

Qôš קוֹשׁ

I. Qôš is the national deity of →[Edom](#). He is attested only once in the Hebrew Bible as an element in the personal name Barqos, “Qôš gleamed forth” (cf. Lihyanite *qwsbr*; BARTLETT 1989: no. 34; South Safaitic *brqs*, BARTLETT 1989: no. 36), indicating the ‘father’ of an exiled clan of *nētînim* returning from Babylon ([Ezra 2:53](#) = [Neh 7:55](#)). This clan or family must have been of Edomite or Idumaeen origin. (The name Kushaiah, [1 Chr 15:17](#), cannot be connected with Qôš [*pace* BARTLETT 1989:200–201]: according to [1 Chr 6:29](#), Etan’s father was also called Kishi, and Qôš is never spelled with [š] in Canaanite and Aramaic texts).

II. Well before the emergence of an Edomite state and an Edomite nation (8th century BCE; cf. BARTLETT 1989; KNAUF 1992), Qôš was already present in or near his later domain. Egyptian listings (SIMONS 1937:XXIII 7; 9; 13; 21) of what must have been the names of Shasu clans from the 13th century BCE (ODED 1971; KNAUF 1984) mention *qsr* (“Qôš is [my] shepherd” or “Qôš is [my] friend”), *qššpt*, *qšsnrm* (“Qôš is verily exalted”, Egyptian /n/ stands for Semitic /l/), and *qšrbn* (“Qôš is brilliant, radiant”; here, Egyptian /r/ stands for Semitic /l/).

As Edom’s national deity, Qôš is attested in the names of the Edomite kings Qaus-malak (BARTLETT 1989: no. 1), contemporary with Tiglath-Pileser III, and Qaus-gabar, who ruled under Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal (BARTLETT 1989: nos. 2 and 8). His official status is also attested by the *Ḥorvat ‘Uza* ostrakon, a piece of Edomite administrative correspondence from the first half of the 6th century: *hbrkth l-qws* “I bless you (in the name) of Qôš” (KNAUF 1988a:78–79; BARTLETT 1989:221–222). Qôš may have been the owner of an estate at (or the recipient of revenues from) Aroer in the Negeb (BARTLETT 1989:213 no. 4). He is also mentioned, in a broken context, however, at the Edomite capital Bozrah (BARTLETT 1989: 223 no. 3). Qôš is further attested in the non-royal Edomite names *qws’nl* (BARTLETT 1989: no. 9; BARTLETT 1989:214 no. 6; cf. Idumaeen *Kōsanélou* BARTLETT 1989: no. 51), *bdqws* (BARTLETT 1989: no. 10), *pq’qws* (BARTLETT 1989: no. 11), *qwsb[nh]* (BARTLETT 1989: no. 12, cf. *Kosbanou* BARTLETT 1989: no. 52), and *qwsny* (BARTLETT 1989: no. 13; BARTLETT 1989: 219–220 no. 7) from Tell el-Kheleifeh/ancient Elath, and *qws’* from Aroer in the Negeb (BARTLETT 1989: no. 14). A building complex from the seventh/sixth century BCE excavated at Ḥorvat Qitmit—10 km south of Arad—has been interpreted as an Edomite sanctuary (BEIT-ARIEH 1985:201–202). Archaeological findings indicate that Qôš had been worshipped there together with an unnamed female consort. An abundance of ostriches among the votive gifts characterize him as a desert god, and as another god fulfilling the role of the ‘lord of the beasts’ (see →[Shadday](#); cf. KEEL & UEHLINGER 1992: 440–444).

Most references to Qôš derive from the period after the decline of the Edomite state (552 BCE) and testify to an uninterrupted continuity of population in southern Palestine and the Transjordan in the second half of the first millennium BCE.

The majority of the references to Qôš is Idumaeen. Although Idumaea was not organized as a distinct administrative district before the early 4th century BCE, the Edomites of the post-state period

