coins and the early texts, the inscriptions provide information which necessitates a careful interpretation within the context from which they originate.

Most scholars of the past twentieth century, along with many today, assert that Ituraeans were of Arab origin, yet perhaps it is time to challenge this preconception. It is important to emphasize the need to examine how the early writers understood the terms 'Arab' and 'Arabian', and at the same time to acknowledge what the Arabs in antiquity considered their own self-identity, if in fact that can be understood. Determining ethnic identity through historical sources and archaeological finds is not without its obstacles and often results in vague and misleading conclusions. The relevant material presented here is meant to challenge some of these prior presuppositions. Questioning what the primary texts say and how they have been ascribed, how scholars both past and present have used these texts, and how we might best understand the information we have before us may lead to a new and enlightened perspective. The information here presented is intended to examine the Ituraeans in a neutral framework, reassess the texts in which they are mentioned, and discuss the archaeology in terms of what it may or may not reveal of an Ituraean people. In the early years of scholarship the various disciplines tended to be studied in isolation without integrating other contiguous areas of research into the examination. That approach is rapidly changing, and it is now understood that an appreciation of archaeology can give substance to texts, while the texts can provide context and historical precision to the archaeological evidence. Coins and inscriptions may reflect the religious and cultural trends of a society sometimes not revealed in other features of an archaeological excavation and often provide insight into

cultural and religious background. Together these various disciplines form a more complete picture, often if not always prompting the researcher with further questions. The following chapters will consider each of these topics in light of the Ituraeans, and in so doing question some of the prevailing ideas regarding Ituraeans.

1

EARLY SCHOLARSHIP

First published in German in 1874, Emil Schürer's *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* includes a section summarizing a history of the Ituraeans.[1] Schürer documented all the then-known primary textual sources, inscriptions, coins and Roman military inscriptions relating to the Ituraean principality. An English translation, now substantially revised and updated, and reflecting the opinions and ideas of those who worked on the revision, remains an important resource.[2] Treatment of the sources is well balanced and objective, and does not rest on unreasonable assumptions. This general historical outline with detailed references is a fundamental tool in any initial research for the historical Ituraean.

Within a few years of Schürer's first English publication between 1885 and 1891, George Adam Smith published *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*.[3] As a clergyman he was particularly interested in geography and its relationship to the history of Israel/Palestine and the early church. Having made two trips to the Middle East, the first in the spring of 1880 and the second in 1891 when he travelled further into Syria, it was his first-hand experience of a new and varied landscape that inspired him to seek a greater understanding of the biblical and extra-biblical texts. Although this experience tends to colour his writing, it still affords a particular insight into the region, its geography, environment, climate and inhabitants. Though the writing is often subjective and occasionally outdated, references to early writers, surveyors and explorers of the region furnish a unique resource. His conclusions regarding the Ituraeans are to be noted when he states quite emphatically the 'Ituraeans were Arabs', describing them as 'wild bordermen between Syria and Arabia'.[4] Initially Smith published an article in *The Expositer*, a journal dealing mainly

[1] Schürer 1874, vol. I, 'Geschichte von Chalcis, Ituräa und Abilene'.
[2] Schürer 1973. [3] Smith 1902. [4] Smith 1974: 350–1.

with biblical and theological issues. Here Smith defends his position on the geographical limits to the territory of the Trachones and Ituraea, and at the same time discusses the territory of the Ituraeans in light of Schürer's evidence. Much of this discussion centres on the reference to the territory of Ituraea as mentioned in Lk. 3.1.[5]

A more detailed and comprehensive study of Syria and surrounding regions which again concentrates on historical geography was published under the auspices of the Haut-Commissariat de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban in 1927. René Dussaud's monumental *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale* furnishes maps, an extensive bibliography, detailed footnotes with references, and a well-documented text.[6] As the title suggests, Dussaud was primarily interested in the topography of ancient Syria, including what is presently known as Lebanon, the Hauran and the Golan. In chapter 6 he discusses the regions of the Hauran, the Hermon and the Biqa', all important in relation to the Ituraeans. The topographical maps are particularly useful as they include sites modern maps often overlooked. Arabic names, when known, are given for towns and villages, rivers, wadis and mountain ranges. As a guide to understanding the landscape of Syria-Palestine in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods it is invaluable.

