THE JOURNAL OF
MIDDLE EAST MEDIEVALISTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Special Dossier:

"Islamic History Broadly Conceived: A Tribute to Michael Cook and the Holberg Seminar"
with Guest Editors Sébastien Garnier, Matthew L. Keegan, and Pamela Klasova

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONT.):

TEACHING NOTES:

BOOK REVIEWS:

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONT.):

Letter from the Editors

It is with great satisfaction, and no small amount of relief, that we present the latest issue of *al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* (*UW*). It is our longest issue to date. As ever, we seek to provide a venue for up-to-date scholarship across the fields of early and medieval Islamic, Arabic, and Middle East studies, while remaining a source of news and information on the latest work of our colleagues and students.

Our deepest appreciation goes to four colleagues without whose efforts we could not proceed. Christiane-Marie Abu Sarah, now Assistant Professor of History at Erskine College, has again put in consistent and excellent work as our Managing Editor. We are very grateful for the outstanding editorial contribution of Hanna Siurua; we also thank our book review editors Malika Dekkiche (University of Antwerp) and Luke Yarbrough (UCLA) for bringing together a fine set of ten reviews on topics in a variety of disciplines.

We are delighted to introduce the journal's new masthead as well as MEM's new logo, both designed by artist Joumana Medlej (https://majnouna.com/). Although the journal's masthead has been entirely redesigned, it still emulates the Kufic pattern originally developed by Fred M. Donner in the 1990s. Our deepest thanks to Joumana for this wonderful addition to UW.

We would further like to express our gratitude to Manan Ahmed Asif (Columbia University). We are pleased to announce that thanks to his efforts, the journal is now housed at Columbia University Library (https://journals.library.columbia.edu/index.php/alusur/index) in the Open Journals Platform as well as in Columbia's Academic Commons. UW is also included in the Directory of Open Access Journals (https://doaj.org/), which provides access to a variety of databases and online search engines, such as WorldCat, and thus

(Photo of Antoine Borrut by Juliette Fradin Photography)

greatly enhances the online visibility of the articles, reviews, and other content of the journal. Our hope is that the move to the new platform makes UW an even more attractive option for colleagues—particularly younger scholars—seeking to publish their research.

The issue begins with an account by Maribel Fierro, recipient of the 2019 Middle East Medievalists Lifetime Achievement Award, of her intellectual formation and the range of scholarly topics that she has pursued over the course of a remarkable career. Six full-length research articles follow, addressing a range of topics: the erotics of identity in *The 1001 Nights* (Zayde Antrim); the provenance of the Mashhad manuscript of Ibn Faḍlān's *Kitāb* and its three companion texts (Luke Treadwell); an edition, translation, and study of a sixth/twelfth-century Arabic travel account to Alexandria (Jelle Bruning); early Arabic/Islamic representations of Umayyad-era caliphal succession (Abed el-Rahman Tayyara); the idea of "Islamic civilization," its genesis, and its institutional ramifications (Kevin van Bladel); and Muslim perceptions of Near Eastern stylites in the early Islamic period (Simon Pierre). The topics bespeak the energy and creativity of current scholarship in our respective disciplines. We are very pleased, in the case of Jelle Bruning's study, to include our first Arabic edition, and, with the selections by Simon Pierre and Sébastien Garnier (see below), our first articles in French.

Garnier's study of gluttony as a narrative device in the Sindbad story cycle is one of six articles in our latest special dossier, "Islamic History Broadly Conceived: A Tribute to Michael Cook and the Holberg Seminar." The other

five pieces are Theodore Beers's study of eleventh/seventeenth-century Persian poetry in Arab-language anthologies; Matthew Keegan's analysis of a sixth/twelfth-century epistle on companionship and hunting; Pamela Klasova's discussion of the widely treated *ḥadīth* on the Intellect (*ʿaql*); Daisy Livingston's treatment of the life cycle of a set of Mamluk-era *iqṭāʿ* documents; and Christian Mauder's study of Persian identity in late Mamluk Egyptian court culture. Led by Michael Cook (Princeton University), Khaled El-Rouayheb (Harvard University), Jack Tannous (Princeton University), and our own Antoine Borrut (University of Maryland) and held at Princeton over four successive summers, the seminar takes its name from the Norwegian government's prestigious Holberg Prize, granted to Professor Cook in 2014. The selections in the dossier, treating topics across medieval Islamic culture, politics, and history, suggest that there is much to look forward to from the up-and-coming generation of scholars in our overlapping fields.

This issue also inaugurates a feature new to *UW*: a section devoted to teaching, which contains a short comment by Jo Van Steenbergen (Ghent University) on his new textbook, *A History of the Islamic World, 600–1800* (Routledge, 2021), and a description by Hannah Barker (Arizona State University) of her new and exciting online resource, *Teaching Medieval Slavery and Captivity*. The site can be accessed at: https://www.medievalslavery.org/.

The issue closes with the book review section. Our heartfelt thanks not only to our two stellar book review editors, Dekkiche and Yarbrough, but also to all our colleagues who agreed to take on what

is a necessary yet often underappreciated task. As with the articles cited above, the topical range of the publications treated in the reviews and the expertise on display in the reviews themselves speak volumes of the vitality of the scholarly community to which we belong.

As is our custom, we close with two reminders.

First, we rely on your financial support. *UW* is online, open access, and peer-reviewed, but it is certainly not free. To cover the costs of publication and the work of our staff, among other expenses, you provide valuable support by keeping your membership in Middle East Medievalists up to date. For information on membership and the fund, please proceed to MEM's website:

https://www.middleeastmedievalists.com/membership-application/

Second, the full run of the journal, in its several iterations, is available online. The full archive can be accessed at:

https://www.middleeastmedievalists.com/volume-index/.

Sincerely,
Antoine Borrut and Matthew Gordon

MEM Awards

Remarks by the Recipient of the 2019 MEM Lifetime Achievement Award
Given at the Annual Meeting of Middle East Medievalists
(New Orleans, 14 November 2019)

Maribel Fierro
Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC)

(maribel.fierro@cchs.csic.es)

I am very honored and extremely grateful to be the 2019 recipient of the Middle East Medievalists Lifetime Achievement Award.

This is an award that comes with age and offers me the opportunity to look back in time and reflect on my trajectory. As with some of the prior recipients, my path started outside the American academic system, but unlike them, it has continued in the same manner, except for brief periods when I had the pleasure of being hosted by the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton and by the universities of Stanford, Chicago, and Harvard. Academic worlds are all similar in many ways, but also different, and these differences may strike an outsider as odd. This works both ways, and I can only hope that what I am going to discuss here will be of some interest for you, just as the American academic system is of interest to me. In what follows, I will mention some of the previous recipients of this award with whom I had direct contact at some point or whose work is related to mine.

I began my studies at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid in 1973, a year that cannot be forgotten by many of my generation because of the coup d'état against Salvador Allende in Chile. I mention this because when I was in college, politics interested me more than study did. In Spain we were living the last years of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, and events like those in Chile were easily translated into our own concerns, in this case as another reminder of the power of the army—the army being one of the major dangers that we all knew we would

have to face in the transition period that was to unfold after the dictator's death and that would, we hoped, lead to democracy.

Before and after Franco's death in 1975, what I remember of my years at the university has little to do with books or debates about scholarly matters. What remains most vivid in my mind are the armed police inside university buildings, the almost daily students' demonstrations that usually ended with being chased by those armed officers, and widespread political activism aimed at putting an end to the glaring dissonance between what most people—especially young people—desired and sought and what the official propaganda of the regime claimed we desired and sought. That period has given me a permanent reluctance to equate official, standard, or normative statements regarding a specific society with the realities on the ground, a reluctance that I have always found rewarding when I have applied it to the countries I have visited, including those on the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

I said that my memories of college have little to do with books or scholarly debates; dictatorships are very bad news for scholarship and for academic life in general. They stifle the free exchange of ideas, they suffocate innovative thinking, and they promote servile attitudes in every area of life. During my five years as an Arabic and Islamic studies major, I do not recall having attended a single seminar or lecture that gave rise to debate. I was taught "facts" to memorize, not ideas to ponder and discuss. The classes in general were quite boring, with some exceptions because there are always, even in the worst of circumstances, individuals who somehow manage to preserve areas of

intellectual freedom and integrity that, however small, remain exemplary and set a model to follow. My supervisor, Fernando de la Granja, taught me to respect the Arabic language and María Jesús Rubiera surprised me with her innovative ideas. Teresa Garulo and Emilio Tornero were always supportive and inspiring.

But as I said, the classes were for the most part dull and uninspiring, all the more so because I was the only Arabic and Islamic studies major in my graduating class, which meant that in some courses I sat alone with the teachers in the classroom. Under these circumstances, some of my teachers were tempted to transform the class into a conversation—usually a monologue—about their own concerns. I recall one who was obsessed with the petty aspects of academic life and spent most of our class time enumerating them. His case alerted me to the danger of letting such aspects gain the upper hand in your life as a scholar. Later experiences confirmed that academic grievances, when nurtured, have damaging effects on both personality and scholarship.

If I was unlucky in not having classmates (which, on the other hand, also meant having no competitors), I was extremely lucky in meeting two older students, Luis Molina and María Luisa Ávila, who befriended me and helped me in a myriad of ways, as they still do today. Luis Molina's knowledge of Arabic is superb, and I still consult him when I know that I do not understand a text, and I am never disappointed by his guidance. María Luisa Ávila, initially trained as a mathematician, has spent most of her academic life building an extremely useful online resource, the *Prosopography of the Scholars of al-Andalus*, which now

comprises more than 11,000 entries. I still remember the computer she was using in 1985 when she wrote her PhD dissertation on demographics in al-Andalus through an analysis of the biographies of scholars. They both introduced me to ulamology and to the thought-provoking work of Stephen Humphreys and Richard Bulliet.

My interest was not initially related to the ʿulamāʾ and their scholarly and social practices, like theirs was. I was interested in heresy and heretics. This was an interest closely linked to my own family history. My parents had been on the losing side of the Civil War that brought the dictator to power. While growing up in Francoist Spain, I was constantly reminded by the official propaganda that there was only one way to be a Spaniard, the National-Catholic way, and that therefore my parents and I did not quite belong, as we were neither nationalists nor Catholic; hence, we were (labeled as) "outsiders" in our own country. When, later, I was taught Spanish national history, I was fascinated by those who had received this label in earlier periods, among them the Muslims who had lived in the Iberian Peninsula for more than eight centuries. I became very curious about them.

Fortunately, my parents had enrolled me in the Italian school in Madrid, so I grew up knowing that there was no single way to write and understand history. Having learned Italian from the age of three, I developed a liking for foreign languages and, like many Spaniards of my generation, I wanted to go abroad and see other ways of living. When it came time to go to college, I decided to study the most exotic language that the Complutense University had to offer as a way to ensure a good justification to travel to the countries where this language was spoken. As Hebrew and Arabic fit the bill, I started studying Semitic philology, soon deciding that Arabic was what I really liked.

At the university, I held on to my initial interests in heresy and the history of al-Andalus, but a new and related interest slowly entered the fray, as I became increasingly fascinated by those Muslims who thought differently from other Muslims, who were labeled heretics, innovators, or even infidels by their coreligionists, or who considered themselves ghurabāʾ. Researching these figures proved one of the most enjoyable experiences of my academic life, and I eventually wrote my PhD dissertation on a tract by an early Cordoban scholar, Ibn Waḍḍāḥ (d. 287/900), attacking religious innovations and innovators. My focus has mostly been on the intersection between politics and knowledge: how the authority to determine what is right and what is wrong was constructed and enforced, and by whom, and how it changed over time, along with how violence was used in such processes and how it was checked.

When working on my dissertation, I started to read about early hadith literature, Qurʾan, and theology. These were topics that had never been core interests of the Spanish school of Arabists, especially not at the time I was studying. I longed to be able to consult with someone who was familiar with such topics, and I was lucky enough to be granted a British Council scholarship to attend the School of Oriental and African Studies as a "Research scholar." In 1982 London was an exciting place to be, with its mixture of different peoples and its vibrant cultural life. There my good luck continued, as I was able to establish contact with Michael Brett

and Michael Cook, who were extremely generous with their time and knowledge and helped me make sense of the text I was studying. Cook, in particular, read every single page I wrote, even if it was written in Spanish, and made many critical remarks and suggestions that taught me more in a year than I had learned in five years of college.

Through Michael Cook I came into contact with a group of scholars who attended the "Late Antiquity and Early Islam" conferences organized by Larry Conrad, among others, and the "From Jahiliyya to Islam" conferences held in Jerusalem. It was there that I attended my first international conference in 1987, and I was terrified when Professor Kister invited me to his office, closed the door, produced a manuscript, and commanded: "Read it." I then met Patricia Crone, whose writings I found provocative and illuminating, and who many years later invited me to write my book on ʿAbd al-Rahman III. I also met Gauthier Juynboll, who pushed me to write my first paper in English. At the time, he was writing his book on early hadith, and he immediately asked me: "Who was the first person to introduce hadith in al-Andalus?" Having come up with an unsatisfactory answer, I decided to work on a better one.