can conveniently be called Idumaeans. A cuneiform contract found at Tawilan and dated to the accession year of (most probably) Darius I contains two Qôš-names: Qôš-šama' and Qôš-yada' (BARTLETT 1989: nos. 3 and 4). Edomites/ Idumaeans exiled to Babylonia are attested under Artaxerxes I (Qôš-yada' and Qôš-yahab from Nippur, BARTLETT 1989: nos. 5 and 6). The Aramaic ostraca from Tell es-Seba' (ca. 400 BCE) contain 14 Qôš-names (BARTLETT 1989: nos. 15–28). Whereas *qwsynqm* (33.3), *qwsbrk* (33.4, cf. *Kosbarakos* BARTLETT 1989: no. 53), *qwsml[k]* (33.4, cf. *Kosmalachos* BARTLETT 1989: no. 55), *qwsgr* (37.4) and *qwsḥnn* [sic! *ed. princeps* reads -ḥbn] (41.6) continue Edomite/Canaanite name types, some of the Idumaeen names are Arabic: *qwsnhr* (28.2; with Arabic *nahār* replacing Canaanite *nūr*), *qws'wt* (34.1; -ḡaut) and *qwswhb* (36.1); *qws'dr* (34.6; cf. *Kosadaros* BARTLETT 1989: no. 49) could be Aramaic as well as Canaanite.

Most Qôš-names in Greek inscriptions and papyri (mostly from Egypt) should have belonged to Idumaeans (some may refer to Nabataeans or Hijâzians, see below). In addition to those already mentioned, these include *Abdokôs/bdqws* (BARTLETT 1989: no. 48), *Kosadou/qws'dh* (from Marissa, BARTLETT 1989: no. 50), *Kosgērou/qwsgr* (BARTLETT 1989: no. 54), *Kosnatanos* (Marissa; BARTLETT 1989: no. 56) and *Kousnatanos/qwsntn* (BARTLETT 1989: no. 59; from Zenon's archive, 259 B.C.E.), *Kosramos/qwsrm* (BARTLETT 1989: no. 57), *Kostobaros/qwsgr* (or -br? BARTLETT 1989: no. 58; Jos. [Ant. XV 8, 9](#)) and *Pakeidokôsōi/pqydwqws* (BARTLETT 1989: no. 60, from Delos). A bilingual ostrakon from Khirbet el-Qôm, dated to 277 BCE (GERATY 1975), contains the Idumaeen name *qwsyd'/Kosidē* (line 2).

In the course of the first half of the 6th century BCE, Edom established a colony at Dedan, a North Arabian caravan town ([Isa 21:13](#); [Jer 49:8](#); [Ezek 25:13](#); Thr 4:21). Hence, some Qôš-names are attested in local inscriptions (fifth-third century BCE), e.g. *qwsmlk* (BARTLETT 1989: nos. 32–33) and *qwsbr* (334; BARTLETT 1989: no. 34; names ending in -qs may refer to the North Arabian deity Qais, and North Minaean *słmtqs* [BARTLETT 1989: no. 35] is better disregarded in the present context, as Minaean transliterates foreign /s/ by [t]).

The southern part of what had been Edom became the cultic centre of the Nabataean realm (in Arabic, *aš-Šarā*, culminating in the environs of Petra). The Nabataean national deity Dushara (*Dū-Šarā*) 'The One of the Sharā-Mountains' can hardly refer to any deity other than Qôš (KNAUF 1989: 110–111; 158–159; KNAUF 1991). Under his proper name, Qôš is mentioned in the Nabataean inscriptions of Jebel et-Tannūr, where his consort is a goddess belonging to the →[Atargatis](#)-type. Here, Qôš is called the "god of Ḥaurā" (*ḥwrw*', presently el-Ḥumaimah, in the Ḥismā district of Southern Jordan; KNAUF 1988b:89–90) by a certain *qsmk* (BARTLETT 1989: no. 47). After the decline of the Nabataean state, Qôš still receives the dedication of an eagle at Bosra (IGLS XIII 9003; 2nd-3rd centuries CE; BARTLETT 1989: no. 44). From roughly the same period stem the graffiti in the Nabataean script in southern Sinai, whose authors mostly came from the northern Hejâz (MORITZ 1916); here, another *qws'dr* (*CIS* II 923.2; BARTLETT 1989: no. 45) is attested; from Hegra (Madā'in Šālīḥ, the Nabataean successor of Dedan el-'Ulā) came a *qsnntn* (*CIS* II 209; BARTLETT 1989: no. 46). Furthermore, Edomite emigration is attested by the occurrence of the personal names *qwsnhr* and *qws'dkr* in the Samaria-papyri excavated at Wadi ed-Daliyeh.

As a deity, *qws* is once mentioned in a Thamudic inscription from the vicinity of Jerash (KNAUF 1981, roughly contemporary with the Nabataean references to Qôš). Several Safaitic and Thamudic persons

were called *qs*, which is better interpreted as *Qais, a frequent Arabic name (BARTLETT 1989: nos. 37–42), and two Safaites named *qs/* (BARTLETT 1989: nos. 42–43) may have been called either *Qōsīl, “Qōs is (my) god”, or, more likely, *Qēsīl.