A history of Rome's control in the Eastern territories is the focus of A. H. M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (1937), which makes extensive use of coins, inscriptional evidence and primary texts.[7] In Jones' view, the Ituraeans were one of two tribal principalities, the other being the Nabataeans. The Ituraeans are called an 'Arab people', and he suggests that they were 'an unruly people, given to brigandage'.[8] These valuations represent still a widely accepted view as will be demonstrated and challenged later. Although Jones gives extensive reference material, his writing, in general, tends to be subjective. In a previously published article on the Ituraeans he outlines the development, urbanization and history of an Ituraean principality which remains a basic reference point.[9]

Such early twentieth-century publications have been enhanced by evidence from archaeological excavations, and the textual historical record reinvigorated by renewed interest in the ancient world. In the 1980s Willi Schottroff expanded the study on Ituraeans through his article 'Die Ituräer' by including a detailed listing of Ituraean

[5] Smith 1894: 231–8. [6] Dussaud 1927. [7] Jones 1937.
[8] See Jones 1971: 254. [9] Jones 1931–1932: 265–75.

auxiliary units recorded on Roman military diplomata.[10] His article begins with a description of gravestones found in and around Mainz, Germany, on which names of soldiers enlisted in the Ituraean auxiliary units are inscribed. Two of the gravestones each have a sculptural relief of an auxiliary soldier. Here, for the first time, a picture is drawn of an individual whom we might assume to be an Ituraean, yet even in this context there is no way of proving it. Schottroff maintains the previously accepted view that Ituraeans were Arabs, describing them as Hellenized Arabs who gradually changed their lives from robbery to farming.[11] Schottroff's recording of Ituraean *alae* and *cohortes* auxiliary units in the Roman army lends yet another aspect to our scant knowledge of an unknown people. His pioneering work on the Ituraean auxiliary units forms a background to which others have since added. This field of study on auxiliary units of the Roman military is both varied and extensive, with significant contributions made by numerous scholars. As it remains a separate field of scholarship with a vast publication, only a few examples have been included in the bibliography.

Since the 1970s and early 1980s increased activity in the archaeology of the Galilee and the Golan, and in particular that conducted by Shimon Dar and Moshe Hartal, has provoked substantial discussion and raised further questions.[12] Their identification of sites as Ituraean based on a particular pottery type has given rise to a renewed interest in the Ituraeans and their history. Some have challenged previous views concerning the northern Galilee and its ethnic composition during the period of Hasmonean expansion in the late second and early first centuries BCE. Questions posed as a result of these enquiries have led to a greater consideration of whether a people called Ituraean formed a substantial part of the Galilean population, or whether they were merely one of many groups that may or may not have inhabited the region. The work by Dar and Hartal is significant, in part for the archaeological record it has produced, but also in terms of their designation of settlement sites in the Hermon and northern Golan as 'Ituraean'. To date it is the only archaeological evidence on which such a claim rests, and it has yet to be fully understood and expanded. Since their determination of ethnic identity rests on a pottery type, this question is discussed in some detail in a following chapter.

Ethnicity is a more deceptive but significant issue arising from pursuit of the Ituraeans, an issue which is often merely a matter of

[10] Schottroff 1982: 125–52. [11] Schottroff 1982: 145. [12] Dar 1993; Hartal 1989.

perception. As one scholar framed it, ethnicity 'can never be a single water-tight category'.[13] It is a common fallacy to assume ethnic identity through names or language; in consideration of these issues Michael Macdonald suggests that both language and artifact are regrettably an insecure guide by which to determine the ethnic identity of a people.[14] There are, in fact, inherent dangers in so doing. Many scholars assume the Ituraeans were Arabs; indeed, this is the standard and most widely accepted view. This is clearly evident in one publication, where it is confidently stated the Ituraeans were of Arabian stock and spoke Aramaic.[15] From what little evidence we have in order to support either part of this statement, we must first ask the question, how do we know? There is no firm evidence upon which such statements can be supported; we can merely speculate. These misconceptions endure, however, where in a recently published travel book the Ituraeans are described as being of Arabian origin and Aramaic speaking.[16] Unfortunately, there is nothing in the primary sources either to confirm or negate such statements with confidence, and only the essential ideas implied are misleading. A society that speaks Aramaic is not necessarily Arab; conversely Arabs do not necessarily speak Aramaic. These statements are made even more confusing by the absence of any clear definition of the term 'Arab'. The question as to whether Ituraeans were Arab involves an understanding, first, of what the word 'Arab' implied in antiquity and, second, how the term is understood today. A work which offers a highly detailed history of the Arabs and attempts to understand this complex term is a recent publication by Jan Retsö.[17] In his book Retsö presents a vast amount of detail with references to literary, historical and archaeological sources, along with an extensive bibliography and footnotes. This follows earlier works by Israel Eph'al and Irfan Shahid, both writing specifically about Arabs and their place within the history of the ancient Near East.[18] In a number of articles, Michael Macdonald has published some of the most significant work regarding the Arabs. With his expertise in Semitic languages, and in particular Ancient North Arabian (of which Safaitic is only one), along with a clear understanding of the historical sources and archaeological results, Macdonald's research offers a rich and enlightening resource for any modern scholar.[19]