When I returned to Spain after my SOAS experience, I was again lucky in that I found a job almost immediately, first at the Universidad Complutense and afterward at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), a national research institution. Although I could have stayed in both, I finally opted for the CSIC. The reason was the CSIC's proactive approach to the opportunities offered by the new political situation following the 1978 Constitution, which transformed Spain into a democracy. The CSIC actively worked toward convergence with the academic standards of the European Community, which Spain joined in 1986. In order to get a job at the CSIC, it became mandatory to first carry out a long research stay abroad: exposure to other academic cultures and ways of doing things was considered the only way to overcome the shortcomings and perversions introduced to our academic culture during the dictatorship period. I also had the good fortune to overlap at the CSIC with two colleagues with whom I shared a vision of what needed to be done. They were Manuela Marín and Mercedes García Arenal, with whom I have worked closely since then—and in spite of which we are still friends. Together we tried to open up opportunities for students at the doctoral level and to offer them the possibility of contact with scholars from abroad, leveraging our limited resources to bring to Madrid scholars such as Wadad al-Qadi and Fred Donner. We also developed fruitful relations with our French colleagues thanks to a French institution located in Madrid, the Casa de Velázquez, which has played a crucial role in advancing the study of al-Andalus. I have learned a great deal from French scholarship, and it saddens me that today many scholars, especially the younger ones, ignore anything that is not written in English. In more recent times, I have been given the opportunity—thanks to the Alexander von Humboldt foundation—to get to know the German academic context better, an experience that has enriched my own work in many ways. Traditionally, in Spain, our contact with the Arab and Islamic worlds has mostly been via North

Africa. I have a longstanding love of both Tunisia and Morocco and have always felt at home in these countries, whether looking at manuscripts in their rich collections or through my contacts with professors such as Mounira Chapoutot-Remadi and Halima Ferhat.

I have enjoyed every minute of my time at the CSIC, and I will continue enjoying it as I still have some years ahead of me before retirement. There have been difficult moments, especially the awful blow that we were dealt in the 2008 economic crisis, which erased much of our progress toward convergence with our more advanced European neighbors. With Manuela Marín, I have pursued a shared interest in the political and intellectual history of al-Andalus, a topic dealt with by Sam Gellens in his seminal study of the *riḥla* practices of the Andalusis. I have written extensively on political, religious, and intellectual developments in al-Andalus, more in Spanish than in English, though sometimes these writings do get translated into English. We Spanish scholars are well aware that anything written in Spanish is very rarely read outside Spanish-speaking contexts and that to exist in the global academic world one must write in English, even if it means an extra effort for those of us who have learned English late and imperfectly.

Although I continue to work on Andalusi topics, several decades ago my interest expanded to encompass North Africa, as it became clear to me that I could not study the one without the other, especially when dealing with the Cordoban Umayyad caliphate and with the Almohads. It may sound silly, but in Spain al-Andalus has traditionally been studied in and of itself

as something unique and almost self-explanatory. The first Spanish Arabists tried to legitimize the study of al-Andalus within the framework of Spanish national history by rebranding al-Andalus as "Muslim Spain." The way we name things is related to the way we conceive of them, in turn influencing how we study them. The choice of terms has always fascinated me, and it was by tracing the history of a term that I made my first incursions into studies that transcended al-Andalus. An early Andalusi rebel was called al-Fāṭimī, and this led me to study how that term was used in Arabic sources inside and outside al-Andalus. While searching for Fatimids, I came across some rebels referred to as al-Aṣfar, sparking research that led me to conclude that some of the Arab conquerors had painted their faces yellow, thus offering another explanation for the term Ṣufrīs. I am presently doing research on the sacrifice of she-camels, a practice that I first encountered when studying the rituals of the Fatimids in North Africa and that has now led me to Safavid Iran, passing through Norman Sicily. It is exhilarating to venture outside al-Andalus while at the same time never losing sight of it. I abhor nationalism, but I do love Spain and thus I love al-Andalus.

Along the way I have met many scholars, of different ages, both inside and outside Spain, who have been extremely generous with their knowledge and time. I have also been fortunate in having contact with younger scholars, whose enthusiasm and vocation have helped me to keep my own alive. If I have been able to offer them help at all resembling the help that I myself have received from others throughout my academic life, I will be

satisfied. I only hope that in the troubled and troubling times in which we now live, they will be not exposed to the kind of context in which I started my career back in 1973, and that those who live and work in dictatorial contexts will be as fortunate as I was in eventually finding themselves in better times.

Qamarayn:
The Erotics of Sameness in the *1001 Nights**

ZAYDE ANTRIM

Professor of History and International Studies,
Trinity College

(Zayde.Antrim@trincoll.edu)

Abstract

This two-part article argues that the earliest Arabic manuscripts of the 1001 Nights *celebrate sameness, especially physical sameness, in sexual relationships to the extent that a category of erotic embodiment emerges that cannot be understood through a binary construction of sex. The first part of the article proposes a reading of a fifteenth-century manuscript that takes its descriptions of beautiful bodies on their own terms. Eroticized characters recur as both lover and beloved in a series of parallel sexual encounters that situate them in emphatic mutual relation and accumulate weight as the text unfolds. The resulting erotics of sameness decenters the perspective of adult men and displaces or undermines, at least temporarily, the lines of gender otherwise drawn in the stories. By contrast, when difference is stressed via explicitly sexed or racialized bodies, it is used to deem a relationship ridiculous or threatening. The second part of the article presents a diachronic analysis of one story, "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," to show how modern editors, translators, and scholars have read binary sex into the text in order to make sense of its erotics. Manuscripts of the* Nights *dating from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries differ considerably from the earliest Arabic print editions in their presentation of the story. This case study reveals what translators and scholars miss when they work from these print editions and/or from modern constructions of gender, sexuality, and embodiment.*

Awealthy businesswoman discovers a young man reciting the Qurʾan at the heart of an enchanted city and is struck by passion. She recites poetry to convey the experience of his beauty:

> ... by the soft myrtle of his rosy cheeks,
> by his carnelian lips and mouth of pearls,
> which sends the fragrance of the honey breath,
> and the sweet wine which in its sweetness purls,
> by his graceful neck and his boughlike frame,
> which bears two pomegranates on the breast,
> by his charming, tender, and slender waist,
> and hips that quiver while they move or rest...[1]

Today's reader may be disoriented by this episode from a fifteenth-century manuscript of *Alf layla wa-layla* (*1001 Nights*). While the gender roles may be surprising, the young man's embodied presence, as evoked by the poem, may seem downright unlikely. Is this beautiful youth *really* male? Is the poem feminizing his body as a way of eroticizing it? Questions like these spring from assumptions about what a male body or masculine desirability looks like, assumptions that should not be projected onto the past. In fact, examples throughout this manuscript cultivate what might be called an erotics of sameness, in which bodies are described in ways that stress their similarities, regardless of gender. This has the effect of producing for the audience a field of sexual possibility that cannot be understood through modern categories of sexuality or norms of embodied gender.

This article proceeds in two parts. In the first part, I propose a reading of this fifteenth-century manuscript that takes its descriptions of beautiful bodies, like the one above, on their own terms. The evidence here, as in the reams of Arabic poetry composed in the same period unselfconsciously eroticizing both young men and women, confirms previous claims that sex difference was not what made passionate love either aesthetically successful or socially acceptable.[2] Rather, in this manuscript eroticized characters recur as both lover and beloved in a series of parallel sexual encounters that situate them in emphatic mutual relation and accumulate weight as the text unfolds. The resulting erotics of sameness decenters the perspective of adult men and displaces or undermines, at least temporarily, the lines of gender otherwise drawn in the stories. By contrast, when difference emerges via explicitly sexed or racialized bodies, it is used to deem a relationship ridiculous or

---

1. This excerpt is from Husain Haddawy's excellent translation of the twelve-verse poem in *The Arabian Nights* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 166–67. Subsequent translations from the Arabic are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

2. See Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), especially chapter 2; Thomas Bauer, "Male-Male Love in Classical Arabic Poetry," in *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, 107–23 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Adam Talib, *How Do You Say "Epigram" in Arabic: Literary History at the Limits of Comparison* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Franz Rosenthal, "Male and Female: Described and Compared," in *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, ed. J. W. Wright and Everett K. Rowson, 24–54 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); and the many works of Everett Rowson cited below.

threatening. In the second part of the article, I present a diachronic analysis of one story, "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," to show how modern editors, translators, and scholars have read binary sex into the text in order to make sense of its erotics. Manuscripts of the *Nights* dating from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries differ considerably from the earliest Arabic print editions in their presentation of the story. This case study reveals what translators and scholars miss when they work from these print editions and/or from modern constructions of gender, sexuality, and embodiment.

Part 1: Sameness and Difference in a Fifteenth-Century Manuscript of the *1001 Nights*

For historians working on earlier periods, it is often a challenge to interpret sexual practices and norms without reproducing, even unintentionally, modern binaries, such as the homosexuality/heterosexuality binary and the binary construction of sex.[3] Even a term such as "same-sex desire," which is often seen as a less anachronistic alternative to homosexuality, centers a binary notion of sameness and difference derived from the sexed body. In general, modern sexual taxonomies depend on the concept of sexual dimorphism, in which male and female bodies are understood as categorically and self-evidently different, with a particular emphasis on genitalia. However, scholarship on the history of the body has shown that sexual dimorphism may not have always underpinned scientific or religious thought.[4] In the field of Islamic history, Indira Falk Gesink argues that despite the importance of a gender binary to the realms of marriage, the household, inheritance, and ritual, Muslim scholars from across the spectrum of premodern jurisprudence exhibited flexibility when confronted with morphological ambiguity. They adopted a category of "complex sex" and allowed people to hold different sex designations simultaneously or to

---

3. Literature on the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality is vast and crosses multiple fields. Terms such as binary sex, gender roles, and embodied gender have become widespread in academic writing. As should be clear already, I take a historical constructionist, rather than an essentialist, approach, and I use these terms throughout the article in particular reference to the primary sources I am analyzing. I also cite relevant secondary scholarship from the fields of medieval and Islamic history and Arabic literature in the notes below. However, if a reader would like to situate these terms in a broader context, informed by recent insights from scholarship in biology and linguistics, starting points that include useful definitions are Ann Fausto-Sterling, "Gender/Sex, Sexual Orientation, and Identity Are in the Body: How Did They Get There?," *Journal of Sex Research* 56, nos. 4–5 (2019): 529–55; and Lauren Ackerman, "Syntactic and Cognitive Issues in Investigating Gendered Coreference," *Glossia: A Journal of General Linguistics* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1–27 (art. 117). As for sexuality, homosexuality, and heterosexuality, I use these terms not in my analysis of primary sources but rather only in reference to modern systems of sexual classification or to specific scholarly works that are cited in the notes.

4. For the well-known if controversial "one-sex" model, see Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). For critics of Laqueur's model, see Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Katharine Park, "Cadden, Laqueur, and the 'One-Sex Body,'" *Medieval Feminist Forum* 46, no. 1 (2010): 96–100; and Helen King, *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

pass from one to another.[5] Medieval Arabic medical texts go a step further and elaborate what Ahmed Ragab calls a "sexscape" in which bodies were observed and placed along a continuum from ultramasculine males at one extreme to ultrafeminine females at the other, with plenty of options in between. Although these texts predictably focus on anatomy and morphology, they deemphasize genitalia, at least in comparison to other physical markers, in locating a body on the continuum.[6] This scholarship highlights the inadequacy of a binary construction of sex for understanding the way bodies were perceived and positioned in premodern legal and medical discourses.

One of the goals of this article is to build on this emerging scholarship by showing the way a literary text also complicates modern binaries in its eroticization of bodies. Existing scholarship on medieval and early modern Arabic literature has tended to use binary sex to establish sexual categories even if other kinds of differences regularly cross-cut those categories. Khaled El-Rouayheb's important monograph on Arabic sources from the Ottoman Empire historicizes the homosexuality/heterosexuality binary and denaturalizes the emphasis on identity and essentialism associated with these modern terms.[7] Although the focus on homoeroticism and same-sex desire centers a category of same-sexed bodies, El-Rouayheb shows that distinctions of age and status organized erotic life among men. In general, scholars of Arabic literature from earlier periods have not paid as much attention to problematizing modern sexual categories as El-Rouayheb has, but have nonetheless found similar patterns. In Abbasid-era belles-lettres, Everett Rowson observes a basic division in society between elite adult men, who authored and acted in texts as sexual agents, and everyone else, who constituted "the ranks of the not-male."[8] Witty disputations between

5. Indira Falk Gesink, "Intersex Bodies in Premodern Islamic Discourse: Complicating the Binary," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 14, no. 2 (2018): 152–73. See also Saqer A. Almarri, "'You Have Made Her a Man among Men': Translating the *Khuntha*'s Anatomy in Fatimid Jurisprudence," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, nos. 3–4 (2016): 578–86; and Sara Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chapter 4.

6. Ahmed Ragab, "One, Two, or Many Sexes: Sex Differentiation in Medieval Islamicate Medical Thought," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 3 (2015): 428–54. See also Emily Selove and Rosalind Batten, "Making Men and Women: Arabic Commentaries on the Gynaecological Hippocratic Aphorisms in Context," *Annales islamologiques* 48, no. 1 (2014): 239–62; and Sherry Sayed Gadelrab, "Discourses on Sex Differences in Medieval Scholarly Islamic Thought," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 66, no. 1 (2011): 40–81. Two related subgenres that predictably focus more attention on genitalia are *ʿilm al-bāh* (sexology) and *ʿilm al-firāsa* (physiognomy), the latter in particular for the purposes of evaluating enslaved people; however, the focus on genitalia only accentuates morphological diversity and a spectrum of possible bodies. On these genres, see Pernilla Myrne, *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2020), chapters 1–2; and Antonella Ghersetti, "The Representation of Slave Girls in a Physiognomic Text of the Fourteenth Century," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 21 (2018): 21–45.