It is generally accepted that the etymon of Qōs is Arabic *qaus* “bow” (BARTLETT 1989: 200–204). The Semitic word for “bow” belongs to the few words with biradical roots: **qs*₁ became triradical by suffixation of a -*t* in Akkadian, Ethiopic, Canaanite and Aramaic (Heb *qešet*, pl. *qēšātôt*), and by infigation of an -*u*-in Arabic (*qaus*, pl. *qusiyy* and *qisiyy*). The orthography of the divine name in Edomite and Aramaic poses, however, a problem which is widely disregarded: Proto-Semitic /*s*₁/ corresponds to /š/ in 1st millennium BCE Canaanite, whereas Qōs is consistently spelled with <*s*> (representing Proto-Semitic /*s*₃/). An historic solution of this problem assumes that /*qaus*₁/ is a loan-word in Canaanite Edomite from a language that had not yet participated in the Canaanite shift /*s*₁/: [s] > [š]; /*s*₃/: [ts] > [s] (KNAUF 1988b:73–76), i.e. Qōs was at home in one of the Proto-Arabian languages of the Shasu-bedouins in southern Edom at the end of the 2nd millennium BCE (with Egyptian /*s*/ for /*s*₁/) and was borrowed into the Canaanite Edomite of the incipient Edomite state (originating in northern Edom; KNAUF 1992) during or shortly before the 8th century (KNAUF 1984b).

Meaning “bow”, Qōs is the deified weapon of the weathergod (cf. [Gen 9:13](#)) or a war-god (hardly an alternative in the barely specialized pantheon of a simple farmer-herder society at the fringe of the agricultural area); deified divine weapons or tools are also known from Ugarit ([yqrš KTU 1.2 iv:12](#)). Although the inventory of the Qīṭmīt sanctuary is rather late, it presents Qōs in the role of the ‘lord of the animals’ (a role also played by a close relative of Qōs, the Israelite →[Yahweh](#); see below), a connection that may help to elucidate Esau’s ‘ritual hunt’ in [Genesis 27](#) (cf. esp. [27:27–29](#)). The worship of Qōs seems to originate in Southern Edom, i.e. south of Wādī-l-Ghuweir or even south of Rās en-Naqb, in the *Ḥismā* area of southern Jordan and Northwest Arabia. Close to the present Saudi-Jordanian border, a Jabal al-Qaus is recorded (MUSIL 1926:41). According to his attestations, Qōs entered the Edomite pantheon not long before, probably with the foundation of the Edomite state in the 8th century BCE. He was supremely *en vogue* among the Idumaeans under Persian rule, when loyalty to the national deity probably compensated for the loss of national independence (a process that may find a parallel in the history of Yahweh). The presence of Qōs in North Arabia and among ancient Arabs can be explained as a cultural loan from the Edomites (and their successors). The inscriptions from Khirbet et-Tannūr, still link him though to the *Ḥismā*.

III. His area of origin and his nature as an aspect of the Syrian weathergod present Qōs as closely related to Yahweh. Could the two have originally been identical? At Kuntillet Ajrud around 800 BCE, a “Yahweh of Teman” is attested besides “Yahweh of Samaria”. Teman was another designation for northern Edom (cf. [Amos 1:12](#); [Jer 49:7](#), [20](#); [Ezek 25:13](#)), but could also refer to any area south of Samaria in this context. In addition, Yahweh arrives from Seir to fight for his people in the archaic song of Deborah ([Judg 5:5](#); [Ps 68:9](#)). One may further note that Qōs is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (nor is there any ‘national deity’ for Edom mentioned), whereas the Ammonite →[Milcom](#) and the Moabite →[Chemosh](#) are (BARTLETT 1989:197–200). Yahweh, Qōs and Dushara are primarily epithets that were used instead of the god’s real name, →[Haddu/Hadad](#) (another of his epithets was, of course, →[Baal](#)). From an historical point of view, one may claim the five deities mentioned as differentiations of

Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999).

a single deity; his different names indicate, however, that various groups of believers stressed various aspects of that generic 'Syrian weathergod'. What they thought about the identity or non-identity of their respective gods is, for the lack of unambiguously phrased source material, presently beyond our insight (cf. KNAUF 1991).

IV. Bibliography

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