[13] Macdonald 1998: 182. [14] Macdonald 1999: 256. [15] Hitti 1957b: 171.
[16] Mannheim 2001: 581. [17] Retsö 2003. [18] Eph'al 1984 and Shahid 1984.
[19] See bibliography for complete listing.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship has tended to view the ancient Near East from a western classicist point of view often, but not always, with the result that the ancient Semitic world is coloured by an overlay of Greek and Roman dress. The drama of the classical world simply obscured the Semitic roots of Syria-Palestine. Eph'al pointed to a lack of literary documentation for the Persian period which he describes as a 'veritable dark age'.[20] This 'dark age' is no longer, as the wealth of epigraphic sources which have come to light in recent years encouraged scholars to rethink previous assumptions relating to the years before Alexander's conquest of Syria-Palestine. Archaeological finds of this past century support the 'abundant evidence of considerable Greek influence in Palestine before the advent of Alexander the Great', which has led scholars to recognize the even greater impact and influence of the Persian Empire upon the Near East.[21] Significant also is a greater discernment for comprehending the ancient Near East in terms of its long history and the immense diversity in which East and West met and at times co-existed. Questioning these earlier preconceptions, in which the various stages of Near Eastern history were treated as separate and often unrelated events, are Susan Sherwin-White and Amélie Kuhrt, who focus mainly on contact between the Greek world and the non-Greek world of what became the Seleucid Empire. Their purpose is to emphasize this world as a 'multiplicity of cultures', in which the indigenous peoples maintained their own cultures and traditions while absorbing and reinterpreting those of the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman worlds.[22] As a classical scholar, Fergus Millar's emphasis on the frequency of Greek language in the inscriptional evidence from Syria-Palestine seems to contrast with this way of thinking.[23] As a result, Millar provides a much less comprehensive understanding of the nature of the Semitic world upon which the Greek and Latin language was imposed. In describing the hinterland of the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, he points to the lack of much inscriptional evidence, and so declares this region to be 'almost wholly obscure', with any details that might remain in the texts 'not worth pursuing'.[24] If such a strict standard is to be used, possible insights into the indigenous populations are severely reduced.

How we approach and understand the historical record and its nature, and what biases we bring to any interpretation, is not without

[20] Eph'al 1998: 107. [21] Eph'al 1998: 118.
[22] Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993: 144. [23] Millar 1993. [24] Millar 1993: 273–4.

its inherent complexities. In his publication on the Roman East, Warwick Ball questions the ways in which the Roman Empire of the East is frequently perceived. Early in his book he criticizes Millar for constantly labouring on the lack of native character in the Near East, and suggests that the 'Romans in the East are almost universally viewed from an overlay of western cultural bias'.[25] In support of his thesis, Ball considers the many works dealing with the Roman East, and in particular those usually written by the classicists whom Ball describes as being 'necessarily Eurocentric'.[26] Ball is critical of scholarship which has continued to interpret and understand the East, and in particular the Roman East, from a Western classicist viewpoint. If in an appreciation of the Seleucid Empire these biases exist (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White would probably agree), then scholars today must be aware of these along with any modern biases they might bring to the interpretation of material. The Ituraeans would have experienced both Seleucid and Roman, and possibly Achaemenid, rule. Yet, in attempting to gain an understanding of who the Ituraeans were as a people, it is also necessary that the researcher place them within the Semitic world they inhabited. What the Semitic world in turn imprinted onto the Seleucid and Roman empires is frequently overlooked in preference to a Greco-Roman view.

Ball attempts to raise another important issue of terminology in his discussion on differences between the use of such terms as 'Greek' and 'Macedonian' or 'Greco-Roman', where each can be a source of cultural confusion. The question becomes even more critical with the word 'Arab', and Ball's comment here is telling: 'History's attitudes to the Bedouin Arab range from uncivilised barbarians of the desert fringes, constantly threatening the civilisation of the Fertile Crescent, to the European Romantic era's adulation of the Bedouin as the ultimate embodiment of nobility and environmental harmony.'[27] There is certainly some truth to this statement, as such attitudes have coloured perceptions and consequent ideas relative to Arabs down to the present. How the term 'Arab' was perceived in antiquity, and how the word is presently used when describing Ituraeans, is an issue of considerable importance to any possible appreciation of both.

Two recent publications add to the growing body of scholarship dealing with ancient Syria-Palestine. First is the publication, in French, of Maurice Sartre's history of greater Syria from the time

[25] Ball 2000: 2. [26] Ball 2000: 2. [27] Ball 2000: 32.