7. El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*. For related work on Ottoman Turkish sources, see Dror Zeʾevi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); and Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of the Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

8. Everett K. Rowson, "Gender Irregularity as Entertainment: Institutionalized Transvestism at the Caliphal Court in Medieval Baghdad," in *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, ed. Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack, 45–72 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). See also Rowson, "The Traffic in Boys:

those who preferred sex with young men and those who preferred sex with women and well-documented practices of cross-dressing imply that gendered and/or sexed bodies mattered in sorting through those ranks. Overall, however, Rowson suggests that difference structured *all* normative sexual relationships, but power difference, expressed in terms of gender, age, religion, or legal status, mattered more than difference derived from the sexed body. The corollary to this was that sameness—which in these texts usually meant two elite adult men—was often portrayed, for at least one of them, as abject or pathological.[9] Pernilla Myrne reads Arabic sources from the same period for women's voices and finds that they sought as diverse an array of partners as the men whose point of view is easier to identify, but that there was less of an emphasis on power asymmetry. For instance, the particular negative associations that attached to sexual relations between adult men did not apply to the case of "female homosexuality," which Myrne understands in line with modern discourses as an "orientation" within a category of same-sexed bodies.[10]

Based on this scholarship, it is clear that concepts of sameness and difference organized sexual practices and norms as portrayed in premodern Arabic literature. Moreover, it is clear that these concepts could not always be mapped onto a binary construction of sex, even if this is not always stated outright. Nonetheless, the emphasis on same-sex desire in much of this work obscures the extent to which the bodies of young men and women are portrayed as strikingly similar in literary texts.[11] These similarities cannot be chalked up solely to the tendency of adult men to sexualize subordinate members of society, especially when viewed through a piece of popular literature such as the *1001 Nights.* In the fifteenth-century manuscript under study here, beautiful he- and she-characters recur as both lover and beloved, both active and passive, and even if they also serve as fantasies for an audience,

---

Slavery and Homoerotic Liaisons in Elite ʿAbbāsid Society," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 11, no. 2 (2008): 193–204; and idem, "Homoerotic Narratives from Mamlūk Literature: Al-Ṣafadī's *Lawʿat al-Shākī* and Ibn Dāniyāl's *al-Mutayyam*," in Wright and Rowson, *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, 158–91.

9. Rowson's work on the category of the *mukhannath* ("effeminate") suggests that from the ninth century on some adult men chose to position themselves as sexually available for other adult men and were frequently stigmatized; see Rowson, "The Effeminates of Early Medina," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, no. 4 (1991): 671–93; and idem, "Gender Irregularity." On this category as well as the related *maʾbūn*, see also El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 13–25; and Frédéric Lagrange, "The Obscenity of the Vizier," in *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, ed. Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, 161–203 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2008).

10. See Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, chapters 4–6; and Sahar Amer, "Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 2 (2009): 215–36.

11. This is a point that is always raised, but the attention to homoerotic poetry in much of the secondary scholarship has left the significance of these similarities as well as the way they operate in other kinds of literature underdeveloped. The question of whether the use of the masculine pronoun in such poetry "masks" a female beloved for reasons of either prosody or propriety is often as far as the discussion goes. In any case, in all the examples below from the *Nights* the pronouns in the poems match the pronouns used for the character elsewhere in the story. For an important discussion of the question of love poetry and pronouns, which concludes that they can, for the most part, be taken at face value, see Thomas Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts: Eine literatur- und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie des arabischen Ġazal* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 150–62.

the stories insist upon their comparability and juxtaposition.[12] In other words, well-matched pairs are those who are described as similar *to each other*, regardless of the body parts that are (or may be imagined to be) involved. Of course, gender differences are central to the stories of the *Nights*, particularly in their portrayal of marriage, the family, and politics. But sameness, especially physical sameness, is celebrated in the context of erotic love to an extent that destabilizes the relationship between gender difference and embodiment. Among the implications of this erotics of sameness for scholars of Arabic literature and sexuality is that it decenters the perspectives of elite adult men. Diverse observers are pictured admiring beautiful characters who are in turn pictured admiring each other, establishing multidirectional circuits of desire.[13] Another consequence is to expand what has heretofore counted as evidence for homoeroticism. When he- and she-characters are eroticized in nearly identical terms, it is unnecessary for the text to portray men attracted to men or women to women for it to incite or affirm such attractions in an audience. This may have been a way of "masquerading" illicit desires, but more broadly it raises questions about the field of sexual possibility produced by literature like this and the role played by the sexed body in structuring it.[14]

In what follows of the first part of this article, I focus on the earliest surviving manuscript of the *1001 Nights*, likely produced in Syria in the fifteenth century.[15] It was acquired by Antoine Galland in the early eighteenth century and made famous as the basis for his best-selling translation and adaptation *Les mille et une nuits*, published in Paris in twelve volumes between 1704 and 1717.[16] Now held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the manuscript opens with a story of two brother-kings who, upon discovering that their wives have been unfaithful, set out on a journey during which they become convinced of the essential treachery of women.[17] After returning to his kingdom, the elder brother, Shahrayar, decides to take a new wife each night and execute her in the morning as a way of protecting himself from further cuckoldry. As she watches the king's vizier procure a new bride for him every day, the vizier's daughter, Shahrazad, hatches a plan to save the women

---

12. I use the terms he- and she-characters to reflect the grammatical gender binary produced by the Arabic language and avoid the terms male and female, which are associated with binary sex.

13. This idea was inspired by chapter 2 of Afsaneh Najmabadi's *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

14. "Masquerade" comes from Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 27.

15. In his critical edition (which I use for all references to the manuscript below), Muhsin Mahdi dates the manuscript to fourteenth-century Syria; see Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights (Alf Layla wa-Layla): The Classic Edition (1984–1994)*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 1:12–36 [hereafter Mahdi, 1/2]. Scholarly consensus now, however, accepts a fifteenth-century date. For more on this, see Heinz Grotzfeld, "The Manuscript Tradition of the *Arabian Nights*," in *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, ed. Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, 2 vols., 1:17–21 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004).

16. See Paulo Lemos Horta, *Marvellous Thieves: Secret Authors of the Arabian Nights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), chapter 1; and Muhsin Mahdi, *The Thousand and One Nights* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 11–49.

17. The three-volume manuscript is BNF Arabe 3609-3611. For more on it, see Ibrahim Akel, "Liste des manuscrits arabes des *Nuits*," in *Arabic Manuscripts of the "Thousand and One Nights*," ed. Aboubakr Chraïbi, 65–114 (Paris: Espaces & Signes, 2016), 70–71.

of the kingdom. She insists that her father marry her to the king, involves her younger sister Dinarzad in the plot, and proceeds to tell stories to the king every night, breaking off at a climactic point in the narrative just as the sun rises and thereby convincing him to let her live to continue the tale the next evening. The manuscript is clearly unfinished, as it ends abruptly in the middle of night 281, but no one knows exactly how many nights it or its now-lost predecessor(s) contained.[18] Although manuscripts from later centuries include different sequences of nights, the earliest surviving Arabic manuscripts containing a full 1,001 nights date from the early nineteenth century.[19]

Following Muhsin Mahdi's assessment of the manuscript in his 1984 critical edition, as supplemented by more recent historical work, I am persuaded that it contains a text that was shaped by and for an Arabic-speaking, urban constituency, likely located primarily in Egypt and Syria during the period of the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517 CE).[20] I do not, however, insist on its particular authenticity or originality, nor do I ignore the fact that it certainly preserves material transmitted either orally or in writing from earlier periods and different geographical and linguistic contexts.[21] Nonetheless, it is a datable artifact that has been shown to be a product of its time in terms of literary style, themes, and sociocultural references and that provides abundant material for analyzing expressions of erotic love. While I also make no claims for its essential representativeness, the existence of manuscript copies of much the same text from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as related examples, both earlier and later, of what Aboubakr Chraïbi calls "Arabic Middle literature," suggest it reflected ongoing and fairly mainstream late medieval readerly appetites.[22] I will

---

18. Muhsin Mahdi argues that its immediate predecessor did not reach 1,001 nights and may never have been intended to; see Mahdi, 1:12–36. Others have argued that manuscripts with a full 1001 nights certainly existed prior to this, but were always likely to have been rare because of cost and the likelihood that they were broken up for sales. See Heinz Grotzfeld, "Creativity, Random Selection, and *Pia Fraus*: Observations on Compilation and Transmission of the *Arabian Nights*," in *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective*, ed. Ulrich Marzolph, 51–63 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007).

19. For a list of all known manuscripts to date, see Akel, "Liste."

20. In addition to Mahdi's work, see the following for evidence that the manuscript reflects a Mamluk or, more broadly, medieval Islamic milieu: Aboubakr Chraïbi, "Introduction," in Chraïbi, *Arabic Manuscripts*, 15–64; Jean-Claude Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique des "Mille et une nuits"* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2013); Muhsin J. al-Musawi, *The Islamic Context of "The Thousand and One Nights"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); and Heinz Grotzfeld, "Contes populaires de l'époque Mamlouke dans les Mille et une nuits," *ARAM* 9–10 (1997–98): 43–54.

21. The earliest evidence for what has come to be called the *1001 Nights* in Arabic is a ninth-century paper fragment that introduces a book with the phrase *alf layla* (a thousand nights) in its title and a woman named Dinazad exhorting another woman to entertain her with stories at night. Two major tenth-century authors (al-Masʿūdī and Ibn al-Nadīm) refer to both a Persian antecedent called the *Hazār afsāna* (*A Thousand Tales*) and its Arabic adaptation, called *Alf layla*, and a documentary reference from the Cairo Geniza notes a book titled *Alf layla wa-layla* (*1001 Nights*) circulating in the mid-twelfth-century. For good overviews of this history, see Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), chapter 2; and Aboubakr Chraïbi, *Les Mille et une nuits: Histoire du texte et Classification des contes* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008), chapter 1.

22. See Chraïbi, "Introduction," especially 62–64. See also Bruce Fudge, "Introduction," in *A Hundred and One Nights*, ed. and trans. Bruce Fudge, xiv–xxviii (New York: New York University Press, 2016). Dwight Reynolds claims that the relatively few references to the *Nights* in medieval sources suggest that it may not have been

add to my analysis three seventeenth-century manuscripts, which are among the earliest to conclude the story that is cut off at the end of the Galland manuscript ("The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur").[23] These versions exhibit sufficient intertextuality with the surviving contents of the fifteenth-century manuscript to convince me to think of them as a single tradition.[24] I will return to this story and present further manuscript evidence in the second part of the article.

1.1 Beautiful Bodies

The eroticization of characters in the *Nights* depends heavily on descriptions of their physical beauty. These descriptions are almost always in rhymed prose (known in Arabic as *sajʿ*) and/or accompanied by poetry. Such stylistic features set physical descriptions apart from the narrative around them, not unlike the way illustrations break up a written text. Indeed, it has been noted that poetry serves as a visual element in manuscripts of the *Nights*, which, likely for reasons of cost, seem to have rarely included illustrations.[25]

---

a very popular work; see Reynolds, "*A Thousand and One Nights*: A History of the Text and Its Reception," in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, ed. Roger Allen and D. S. Richards, 270–91 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 272. However, Konrad Hirschler argues that the scholarly elites who wrote the majority of the sources that have come down to us from this period tended to mention such literature only when they perceived it to impinge on their own authority. It is likely that the content and reading practices associated with the *Nights* were perceived as unthreatening and therefore did not occasion comment. The relatively small number of extant early manuscripts may also reflect a phenomenon Hirschler describes for other kinds of popular literature: the practice of commercial lending. The wear and tear involved in this kind of lending would have lessened the chances of a manuscript's survival. Although it is likely that the *Nights* was transmitted at least in part orally over the centuries, Hirschler's demonstration of the increasing importance of "textualization" from the twelfth century on reinforces the literary arguments made by Chraïbi, Fudge, and others that the fifteenth-century manuscript represents a *written* tradition that was intended to be *read*, either silently alone or out loud for an audience. See Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), especially chapter 5.

23. These are BNF Arabe 3612 (on which see Akel, "Liste," 76); BNF Arabe 3621; and BNF Arabe 3623. The latter two are standalone versions of the story. BNF Arabe 3621 includes night divisions but drops large chunks of the story (as does BNF Arabe 3612). BNF Arabe 3623 is dated 1698 and is highly abridged throughout. I will add a third seventeenth-century standalone manuscript of the story to my analysis in the second part of the article.

24. Apart from its continuation as "The Story of Amjad and Asʿad," Garcin argues that the version of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" presented in Mahdi's critical edition (which is concluded on the basis of an eighteenth-century manuscript, not the sixteenth-century manuscript cited by Garcin) exhibits considerable intertextuality with the rest of the fifteenth-century manuscript; Garcin also cross-checks with one of the seventeenth-century manuscripts I use here. See Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 110–25.

