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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

*Cambridge
London New York Melbourne*

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521293990

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First published 1979
 Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Meeker, Michael E.

Literature and violence in North Arabia.

(Cambridge studies in cultural systems)

Bibliography: p.

1. Bedouins in Arabia.
2. Nomads – Near East.
3. Nomads – Africa, North.
4. Arabic poetry – Arabia – History and criticism.
5. Near East – Civilization.
6. Africa, North – History.
7. Muslim Saints – Africa, North.

I. Title. II. Series.
 DS219.B4M36 953 76–47194

ISBN 978-0-521-22074-3 hardback
 ISBN 978-0-521-29399-0 paperback

The cover illustration is from a drawing of an Aramaic inscription that appeared in Charles Huber's *Journal d'un Voyage* (1889). Huber observed the inscription in Teyma, southwest of the Nefūd desert. It is probably part of a funerary monument dating from around the fifth century B.C. The drawing evokes some of the themes of the present book which suggest a relationship between the importance of "literary" metaphors in Bedouin oral traditions and the character of Arabian political history since ancient times. Although the principal features of the human face, eyes, brows, and nose, are represented, a phonetic inscription appears in the place of the mouth.