25. See Geert Jan van Gelder, "Poetry and the *Arabian Nights*," in Marzolph and van Leeuwen, *Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 1:13–17; and Wolfhart Heinrichs, "The Function(s) of Poetry in the *Arabian Nights*: Some Observations," in *O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture*, ed. Arnoud Vrolijk and Jan P. Hogendijk, 353–62 (Leiden: Brill, 2007). For the two seventeenth-century manuscripts of the *Nights* known today to include illustrations, see Akel, "Liste," 73–76; for the role played by one of them in a late eighteenth-century lending library, testifying to issues of cost and circulation, see Boris Liebrenz, "The Library of Aḥmad al-Rabbāṭ: Books and Their Audience in 12th to 13th/18th to 19th Century Syria," in *Marginal Perspectives on Early Modern Ottoman Culture: Missionaries, Travelers, Booksellers*, ed. Ralf Elger and Ute Pietruschka, 17–59 (Halle [Saale]: Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Regionalstudien, 2013).

Although poetry also serves other purposes in the stories, the way its highly effusive and metaphorical language is used to evoke characters' bodies was likely intended to paint a picture in the minds of the audience. Fifteenth-century audiences would have been familiar with such descriptive genres of poetry, and sometimes with the exact poems, from other texts and contexts. In Ulrich Marzolph's words, this kind of repetition is

> a highly effective narrative technique for linking new and unknown tales to a web of tradition the audience shares. On the one hand, the process of recognition links to previous experiences and familiar contexts, thus creating an atmosphere in which the audience would feel welcome and appreciated; on the other, a tale's unexpected turn of events would attract attention and entertain the audience by introducing something new.[26]

In the case of the poetry and prose descriptions that eroticized bodies in the *Nights*, one element that would certainly have been familiar to the audience was the beauty ideal at work. What may have been new was the scenario in which the description was embedded, as well as the cumulative effect of the different kinds of scenarios in which the same kinds of descriptions occurred.

Previous scholarship on premodern Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish belletristic and visual cultures has established that ideals of beauty for young men and women were very similar to each other.[27] At its most basic and across traditions, beauty was associated with youth and a moonlike appearance. In terms of facial features, some combination of dark eyes, arching brows, rosy or ruddy cheeks, and white teeth, often framed by black and/or curling hair and accentuated by a dark beauty mark or mole, seems to have constituted an ideal, moonlike type.[28] Such traits abound in the *Nights*, as do the various words for moon in Arabic, including *badr* and *qamar*, which recur in both poetry and prose descriptions and as names of both he- and she-characters. While the moon in all its guises is the dominant metaphor for beauty, the sun appears too, and radiance seems to be the main aesthetic effect produced by desirable characters. The most common words for beauty in Arabic, such as *jamāl* and *ḥusn*, as well as the adjective *malīḥ*, which appears right at the beginning of the vast majority of descriptions, also apply equally, despite the tendency of some English

---

26. Ulrich Marzolph, "Making Sense of the 'Nights': Intertextual Connections and Narrative Techniques in the 'Thousand and One Nights,'" *Narrative Culture* 1, no. 2 (2014): 239–57, at 240. The poetry in the fifteenth-century manuscript is overwhelmingly unattributed, but it has been suggested that this was because an audience would have known in many cases who the author was without the need for identification; for more on this, see Heinrichs, "Function(s) of Poetry."

27. Unlike in Arabic, third-person pronouns and verb forms in Persian and Ottoman Turkish are gender-neutral. This means it is sometimes difficult to guess the gender of the person being described. Even in Arabic, though, the rules of poetic meter may dictate the use of a masculine or feminine noun, adjective, or verb form, regardless of the person being described. For representations of beauty in early modern Ottoman and Qajar art and literature, see Andrews and Kalpaklı, *Age of Beloveds*, passim; Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, chapters 1–2; and Francesca Leoni and Mika Natif, eds., *Eros and Sexuality in Islamic Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

28. The way this beauty ideal is racialized will be discussed further below.

translations to distinguish "handsome" men from "beautiful" women.[29] For instance, the following series of rhyming words accompanies the entrance of both he- and she-characters into their stories: *dhāt ḥusn wa-jamāl wa-bahāʾ wa-kamāl wa-qadd wa-ʿtidāl* (having beauty, elegance, radiance, perfection, stature, and symmetry).[30] Overall, there is no generic term or metaphor for physical beauty that seems gender-specific in the fifteenth-century manuscript under study.

Faces dominate the paeans to physical beauty in the *Nights* and are the main referent for the ubiquitous lunar metaphors, but bodies are also described, sometimes in considerable detail. The ideal figure is slender and supple, with some fleshiness in the belly, hips, and buttocks. Recurring metaphors include young deer, gazelles, willow boughs, and spears, all of which apply equally to he- and she-characters. Sometimes the bodies of she-characters are noted as having breasts that are firm or upright (*qāʿidat al-nahd/nahd qāʾim*).[31] The emphasis seems to be on firmness rather than size, which is sustained by more figurative descriptions of the term "chest" (*ṣadr*) upon which "two pots" (*ḥuqqān*) or "pomegranates" (*rummān*) may appear.[32] Significantly, this latter metaphor also appears in the poem that opens this article, which is repeated in two different stories to describe a he-character, raising questions about the extent to which breasts can be understood to sex the body.[33] Reinforcing this impression of embodied sameness, both he- and she-characters are described as possessing "soft curves" (*līnat al-aʿṭāf*) and "hips/haunches/buttocks" (*ridf*) that are "quivering" (*murtijj*), "full to bursting" (*daghaṣ*), or "heavy" (*thaqīl*).[34] Similarly, necks, arms, thighs, and bellies are praised for being soft, smooth, and silky; the belly and its navel, folds, or creaminess in particular function as a catalyst for sexual arousal in the stories.[35] The provocative sight of the belly, rather than the genitals, cannot be attributed

---

29. For example, compare Haddawy, *Arabian Nights*, 66 and 114; in the former, a *shābb malīḥ* is a "handsome young man" and in the latter, a *ṣabiyya malīḥa* is a "beautiful girl." In a related inconsistency, even where the term *ṣabiyy* is used, it is sometimes translated as "young man" (see, for instance, Haddawy, *Arabian Nights*, 142, 173), whereas *ṣabiyya* appears frequently and is almost always translated as "girl."

30. Mahdi, 1:128 (she), 212 (he), 232 (he), 233 (he), 240 (she), and with variation in sequence 226 (he).

31. Mahdi, 1:128, 157, 245, 436. Brief appearances of *juwar*, young women purchased as concubines, are described as having "virginal breasts" (*nahd abkār*); see Mahdi, 1:311, 380.

32. The description of the Doorkeeper in "The Story of the Porter and Three Ladies" is unusual for its emphasis on size, comparing her chest to "a fountain" (*shādharwān*) and her breasts to "two large pomegranates" (*faḥlayn rummān*); see Mahdi, 1:129. For caskets/pots of ivory or musk, see Mahdi, 1:194, 542 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 226a; and BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 1a).

33. Mahdi, 1:206; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 224a. For an even more explicit example in English translation by one of the most famous poets of the ninth century, see Thomas Bauer, "The Arabic Ghazal: Formal and Thematic Aspects of a Problematic Genre," in *Ghazal as World Literature II: From a Literary Genre to a Great Tradition; The Ottoman Gazel in Context*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Michael Hess, Judith Pfeiffer, and Börte Sagaster, 3–13 (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2006), 9–10. For more examples from this genre, along with the argument that pronouns in Arabic love poetry can, for the most part, be taken at face value, see Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung*, passim.

34. Mahdi, 1:194, 206, 230, 246, 260, 436, 483, 500, 540; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 224a.

35. Mahdi, 1:129, 251, 333, 541–42 (see also BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 1a–1b; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 8b), 584 (see also BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 15b; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 8b). Belly "folds" (*ṭayyāt*) are mentioned in the case of two she-characters, but neither seems to conform to the gendered ideal of fatness Marion Holmes Katz

to politesse, since genitals are explicitly named in other scenarios. Rather, the belly's role in arousal likely reflected the expectations of the audience just as it provided an opportunity to eroticize he- and she-characters in the same way.

The association of youth with so many of these beautiful bodies may suggest that what appears to be a shared beauty standard is actually a standard for feminine beauty to which young men are assimilated before they acquire the trappings of adult masculinity (usually marked by the growth of a full beard). This could mean that young men are being feminized when they are eroticized or that they occupy a temporary and separately gendered space, distinct from women but still subordinate to adult men.[36] The evidence in this manuscript does not, however, clearly align with either of these options. I have not found a single instance of the use of the term *amrad* (beardless youth), a well-attested and age-sensitive category of embodied masculinity.[37] More generally, there are very few words that could be said to pertain only to embodied masculinity or femininity. The two most frequent examples are *ʿidhār* (beard down) and *nahd/nuhūd* (breasts), but these are by no means used every time a he- or she-character, respectively, is described.[38] In fact, the ease with which characters cross-dress convincingly in several stories suggests that bodies were imagined to be either so similar or so variable as to provide little visual evidence of sex or gender beyond what clothing was understood to convey.[39] Indeed, clothing is the most obviously gendered element in physical descriptions, as when the occasion for praising a she-character's face is the lifting of a veil (though beautiful he-characters' faces are also "uncovered" for dramatic effect), but often it communicates as much about luxury and wealth as about gender.[40] Moreover, in contrast to many of the other textual environments

---

describes for fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Cairo; see Katz, "Fattening Up in Fourteenth-Century Cairo: Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ and the Many Meanings of Overeating," *Annales islamologiques* 48, no. 1 (2014): 31–53. As mentioned above, references to full or heavy hips and buttocks in this manuscript apply equally to he- and she-characters, and belly folds do not prevent one of the aforementioned she-characters (Princess Budur) from significant physical activity as well as successfully passing as a he-character.

36. See El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, especially 25–33, 60–75; and Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*, 11–25.

37. *Ghulām*, usually considered an equivalent of *amrad* but without the literal association with facial hair, appears occasionally. The most common words for desirable characters are *shābb*, *ṣabiyy/ṣabiyya*, and *jāriya*.

38. It is impossible to say whether he-characters who are not described with beard down are meant to be imagined as beardless or with some other form of facial hair; nor is it possible to say whether desirable she-characters are meant to be imagined with any facial hair at all, though none is mentioned to the best of my knowledge. Likewise, dark hair and "curling sidelocks" (*ʿaqrab/ʿaqārib*) are praised equally on he- and she-characters (for examples, see Mahdi, 1:206, 246, 333, 536). The only two references I found to very long hair, reaching to the waist or ankles, are for she-characters (see Mahdi, 1:246, 483); this does not, of course, tell us anything about the length or style of hair of others.

39. The most obvious example of this is the lengthy period in which Princess Budur is dressed as a man in "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," which will be discussed below. Other examples include King Shahrayar's twenty concubines in the frame story who become ten concubines and ten "black slaves" after taking off their clothes and the episode in which Budur's brother dresses as a woman in "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur."

40. For examples of unveiling that apply to she-characters only, see Mahdi, 1:126, 294 (*shālat al-shaʿriyya*); and 290, 319 (*kashafat/shālat al-niqāb*). For examples of uncovering that apply to both he- and she-characters,

in which late medieval Arabic-speakers would have encountered eroticized descriptions, which explicitly establish separate categories for young men and women, the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights* jumbles them up, he- and she-characters moving in and out of plots and falling in love with other he- and she-characters.[41] All in all, I am not convinced that desirable young men in this manuscript are being either feminized or placed in their own category. Rather, a select group of both he- and she-characters occupy a shared space of the erotic, not defined by subordination to older men, in which bodies appear virtually interchangeable.

That said, because Arabic second- and third-person pronouns, verbs, and many nouns have masculine and feminine forms, characters are always identifiable in terms of a grammatical gender binary. It could be argued that the combination of Arabic grammar and the roles played by characters elsewhere in the stories prompted readers to "flesh out" generic or metaphorical descriptions of beautiful bodies so as to stress gender differences or binary sex, at least in their imaginations if not also in improvised ways in front of an audience.[42] However, I maintain that it is significant that these differences are not stressed in the text, especially in light of the tendency, discussed in the second part of this article, for modern editors and translators to make interventions that do just that. Moreover, scholars of the *Nights* have noted that repetition—of motifs, of descriptive language, of the framing device itself—is an "economy" that allows for the crafting of highly sophisticated narratives.[43] For instance, the same poetic verses and rhyming prose passages are recycled for different characters in the fifteenth-century manuscript. Some might object, therefore, to placing such emphasis on a series of repetitive, even formulaic, descriptions that were, in any case, secondary to plot. At the same time, repetition draws attention to itself in ways that accumulate as a reader moves through a text, especially when, as Sandra Naddaff puts it, "repetition is attended by difference."[44] When poetic evocations of eroticized bodies, which would be familiar to audiences by virtue of literary compendia authored by well-known men, issue from the mouths of both he- and she-characters in a series of new or surprising narrative contexts, they likely attracted notice in ways they would not have done otherwise. This kind of repetition may have served, in Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah's

---

see Mahdi, 1:306, 321, 458, 540 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 225b; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 2b), 544 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 227a; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 2b; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 3a), 545 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 227a; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 3b) (*kashafa al-wajh*, *kashafa al-ghiṭāʾ/al-mulāʾa ʿan al-wajh*).

41. For examples from the proliferation of literary anthologies in this period that devote separate chapters to young men and women, see Talib, *"Epigram" in Arabic*, passim; and for essays that explicitly compare young men and women from the centuries-old Arabic literary genre of contrastive enumeration, see Rosenthal, "Male and Female."

42. We have no direct evidence of how the *Nights* was consumed at the time of the production of the fifteenth-century manuscript under study, but it is likely to have been in ways analogous to the consumption of epic literature in the period, i.e., *read* either quietly alone or out loud in front of an audience. See Hirschler, *Written Word*, chapter 5.

43. See Daniel Beaumont, "Literary Style and Narrative Technique in the *Arabian Nights*," in Marzolph and van Leeuwen, *Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 1:1–5.

44. Sandra Naddaff, *Arabesque: Narrative Structure and the Aesthetics of Repetition in "1001 Nights"* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 82.

words, "not only to convey what is important but also to inform and cultivate audience-reader expectations."[45] Although we have no direct evidence regarding who constituted the readership of the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights*, the stories themselves portray heterogeneous audiences whose appreciation for a pair of lovers or a beautiful body might be considered to reflect or model external audience attitudes.[46] Finally, if what is said, repeatedly, in a text is important, so is what is unsaid. When the sexed body is repeatedly unsaid, a binary construction of sex or embodied gender may not be a helpful way to understand, and may in fact cause us to misunderstand, eroticism within the *Nights* as well as, perhaps, outside it.

1.2 Pairs, Parallels, and Triangles

Not only are eroticized he- and she-characters described in similar terms in the fifteenth-century manuscript, but they are also put emphatically into relation with each other. Multiple stories revolve around a pair of characters whose beauty is explicitly compared using the terms *mithl* (like/the same as), *shakl* (likeness/resemblance), *ashbaha* (to be similar/resemble), *qāraba* (to approximate/be equivalent to), or *ʿādala* (to be equal to) and whose mutual, if often thwarted, desire traces the plot's dramatic arc.[47] These pairings convey the sense that beautiful people belong together and that a sameness that transcends or displaces distinctions of gender is the most appropriate basis for a relationship. In addition, there is no hint in this manuscript that beauty equates to passivity in matters of love and lust. This is true of both he- and she-characters, whose parallel pursuit of partners decenters the perspective of adult men, so well established in other genres of literature. These pairs and parallels also make space for sexual attraction between characters of the same grammatical gender, while triangles in the text allow for outsiders to collude in the erotics on display.

Since passionate love need not be experienced or expressed as erotic, key to this analysis are the moments when characters react to beautiful bodies in ways that strongly imply sexual desire.[48] These reactions range from verbal declarations, such as "fire exploded in my heart" or "I lost my mind," to seemingly uncontrollable nonverbal responses like intense gazes, sighs, rapid heartbeat, trembling hands, fainting, exclamations, kisses, and embraces.[49] Many of these encounters culminate in sexual intercourse, referred to using numerous Arabic terms, including the euphemistic but usually contextually clear "sleeping

---

45. Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah, "A Response to Zayde Antrim's 'Sex, Sameness, and Embodiments of Desire in the 1001 Nights,'" paper presented at the Islamic History Workshop, Columbia University, February 20, 2020.

46. Khaled El-Rouayheb's discussion of the relationship between homoerotic literature and real-life attitudes is also applicable here; see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 75–85.

47. For examples of these terms in use, see Mahdi, 1:240, 459, 490, 500, 544 (see also BNF 3612, fol. 227a; BNF 3621, fol. 2b; and, for a variant, BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 3b), 547 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 228a), 582 (see also BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 14b), 590 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 237b; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 18a; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 9a), 591 (see also BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 18b; BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 9a; and, for a variant, BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 237b).

48. For a discussion of the relationship between passionate love and sexual desire in poetry of this period, see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, 85–95.

49. Examples of such reactions in the text are legion. For the two specific phrases here, see Mahdi, 1:329, 380.

with/spending the night with" (*nāma ʿinda*/*bāta maʿa*). In four cases, it is formulated as a he-character "taking the virginity of" a she-character, but in the more than three times as many cases in which some form of intercourse clearly takes place no mention of virginity is made, nor is virginity as such an attribute stressed in descriptions of beautiful bodies.[50] Other pleasurable activities, primarily eating, drinking, bathing, and massaging, but also talking, reciting poetry, and playing games, are often preludes to sexual intercourse, but when they stand on their own it is not always clear whether they should be read as erotic.[51] When a succession of such activities takes place between characters who have both been established as beautiful or who have been described in terms of sameness, I am interpreting the ambiguity as suggestive of the sexual nature of the relationship.

In the two stories in which the comparable beauty of a pair of characters functions most explicitly as a plot device, their union is facilitated, at least initially, by the supernatural powers of the *jinn* ("genies" or demons). In both stories, the humans are each championed by a demon, resulting in a kind of beauty contest between them, which is then either left unresolved or resolved on the basis of something other than the physical attributes of the characters, further emphasizing the sameness of their looks. For instance, at the beginning of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," a stalemate is broken between the two beautiful humans, Prince Qamar al-Zaman and Princess Budur (whose gender-neutral names both mean "moon") not on the basis of their shared physical perfection—which makes them equally desirable—but on the basis of their actions. While Qamar al-Zaman is able to resist kissing the sleeping Budur, she cannot help kissing and embracing him when their positions are reversed. At this point the narrator of the story interjects a well-known stereotype: "the desire (*shahwa*) of women is stronger than that of men."[52] This is a gendered distinction, but not one presented, at least in this context, in terms of embodied difference.[53] Qamar al-Zaman's restraint takes the form of an internal monologue in which he makes a set of calculations involving his expectation of marriage and willingness to defer gratification, while Budur is simply portrayed as not thinking at all. In the end, Qamar al-Zaman wins the contest, not because he is either more or differently physically beautiful, but because he exhibits self-control.

---

50. For these four cases, see Mahdi, 1:250, 440, 486, 532. Interestingly, these four cases include the only two times in which an act of sexual intercourse described as part of a story's plot results in a baby.

51. This is particularly complicated in scenes of attachment between fathers and sons, which sometimes involve displays of physical intimacy and declarations of passionate love that might strike readers today as sexual. The two most prominent examples of this are in "The Story of the Two Viziers" and "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur."

52. The fifteenth-century manuscript breaks off just before this point in the story, so here Mahdi's edition follows an eighteenth-century manuscript, which I supplement with three seventeenth-century manuscripts. See Mahdi, 1:551; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 229a; and BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 4a. BNF Arabe 3623 does not include this line. For more on the *shahwa* of women, see Myrne, *Female Sexuality*, 57–60.

53. I will discuss this episode further in part 2 of this article. For a different interpretation based on a psychoanalytic reading, see Daniel Beaumont, *Slave of Desire: Sex, Love, and Death in the "1001 Nights"* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University, 2002), chapter 4.

Similarly, in "The Story of the Two Viziers" two demons stage an elaborate ruse whereby a young man, Badr al-Din, is transported from Basra to Cairo to replace a hunchbacked groom whose physical appearance makes him, in the world of the story, unworthy of the bride, Sitt al-Husn, who also happens to be Badr al-Din's long-lost cousin. After a brief dispute in which a she-demon champions the beauty of Sitt al-Husn and a he-demon the beauty of Badr al-Din, they let the contest go unresolved in order to act as matchmakers. At the wedding of Sitt al-Husn and the hunchback, the women attendants allow Badr al-Din into the bride's unveiling, as they are, en masse, smitten by him. During the proceedings, Badr al-Din gazes upon the dazzling bride, just as the assembly gazes upon him, all with mounting passion. Afterward, when Sitt al-Husn finds Badr al-Din rather than the hunchback in her bedroom, she implores him to sleep with her, quoting poetry to urge him on. Though he is easily persuaded, she is portrayed as the initiator and, by implication, as the one with less self-control.[54] In both stories, the message appears to be that beauty manifests itself equally in both kind and degree among he- and she-characters, but the way a character acts on feelings of sexual attraction may reflect gender stereotypes.

Nevertheless, the fifteenth-century manuscript produces parallels in which both he- and she-characters express attraction in similar ways and pursue partners whose appropriateness is established in terms of a sameness that includes but also exceeds the physical. The clearest examples of these parallels come from "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies," especially the tales of the Second and Third Dervish (he-characters) and the tales of the Mistress of the House and the Doorkeeper (she-characters).[55] The Second and Third Dervish both tell stories in which their lack of self-control spells their doom, proving that women are not the only ones who let their appetites command them. When the Dervishes first enter, they have each lost an eye and shaved their hair, defects that keep them from being described as beautiful at the outset. Later, their role as narrators of their own tales means they are never described as they were before their downfall, though their self-narrated encounters with beautiful characters suggest that they too possessed similar qualities at the time. In the case of the Second Dervish, after he spends a night enjoying the charms of a gorgeous woman imprisoned in a subterranean chamber, her captor, a demon, discovers them and exclaims in rage and betrayal, "It is clear that like (*jins*) yearns only for like (*jins*)."[56] The use of the term *jins*, which today may be translated as sex, gender, race, or nation, here may refer to the category of humankind (versus the category of *jinn*).[57] Regardless of its exact meaning, the demon is recognizing and attributing the affair to an essential sameness in the pair. In the Third Dervish's tale, the narrator happens upon an attractive young he-character who had been hidden away by his father in another

---

54. Mahdi, 1:249.

55. For an analysis of these parallels in terms of narrative repetition, see Naddaff, *Arabesque*, especially chapter 4.

56. Mahdi, 1:163.

57. The term *jins* here may also be understood as a reference to Aristophanes's speech in Plato's *Symposium*, which portrays lovers as two halves of the same whole. For an articulation of this idea in Arabic in a well-known eleventh-century work, see Ibn Ḥazm, *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma* (Damascus: Maktabat Dār al-Bayān, 2002), 25–32. I thank one of my anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.

subterranean chamber, in this case to escape a fatal prophecy. The youth is initially hesitant but is then reassured that they can enjoy each other's company because they are "like" (*mithl*) each other and he is "of his kind" (*min jinsihi*), which is specified as meaning both human and elite, though other forms of sameness, such as gender, may be implied.[58] Although it is left ambiguous as to whether the two engage in any sex acts, the language used for the pleasurable activities they do together—eating, drinking, bathing, staying up late, having stimulating conversation, and sleeping together—is nearly identical to that of scenarios in other stories that explicitly involve sexual intercourse.[59]

The tales of the Mistress of the House and the Doorkeeper, whose beauty had been established by the time they tell their stories, highlight physical sameness as well as status and reciprocity to justify their unions. In the encounter featured at the beginning of this article, the Mistress of the House falls in love with a captivating prince reciting the Qurʾan alone in an enchanted city and begs him to accompany her back to her home in Baghdad. To convince him to agree, she asserts that she is a successful merchant and head of her household, while pledging to become his "concubine" (*jāriya*) and "wife" (*ahl*), if he will be her "lord/husband" (*baʿl*).[60] To this, he answers, "Yes, indeed, for you are my mistress (*sayyidatī*) and patron (*mawlātī*); whatever I do, I will not disobey you."[61] Her wealth and independence balance his piety and nobility, and their promises to each other emphasize reciprocity and mutual devotion. Status also factors in the story of the less self-possessed Doorkeeper, who agrees to marry a total stranger because of his good looks and the fact that they are each heads of their respective households.[62] Like the Dervishes, the two women are filled with desire at the sight of a beautiful body that mirrors their own, but shared status is also stressed as a basis for the relationship.

Sometimes status difference may be ignored or minimized by an emphasis on reciprocity, as when free men are paired with unfree women. The figure of the refined and sexually desirable concubine (*jāriya*) makes relationships with kings or well-to-do men legible within the terms of sameness advanced by the fifteenth-century manuscript, especially when feelings are mutual.[63] Jullanar, for instance, is a concubine to a king who is so attached to

---

58. Mahdi, 1:183.

59. The language differences are subtle; for instance, in this case the text says, "we slept" and "when he slept I slept," rather than "I slept with him." For this particular episode, see Mahdi, 1:184–85. There are many episodes to compare it with, but the most obvious is the parallel episode in the Second Dervish's tale; see Mahdi, 1:159.

60. I have translated *jāriya* as "concubine" throughout this article, as it is most often used to describe a category of enslaved woman. That is not literally the case here, but the connotation applies in that love has made her a captive to his will. The other connotation of *jāriya* is sexual availability, which is also implied here.

61. Mahdi, 1:207–8. The terminology in this exchange blurs distinctions of free and unfree legal status just as it blurs the gendered hierarchy early Muslim jurists insisted defined marriage; for more on this, see Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

62. Mahdi, 1:212. Another example of this comes in "The Story of Jullanar of the Sea": when Badr's mother is looking for a bride for him, she says she will only marry him to "his like" (*mithlihi*) in beauty *and* a series of other qualities that include intelligence and social status; see Mahdi, 1:499.

63. For a related story type that occurs in later manuscripts of the *Nights*, as well as in a handful of authored works of medieval Arabic belles-lettres, see Geert Jan van Gelder, "Slave-Girl Lost and Regained: Transformations of a Story," *Marvels & Tales* 18, no. 2 (2004): 201–17. For more on the figure of the *jāriya* in this period, see the

her that he forsakes all the other women of his household. In recognition of his devotion, she reveals herself as the daughter of an undersea king, but agrees to stay with him on land and bear his son and heir.[64] Shams al-Nahar, a concubine of the storied Caliph Harun al-Rashid, has a tragic love affair with an elegant young man, one of the "sons of the kings of Persia" (*awlād mulūk al-ʿajam*). They are portrayed repeatedly as well-matched in beauty and eloquence, if ultimately doomed by circumstance.[65] Finally, Anis al-Jalis, a concubine purchased for a king, falls in love with the son of a vizier whose beauty rivals her own. Upon his promise never to marry, abuse her, or sell her, they spend the rest of their lives together under the approving eyes of various observers, including Caliph Harun al-Rashid.[66] The text does not offer, however, any parallel possibility of appropriate relationships between free women and unfree men, as will be discussed further below.

Another way in which sameness is emphasized in many stories is through roughly equivalent age pairings. Although exact ages are given in only a few cases, the words most frequently used for beautiful characters—*shābb*, *ṣabiyy/ṣabiyya*, *ghulām*, *jāriya*—all either literally mean young or have strong connotations of youth.[67] Badr al-Din and Qamar al-Zaman are just over twenty when they encounter, respectively, Sitt al-Husn, described as "about twenty," and Budur, whose many similarities to Qamar al-Zaman include, it is stated, age.[68] The ages of the respective partners of the Second and Third Dervishes are also specified, the first being a *ṣabiyya malīḥa* (beautiful young woman) of thirty-seven and the second a *shābb malīḥ* (beautiful young man) of fifteen, though it is unclear how old the Dervishes themselves are at the time of the encounters.[69] In some cases boys are described as beautiful as they grow up, with the ages of twelve, fifteen, and sixteen invoked as moments when their looks are admired and/or they are deemed ready for marriage, but the girls with whom they are eventually paired seem to be about the same age.[70] Beard down (*ʿidhār*) and, in one case, a mustache (*shārib*) appear in physical descriptions of beautiful he-characters, but facial hair is not mentioned at all in at least as many other descriptions, which does

---

essays in Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain, eds., *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

64. Mahdi, 1:486–88.

65. Mahdi, 1:380–82.

66. Mahdi, 1:436–43, 480.

67. It is important, however, to remember that the concept of "youth" is a social construction and may have varied considerably from the way we understand it today. Syrinx von Hees's analysis of Qurʾanic commentaries from the Mamluk period reveals that the term *shabāb* referred to the prime of life enjoyed by bearded men up to the age of forty; see von Hees, "Die Kraft der Jugend und die Vielfalt der Übergangsfasen: Eine historisch-anthropologische Auswertung von Korankommentaren des 10. bis 15. Jahrhunderts," in *Islamwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft I: Historische Anthropologie – Ansätze und Möglichkeiten*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Syrinx von Hees, 139–76 (Schenefeld: EB-Verlag, 2007).

68. Mahdi, 1:234, 240, 536, 590 (on Budur's age, see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 237b; and BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 18a).

69. Mahdi, 1:161, 164, 184.

70. See, for examples, Mahdi, 1:233, 496, 499. In "The First Old Man's Tale," two marriages take place, one in which the girl is twelve (and, it is said, has yet to go through puberty) and another in which the boy is twelve; see Mahdi, 1:78–81.

not mean, of course, that it was not present.[71] Only one beautiful character, to the best of my knowledge, is portrayed as growing a full beard, at which point in the story he begins to pursue a youth who turns out to be his son.[72] Regardless, the vast majority of couples in the fifteenth-century manuscript are about the same age, which complicates the emphasis in other texts on the erotic agency of elite men, whose dominance was often expressed sexually through age asymmetry.[73] By contrast, the appeal here seems to be the spectacle of sameness produced by characters of commensurate age, beauty, and status attracted to each other.

In many cases, this spectacle is staged explicitly for admiring audiences within the story, audiences in which elite men are by no means the majority. As has already been discussed, in two stories the role of demons is to test, and attest to, the sameness of a beautiful pair; this involves much gazing down on human forms and rhapsodizing over their loveliness. Other stories feature various groups of bystanders whose eyewitness testimony and seemingly involuntary physical reactions make clear that a character is being eroticized. In "The Story of the Two Viziers," whenever Badr al-Din would go out in the city of Basra, people would "look" (*naẓara*) at him and marvel at his beauty.[74] When he is later transported to Cairo for Sitt al-Husn's wedding, the guests "look" (*naẓara*) and "gaze" (*aḥdaqa*) at him, imagining themselves in his arms.[75] Finally, after the wedding night, when he is dropped in his sleep outside the gates of Damascus by the *jinn*, a crowd assembles to admire his half-naked form, exclaiming in pleasure at the sight of his creamy thighs and belly.[76] Similarly, when Princess Budur, disguised as a man, appears to a group of courtiers and state officials, they are inspired just by "looking" (*naẓar*) at her/his beauty and elegance.[77] The responses of these diverse observers suggest that the erotics of sameness cultivated in the stories was imagined as enjoyable for both men and women, rich and poor.

In several stories, third parties act as go-betweens for or witnesses to a well-matched pair, resulting in a triangulation of desire. The tragic love story of ʿAli b. Bakkar and Shams al-Nahar is set in motion by a merchant whose appreciation of the two beautiful young people motivates him to abet their union. Hidden behind a piece of furniture, he describes his pleasure in watching them recite passionate poetry to each other: "I have never before

---

71. For examples of beard down, see Mahdi, 1:114, 206, 220, 262, 438, 497, 536; for a mustache, see Mahdi, 1:490.

72. See Mahdi, 1:260. This is a highly ambiguous episode, in which the father rhapsodizes about the son's beauty, feeds him from his hand, and follows him around the city. The son accuses the father of inappropriate sexual desire before they realize they are father and son and the desire was actually just a case of "blood longing for blood"; see Mahdi, 1:261–69.

73. This has been particularly well elaborated in Everett Rowson's work on early Arabic literature, in which adult men may sexually pursue subordinate members of society, including younger men, women, non-Muslims, and slaves, without endangering their masculinity and social status; see, for instance, Rowson, "Traffic in Boys." See also El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, chapters 1–2; and Bauer, "Male-Male Love."

74. Mahdi, 1:234.

75. Mahdi, 1:243–44.

76. Mahdi, 1:251.

77. Mahdi, 1:592; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 238a; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 19a.

seen two people more beautiful than the two of them, as I have never, before them, seen a sun embrace a moon."[78] Similarly, in the love story of Nur al-Din and Anis al-Jalis, two scenes are staged in which a third character bears witness to the eroticized sameness of the pair. First, an elderly gardener finds them sleeping on the grounds of a caliphal estate and, after uncovering their faces, is so taken by their beauty—"they were like two moons (*qamarayn*)"—that he cannot bring himself to evict them. Instead, he is moved to recite poetry and to begin massaging the legs of Nur al-Din.[79] Later, the couple persuades him to feast with them in one of the palaces on the grounds. Upon noticing the lights in the building, Caliph Harun al-Rashid devises a plan to climb a tree and catch the trespassers in the act. Peering through a window, he is greeted by such a delightful sight—"two moons" drinking wine and making music—that his anger melts away and he is moved to bestow upon them his considerable largesse.[80] In another story, an old woman acts as a go-between for a young couple who fall in love at first sight, she on her balcony and he on the street below. In this case, the old woman recites poetry to each of them, ventriloquizing one's devotion and visualizing the other's beauty. Through the pictures she paints with words, the old woman functions as a stand-in for the absent beloved.[81] Such scenes of witnessing, enabling, and enacting may have presented an opportunity for audiences outside the text to imagine themselves within the story. Third parties can be seen as proxies for readers who have before them two seemingly interchangeable, though in these cases grammatically distinct, objects of desire. This form of triangulation makes space for difference, thus enlarging the field of sexual possibility for the audience, without disturbing the erotics of sameness produced by the pairs and parallels in the stories.

1.3 Sexed and Racialized Bodies

When difference is emphasized, however, in sexual scenarios, it is done primarily for the purpose of comedy or derision. This is usually signaled by an explicitly sexed or racialized body. The most graphic references to genitalia in the fifteenth-century manuscript occur in encounters structured by socioeconomic difference. In these situations, the appearance of genitalia suggests sexual arousal but also throws into question the mutuality of the encounter, blurring the line between titillation and ridicule. This reinforces the sense conveyed elsewhere in the manuscript that the sexed body is peripheral to and may even interrupt circuits of desire. Unlike socioeconomic difference, which provides fodder for comedy in the stories, racial difference, when marked, invites contempt and, ultimately, violence. Black skin is never mentioned as a feature of a beautiful body in the fifteenth-century manuscript. In terms of color, redness is the dominant attribute of beautiful faces,

---

78. Mahdi, 1:388.

79. Mahdi, 1:458–59. Other pairs are described as "two moons" (*qamarayn*), using the Arabic dual that stresses the sameness of their beauty; for examples, see Mahdi, 1:226, 545 (see also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 227a; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 3b), 592.

80. Mahdi, 1:466.

81. Mahdi, 1:329–33.

with ruddy, rosy, or ruby cheeks set in contrast to white teeth, black hair, or a dark beauty spot.[82] Radiance and luminosity, as when a sun or moon illuminates a sky, may imply a light complexion, but the far-ranging geographies, both imagined and real, that the stories traverse likely conjured various forms of racialized desirability within the parameters of this beauty ideal.[83] What is absolutely clear, however, is that all the characters marked as "black" in the stories are also attributed slave status, and the two sexual scenarios that involve a she-character and a "black slave" are presented as evidence of women's perfidy and punished dramatically.

One of the most well-known erotic sequences in the *Nights*, the opening to "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies," may be read as both sexual fantasy and physical comedy. It features a porter hired by a well-dressed woman in a market in Baghdad who ends up inviting him to spend the evening feasting in her sumptuous home along with her two beautiful sisters. The porter is included in the revelries out of a combination of amusement and pity; he recites verses to plead his case that make the women laugh, and the sister who initially hired him wants to reward him for his hard work. Ultimately, he returns the payment he received for his services in the market and says, "Take me as a servant (*khadīm*) rather than a companion (*nadīm*)."[84] His socioeconomic difference thus accentuated, the partying begins, replete with singing, dancing, and various forms of touching: kissing, biting, rubbing, and so on. As they get drunk, a game of erotic wordplay commences. Each sister undresses, first washing herself as the others watch, and then sits in the porter's lap, demanding he name her genitals. Every time the porter comes up with a name that does not please her, he gets slapped. When it is his turn, he undresses and does the same, culminating in a witty punchline in which he plays the name of his penis—"inserts" it, perhaps—into the metaphorical names each of the women had previously insisted on for their vaginas.[85] The lengthy lists of Arabic terms for genitalia that come out of this scene, ranging from the formal to the crude, emphasize sex difference, just as the porter's service profession and the fact that he is not described as beautiful in any way cement his social and physical difference from the women. Although most of the episode seems pleasurable for all involved, the porter's perspective is described as one of astonishment and bliss, whereas the women's reactions tend toward amusement and laughter. Moreover, although

---

82. Comparisons of skin to cream, silk, or marble seem more immediately evocative of texture than of color. One beautiful character is described twice as having "a neck like marble" (ʿunuq ka-l-marmar); see Mahdi, 1:231, 244. Husain Haddawy translates this as "a neck like white marble," which seems an instance of reading color into the text; see Haddawy, *Arabian Nights*, 196, 210.

83. This is reinforced in three places in the fifteenth-century manuscript when a group of concubines (juwar) are described as of "all geographical origins" (sāʾir al-ajnās). One of these scenes is set in a slave market specified as having concubines for sale representing regions and peoples from sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and Central Asia; see Mahdi, 1:449, 457, 481.

84. Mahdi, 1:131–32.

85. For an analysis of the language used in this episode, see Erez Naaman, "Eating Figs and Pomegranates: Taboos and Language in the *Thousand and One Nights*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 44 (2013): 335–70, at 362–64. For a contrasting reading that focuses on the metaphorical language of the female body, see Naddaff, *Arabesque*, especially chapter 2.

slapping, like biting can certainly be associated with eroticism, the repeated references to the porter's sore neck and shoulders to the point that he starts to "worry" (*karaba*) and to feel as though he is "choking to death" (*inkhanaqa*) suggest that he is not having as much fun as his hosts. Ultimately, in this scene the porter walks the line between being laughed with and being laughed at, and in any case the comedic elements certainly balance, if not outweigh, the erotic ones.

If "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" can be read as a sexual fantasy in which an ordinary man gets to spend the night of his life with three beautiful women, the tales of the barber's six brothers in "The Hunchback Story" feature a series of ordinary men who suffer just for daring to dream of such a scenario. For instance, "The Tale of the Second Brother" stages what could be thought of as a mean-spirited version of the opening to "The Porter and the Three Ladies." The brother is lured to a mansion by an old woman who promises him luxury and pleasure. She leaves him in an opulent garden where he is soon joined by a beautiful she-character surrounded by companions. As they eat, drink, and listen to music, she pretends to flirt with him, all the while laughing at him behind his back. She begins slapping him and encourages her companions to hit him too. She then orders that they shave his facial hair, take off his clothes, and make him chase her around the garden until his penis becomes erect. At that point she lures him to a trapdoor that plunges him—naked, hairless, and aroused—into the middle of a crowded marketplace, where he gets beaten up and hauled away by the police.[86] In two other stories, the barber's brothers are lured by beautiful women into financial scams, one of which involves a gruesome mass murder. All six tales, including those that do not directly involve sexual encounters, stage elaborate scenes of humiliation or stress the brothers' gullibility, disability, and poverty.[87] Though this may not seem funny today, the intended comic effect is evidenced by the fact that the barber's narration of his brothers' stories is immediately directed at a caliph, who greets each vignette with laughter and at one point falls on his back in mirth.[88]

While it may be possible to imagine someone fantasizing about being in the shoes of the porter, it is difficult to imagine the same in the case of the barber's brothers. One moment in "The Hunchback Story," however, offers up a match better suited to such characters. The barber, describing some of his friends to a well-to-do young man he meets in Baghdad, emphasizes the beauty of one of them, a garbage collector, in terms reminiscent of other eroticized he- and she-characters in the stories, reciting verses that compare his movement to the swaying of a bough.[89] Although this physical description evokes a beautiful body that anyone might appreciate, it seems to be his socioeconomic status, not his grammatical gender, that makes him a more appropriate match for the barber and his ilk than for the

---

86. Mahdi, 1:354–57.

87. The issue of disability and its relationship to difference, as it manifests here as well as in the various hunchback characters and the one-eyed dervishes, is worth further investigation from a historical perspective; for an illuminating study that addresses this time period, though not the *Nights*, see Kristina L. Richardson, *Difference and Disability in the Medieval Islamic World: Blighted Bodies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

88. Mahdi, 1:363.

89. Mahdi, 1:342.

well-to-do young man, who shows no interest whatsoever. This is also an opportunity for comedy, since the verses conclude with wordplay on the garbage collector's lowly profession, and the well-to-do young man reacts with amusement as well as exasperation. This poem is notable for being the only one, to the best of my knowledge, in the fifteenth-century manuscript that reflects the contemporary popularity of a poetic genre in which non-elite men and women were eroticized through witty takes on their urban trades.[90]

Though characters of lower socioeconomic standing are frequently the butts of jokes, their aspirational desires are depicted as unrealistic rather than threatening. Characters described as "black," however, are not only even less fully developed but also associated with sexual deceit and danger.[91] As Rachel Schine has shown, the scenes of infidelity and their violent aftermaths in the frame story are shot through with blackness.[92] The parties involved in the first act of infidelity, King Shahzaman's wife and a kitchen servant, are not described physically, but their clear status difference and the murderous rage into which the sight of them sends Shahzaman set up the next, more spectacular, scene of infidelity.[93] This scene, which is first witnessed by Shahzaman from a window and then repeated later under the eyes of both brothers, features King Shahrayar's gazelle-like wife and a "black slave" (*ʿabd aswad*) named Masʿud who jumps down from a tree to mount her. She is accompanied by twenty companions in women's clothing who, once undressed, appear as ten concubines (*juwar*) and ten "black slaves" (*ʿabīd sūd*), both categories of enslaved people but the former connoting higher status than the latter. These ten pairs then proceed to copulate.[94] While the concubines are racially unmarked, one of the terms used for the sex acts that ensue is *sakhkhamūhum*, which means slangily "[the slaves] fucked them" and literally "[the slaves] blackened them."[95] Schine argues that this verb and the mass violence with which King Shahrayar ultimately reacts—killing all of the women in the palace and vowing to take a new wife every night only to execute her in the morning—reveal profound anxiety about racial mixing in the royal household.[96] This anxiety is intensified not only by the fact of the deception but also by the apparent difficulty of detecting it, as each time upon getting

---

90. See Adam Talib, "Citystruck," in *The City in Arabic Literature: Classical and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Nizar F. Hermes and Gretchen Head, 138–64 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Thomas Bauer, "'Ayna hādhā min al-Mutanabbī!': Toward an Aesthetics of Mamluk Literature," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17 (2013): 5–22; and Rosenthal, "Male and Female."

91. The same could be said of sexual relations across the human/demon divide, and demons are sometimes described as "black" or associated with "darkness"; see Mahdi, 1:23, 160. The difference is that they are portrayed as the captors of women, rather than as the women's chosen sexual partners.

92. Rachel Schine, "Reading Race and Racism in the *1001 Nights*," in *Approaches to Teaching the Arabian Nights*, ed. Paulo Lemos Horta (forthcoming). See also Ferial J. Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: "The Arabian Nights" in Comparative Context* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1996), 26–27, 32–33.

93. Mahdi, 1:57. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century versions, this "man from among the kitchen boys" (*rajul min ṣibyān al-maṭbakh*) was changed to a "black slave" (*ʿabd aswad*); see Mahdi, 2:34.

94. Mahdi, 1:59.

95. The concubines are not described as "white" in the fifteenth-century manuscript. That adjective is inserted only in eighteenth-century manuscripts; see Mahdi, 2:35. For the use of the verb *sakhkhama*, see Mahdi, 1:62.

96. Schine, "Reading Race."

dressed the group "became twenty concubines to anyone who saw them (*yarāhum*)."[97] Thus framed by an optical illusion of sameness, the dysfunction at the heart of this orgiastic spectacle is rendered even more shocking.

A more elaborate example comes not long after the frame story in "The Tale of the Enchanted King," in which a king discovers that his wife has been cheating on him with a "diseased black slave" (*ʿabd aswad mubtalan*). The combination of blackness, slave status, and a "blighted body" seems intended to elicit disgust from the audience.[98] Moreover, his unkempt dwelling in a slum outside of town, the crude food and drink he offers her, and the rough floor where they lie together present a parodic inversion of the opulent erotic scenes in other stories and make the queen's behavior appear particularly irrational and demeaning. Even worse, her desire for him seems greater than his desire for her. She calls him "beloved of my heart" (*ḥabīb qalbī*), whereas he calls her "cursed woman" (*malʿūna*) and threatens to withhold sex if she does not do as he wants.[99] The entire situation stands in stark contrast to her marriage to a king whose beauty is evoked at the beginning of the story and whose status as her cousin makes their match in many ways an exemplar of sameness. Ultimately, this king, with help from another king who feels sorry for him, manages to get revenge, and both the wife and her lover end up slain.

These stories of infidelity and retribution emphasize the treachery of women and the abjection to which their lack of self-control may drive them, themes that come up elsewhere in the *Nights*. The likelihood that audiences would have imagined some of the many concubines that fill the pages of the fifteenth-century manuscript with dark skin suggests that the problem in these cases was not just racial mixing, but queens choosing slaves over kings.[100] This is arguably also why the bodies of the "black slaves" in these scenarios are unsexed; they are primarily signifiers of women's duplicity and sexual excess and only secondarily racial stereotypes or biological threats in and of themselves.[101] Nonetheless, it is likely that these stories confirmed both misogynistic and racist attitudes among the audience of the fifteenth-century manuscript. As opposed to the situations in which sexed

---

97. Mahdi, 1:59, 61.

98. Mahdi, 1:117. I take "blighted body" from the subtitle of Richardson's *Difference and Disability in the Medieval Islamic World*. Translators sometimes render *mubtal* as "leprous," though Richardson shows that more specific terms tended to be used for leprosy in this period.

99. Mahdi, 1:117.

100. For examples of diversity among concubines in the stories, see Mahdi, 1:368, 449, 457, 481. For explicit mentions of a "black concubine," see Mahdi, 1:208, 296. For a related interpretation of the "husband-wife-master-slave" dynamic in the frame story, see Beaumont, *Slave of Desire*, 49. As Schine reminds me, "this is a legal breach as well as a social one" (personal communication). According to Kecia Ali, the possibility that women might have sexual rights to their slaves akin to those granted men (and the related possibility that women might therefore have licit access to more than one sexual partner as men did) was shut down early on in the development of Islamic jurisprudence; see Ali, *Marriage and Slavery*, 12–15, 176–83.

101. That said, in other examples of popular Arabic literature from the period, it is "the female body's sexual and biological vulnerability [that] is cautionarily represented through the black body"; see Rachel Schine, "Conceiving the Pre-Modern Black-Arab Hero: On the Gendered Production of Racial Difference in *Sīrat al-Amīrah Dhāt al-Himmah*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 48 (2017): 298–326, at 325.

bodies highlight poor men's inappropriate desire for comedic effect, the situations involving racialized bodies highlight rich women's excessive desire and always result in death.[102]

Part 2: Modern (Mis-)Readings of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur"

While sex across racial difference retains its negative associations in the modern dissemination of the *Nights*, a new set of anxieties crops up over sameness.[103] What seems taken for granted in the fifteenth-century manuscript—namely, that he- and she-characters are eroticized in the same way and that the field of sexual possibility is not structured by binary constructions of sex or embodied gender—seems to require explanation or intervention starting in the nineteenth century. Specifically, the two most important Arabic print versions of the *Nights*, the Bulaq (1835) and Calcutta II (1839–42) editions, alter the conclusion to "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" so as to emphasize sexual binaries.[104] This tendency is magnified in subsequent translations and scholarship that read sexed bodies into other parts of the story in order to make sense of its erotics.

"The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" provides a useful case study for these nineteenth-century changes, as it features recurring evocations of physical beauty, multiple sexual pairings, and an extended episode of cross-dressing. It has also received particular attention in recent scholarship on sexuality. It presents, however, challenges for a diachronic analysis, as the fact that it was cut off in midstream in the fifteenth-century manuscript means that it is more difficult to establish a baseline for comparison. That said, later manuscripts sometimes preserve older material than earlier manuscripts do, especially when oral transmission and multifarious, fragmentary, and lost manuscript traditions are involved, as they are with the *Nights*.[105] For my analysis, I use the version presented in Mahdi's critical edition, which is based on the fifteenth-century manuscript

---

102. In a third example from "The Story of the Three Apples," a husband kills his wife because of a rumor, later disproved, that she was having an affair with a "black slave"; see Mahdi, 1:223.

103. The racism in later editions may in fact be more pronounced. For instance, the character described as a "diseased black slave" in the fifteenth-century manuscript is, in nineteenth-century Arabic manuscripts and print editions, further ridiculed for his protruding, ugly lips. Such elements were exaggerated even further in nineteenth-century English and French translations, like those of Richard Burton and Joseph Charles Mardrus, just as, in some more recent examples, they have been downplayed or erased. For more on this, see Schine, "Reading Race"; and Robert Irwin, "The Dark Side of 'The Arabian Nights,'" *Critical Muslim* 13 (2015), https://www.criticalmuslim.io/the-dark-side-of-the-arabian-nights/.

104. W. H. Macnaghten, ed., *The Alif Lailá, or Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night/Alf layla wa-layla*, 4 vols. (Calcutta: W. Thacker, 1839–42) [hereafter Calcutta II]; and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣafatī al-Sharqāwī, ed., *Alf layla wa-layla*, 2 vols. (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Kubrā bi-Būlāq, 1251/1835) [hereafter Bulaq]. For the purposes of this analysis, I am considering "The Story of Amjad and Asʿad," which is presented as a continuation of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" in most of the versions under study here, as a separate story, in part on the basis of Garcin's historicist assessment; see Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 352–53. It has also received less attention in scholarship on sexuality. Therefore, when I refer to the conclusion of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," I am referring to the reunion between Qamar al-Zaman and Budur in the Ebony Islands. For a different assessment of "The Story of Amjad and Asʿad" from a literary perspective, see Jamel Eddine Bencheikh, *Les mille et une nuits ou la parole prisonnière* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 97–135.

105. For an example of this dynamic, see Chraïbi, "Introduction," 54–58.

through the middle of night 281 and then concluded on the basis of a manuscript copied in Egypt in 1764, though this is missing the crucial final scene. I supplement this with the three seventeenth-century manuscripts cited in the first part of this article, two of which are standalone versions of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," and I cross-check them with three early nineteenth-century representatives of the manuscript tradition known as Zotenberg's Egyptian Recension (ZER) that are among the first extant examples to feature a full 1,001 nights.[106] Where they diverge, I tend to prefer the earliest manuscript version available and give variations in the notes, but all of them have more in common with each other than they do with the Bulaq and Calcutta II print editions, particularly at the story's conclusion. This matters because these editions have come to represent the *Nights* for a modern global audience.[107] It is possible that what I see as changes in the print editions are actually continuities with earlier oral traditions, manuscripts I have not studied, or now-lost manuscripts. However, the way in which the print version of the conclusion differs from all the manuscripts I have consulted persuades me that the difference is the work of nineteenth-century editors, magnified by subsequent translators and scholars, concerned with (or simply defaulting to) modern sexual binaries.

As we have seen, the beginning of the story features a beauty contest adjudicated by demons. Qamar al-Zaman is deemed the winner for the restraint he shows when presented

---

106. These are Gotha Forschungsbibliothek Ms. Orient. A 2633 [hereafter Gotha]; Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod.arab 623 [hereafter Munich]; and BNF Arabe 3602. The latter two manuscripts were both copied by the same person, though they are not identical texts. The Munich manuscript is dated 1806. My analysis of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" indicates that BNF Arabe 3602 is identical to BNF Arabe 3598, so I include references only to the former (which is a clearer copy). According to Garcin, both of these manuscripts are identical to Cairo Dār al-Kutub 13523z, which is dated 1809; see Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 25–26. For more on Zotenberg's Egyptian Recension, see Grotzfeld, "Manuscript Tradition." I have also cross-checked with a third standalone manuscript of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," datable to the seventeenth century: BNF Arabe 3622. This was one of the manuscripts brought to France from Syria by Antoine Galland, and Ibrahim Akel suggests it may have been used as the basis for the story as it appears in Galland's French translation (if that is the case, however, Galland took considerable liberties with it); see Akel, "Quelques remarques sur la bibliothèque d'Antoine Galland et l'arrivée des *Mille et une nuits* en occident," in *Antoine Galland et l'Orient des savants*, ed. Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat and Michel Zink, 199–215 (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2019), 205–9. What is interesting for the purposes of this study, however, is that the text of BNF Arabe 3622 is identical to the version of the story presented in a third early print edition, known as the Breslau edition; see Maximilien Habicht and Heinrich Fleischer, eds., *Tausend und eine Nacht/Alf layla wa-layla*, 12 vols. (Breslau: J. Max, 1825–43) [hereafter Breslau]. This version differs in a few striking places from the other versions under study here, and I will provide details in the notes.

107. For more on these editions, see Mahdi, *Thousand and One Nights*, 87–126. Famous early English translators of the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions include Edward W. Lane (Bulaq) and Richard Burton (Calcutta II). More recently, Calcutta II has been translated into English by Malcolm C. Lyons with Ursula Lyons and into French by Jamel Eddine Bencheikh and André Miquel, whereas Husain Haddawy has produced a collection of select stories (including "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur") from the Bulaq edition. See Lyons with Lyons, trans., *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, 3 vols. (London: Penguin Books, 2008); Bencheikh and Miquel, trans., *Les mille et une nuits*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 2005); and Haddawy, trans., *Sindbad and Other Stories from the Arabian Nights* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008). For the way English translations of the *Nights* influenced its reception among nineteenth-century Arabic- and Persian-speaking audiences, see Kamran Rastegar, "The Changing Value of *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* for Nineteenth-Century Arabic, Persian, and English Readerships," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 36, no. 3 (2005): 269–87.

with the near-naked sleeping body of Budur. Even though it is his gendered behavior that wins him the day, it is the physical sameness of the two bodies that dominates the narration of the sequence, presented initially in lengthy descriptions of the beauty of each and then repeated as the contest ensues, punctuated by astonished exclamations on the part of the *jinn* about how similar the two look. Qamar al-Zaman's beauty is described right at the beginning of the story in terms that recall previous descriptions, including the poem quoted at the beginning of this article that is first used for the beloved of the Mistress of the House in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies." The fifteenth-century manuscript presents only the first six verses of the twelve-verse poem for Qamar al-Zaman.[108] In two of the early nineteenth-century manuscripts I consulted, the poem appears in its full twelve verses with only minor variations in wording from its first appearance in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies."[109] In the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions, however, only ten of the twelve verses appear, with what may be a telling omission.[110] One of the dropped verses is the seventh verse, which praises Qamar al-Zaman for his bough-like figure and the "two pomegranates on his chest." This verse may not have conformed to nineteenth-century norms for embodied masculinity, and its omission serves to downplay the sense of interchangeability among beautiful he- and she-characters that repetition of this kind of poetry conveys.[111] Even without that verse, twentieth-century French translators Jamel Eddine Bencheikh and André Miquel feel the need to explain the poem in a footnote: "This evocation is more reminiscent, classically so, of a woman and becomes only more suspect given that it has to do with a young man obviously disinclined toward the other sex… and given that one of these women, so disparaged by him, will save him."[112] This reading suggests that the poem may not actually describe Qamar al-Zaman's body, or, if it does, his

---

108. There is a slight variation in the first verse. Compare Mahdi, 1:206 ("The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies") and 536 ("The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur"). For a full English translation of the twelve-verse poem when it first appears in the fifteenth-century manuscript, see Haddawy, *Arabian Nights*, 166–67.

109. BNF Arabe 3602, fols. 435b–436a; Gotha, fol. 49b. One of the seventeenth-century manuscripts I consulted includes eleven verses of the poem, omitting only the second verse; see BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 224a–224b. The other two seventeenth-century manuscripts are missing the beginning of the story where this poem occurs.

110. Bulaq, 1:345; Calcutta II, 1:815–16. One of the manuscripts I consulted also omits the seventh verse: Munich, fol. 450a.

111. This poem does not appear at all in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" in the Bulaq edition; see Bulaq, 1:44–46. It does appear in the earlier story in the Calcutta II edition, and there it includes the "pomegranate" verse but drops two others (the fourth and the sixth); see Calcutta II, 1:125–26. The Breslau edition has the poem in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies" (Breslau, 1:318–19) but drops it entirely in "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" and inserts instead into the first description of Budur a description of her breasts as being like "a large pair of pomegranates" (Breslau, 3:182; BNF Arabe 3622, fol. 5b).

112. Bencheikh and Miquel, *Mille et une nuits*, 1:1196, n. 3. They do not comment on the poem when it occurs earlier in "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies." By contrast, in his 1885 translation of the Calcutta II edition, Richard F. Burton restores the "pomegranate" verse to "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," explaining in a footnote, "These lines occur in Night xvii.; so I borrow from Torrens (p. 163) by way of variety"; see Burton, trans., *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, 10 vols. (Reprint: Project Gutenberg EBook, 2001), 3:n. 232.

looks are a function of his "disinclination toward the other sex" and/or a prefiguration of the beautiful female body that will "save" him.

The assumption that the story opens with a crisis of sexual orientation—especially one that muddies the otherwise clear waters of sexual dimorphism—does not match up with the way any of the Arabic versions under study here present the issue. In the fifteenth-century manuscript, both Qamar al-Zaman and Budur reject the prospect of marriage until they lay eyes on each other. In Qamar al-Zaman's case, he explains his rejection by saying that his "soul is not sympathetic to/inclined toward women" (*lā lī nafs tamīlu ilā al-nisā*ʾ) because he has read cautionary tales about their deceitfulness. His position is amplified by additional poetry in the nineteenth-century versions, but the rationale remains the same: women are not to be trusted.[113] Although it might be possible to read the verb "to be inclined toward" in terms of sexual object choice, the immediate context in which it occurs, reinforced by the broader environment of the *Nights* with its prominent theme of marital infidelity, strongly suggests that it is marriage, not the female body, that Qamar al-Zaman is refusing.[114] In Budur's case, all versions have her explaining that she is already a princess (*sayyida*) and a ruler (*ḥākima*, *malika*) and does not want a man to rule over her.[115] While the explanations invoke gender stereotypes and norms (women are treacherous; men wield more power in marriage), the more striking effect is to stress the sameness of the two protagonists: both are powerful, self-sufficient, and loath to put themselves in a structurally vulnerable position. The fact that they are both promptly locked up by their fathers to punish them for their disobedience only reinforces the parallel. In other words, the problem is not one of object choice in which Qamar al-Zaman just needs to find a sufficiently desirable female body; it is that both Qamar al-Zaman and Budur need to meet

---

113. Compare Mahdi, 1:534–35; BNF Arabe 3612, fols. 223b–224a; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 2a; with BNF 3602, fols. 434a, 435a; Gotha, fols. 47b–48b; Munich, fols. 448a, 449a; Bulaq, 1:343–44; and Calcutta II, 1:812–14. In "The Hunchback Story," the young man from Baghdad who meets the barber is also initially described as a hater of women, but no reason is given. One glimpse of a beautiful woman on a balcony and his "hatred of women was reversed by love"; see Mahdi, 1:328–29.

114. On the use of this verb form, see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality,* 48–49. The French translator Joseph Charles Mardrus embellishes these explanations to make them seem much more like sexual preferences; see Mardrus, *The Book of the Thousand and One Night*, trans. E. Powys Mathers, 4 vols. (1923; repr., London: Routledge, 1986), 2:3, 9 [hereafter Mardrus-Mathers]. This has led Brad Epps, on the basis of the Mathers translation of Mardrus, to argue, "Inasmuch as both Qamar and Budur had already professed to reject not only marriage but also any interest in the opposite sex, Qamar's self-control may be as consistent with his previously expressed penchant as Budur's lack of self-control is inconsistent with hers"; see Epps, "Comparison, Competition, and Cross-Dressing: Cross-Cultural Analysis in a Contested World," in Babayan and Najmabadi, *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, 114–60, at 119–20 and n. 17. David Ghanim copies this word-for-word from Epps; see Ghanim, *The Sexual World of the Arabian Nights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 40.

115. See Mahdi, 1:542; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 226b; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 1b; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 440b; Gotha, fol. 54b; Munich, fol. 455a–455b; Bulaq, 1:349; and Calcutta II, 1:825. The highly abridged BNF Arabe 3623 (fol. 3a) just says she "does not want marriage."

someone similar enough to themselves to put their fears about the gendered institution of marriage to rest.[116]

Like Bencheikh and Miquel, other translators and scholars read a binary construction of sex into the story's opening sequence. Brad Epps claims that phallic imagery recurs in the beauty competition and that its resolution hinges in large part on the presentation of "women as lacking 'the thing' that men have and, perhaps on the basis of that 'lack,' as being less capable of self-control ..."[117] However, almost all of the examples of phallic imagery are embellishments made by Joseph Charles Mardrus in his notorious sixteen-volume French translation (1899–1904) as rendered in English by E. Powys Mathers in 1923.[118] For example, Mardrus tempers the physical resemblance between the two protagonists by emphatically sexing their bodies: "... the two upon the couch might be twins, save in the matter of their *middle parts.* Each had the same moonlit face, the same slim waist, and the same rich round croup; if the girl lacked the youth's *central ornament*, she made up for it in *marvelous paps which confessed her sex*" (italics mine).[119] The Arabic versions I have consulted liken Qamar al-Zaman and Budur to "two moons" (*qamarayn*) and/or "siblings" (*akhawayn*) when they are first placed next to each other, but it is likely that the rest of the passage was inserted at that point in the story by Mardrus, and I have found no Arabic equivalent for the italicized phrases in any version I have consulted.[120] Although the Arabic manuscripts and print editions alike portray the excitement of each protagonist upon encountering parts of the other's body that may be interpreted as signifying binary sex—Budur's breasts, Qamar al-Zaman's penis—these are very brief mentions, particularly in comparison with the lengthy descriptions of other aspects of their physical beauty.[121] At one point a demon

---

116. The tendency to conflate marriage and heterosexuality is an effect of modern discourses of sexuality. Fedwa Malti-Douglas's reading of the frame story, while groundbreaking and insightful in so many ways, is an example; see Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), chapter 1; and idem, "Homosociality, Heterosexuality, and Sharazâd," in Marzolph and van Leeuwen, *Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 1:38–42.

117. Epps, "Comparison, Competition, and Cross-Dressing," 121.

118. One is Epps's own misinterpretation of the phrase "his waist sometimes complained of the weight which went below it"; see Epps, "Comparison, Competition, and Cross-Dressing," 118. Mardrus leaves this ambiguous (Mardrus-Mathers, 2:2), but the Arabic versions clearly refer to the weight of his hips (*ardāfihi*), not of his penis, a description consistent with the recurring image of beautiful men and women with fleshy hips and buttocks below slim waists; see BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 224a; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 435b; Gotha, fol. 49b; Munich, fol. 450a; Bulaq, 1:345; and Calcutta II, 1:815. Among Mardrus's blatant embellishments is the reference to the enormous *zabb* (an Arabic term for penis) on one of the demons, which does not appear in any Arabic version I have seen; see Mardrus-Mathers, 2:14; and Epps, "Comparison, Competition, and Cross-Dressing," 118. For more on the Mardrus translation, see Irwin, *Arabian Nights*, 36–40.

119. Mardrus-Mathers, 2:12.

120. For this scene, see Mahdi, 1:545; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 442a; Gotha, fol. 56b; Munich, fol. 457b (*qamarayn aw badrayn ... akhawayn*); BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 227a (omits *akhawayn*); Bulaq, 1:351; Calcutta II, 1:828 (*taw'amān aw akhawān munfaridān*); and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 3b (*qamarayn aw najmatayn aw tuffāḥatayn*). BNF Arabe 3621 does not include this section.

121. For breasts (*nuhūduhā*), see Mahdi, 1:548; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 228b; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 444b; Gotha, fol. 59a; Munich, fol. 460a; and Bulaq, 1:353. The only variant is Calcutta II, 1:833 (*nuhūduhā mithl ḥuqqayn min al-ʿāj*), while BNF Arabe 3621 is missing this section. BNF Arabe 3623 does not mention Qamar al-Zaman looking

observes that "the sweetness of women is a thing and the sweetness of men is a[nother] thing" (*ḥalī al-nisāʾ shayʾ wa-ḥalī al-rijāl shayʾ*), but in no specific way does the scene indicate the relevance of the sexed body to either the kind or the degree of beauty.[122] Though Budur's reaction to Qamar al-Zaman is more intense than is Qamar al-Zaman's to Budur, it is presented as a matter of masculine self-control rather than as one of embodiment. Thus while it is true that the outcome is a gender hierarchy, it is not one rooted in the body or its "middle parts."

The next phase of the story has also prompted readings that understand sexual attraction as a matter of object choice. Sahar Amer calls this phase a "lesbian interlude" and argues that it highlights the appeal of a female body to another female body.[123] After Qamar al-Zaman and Budur, so fleetingly united by supernatural forces, eventually find their way to each other in the light of day, as it were, they get married. However, on a journey together Qamar al-Zaman is lured away from his wife's sleeping body and loses his bearings. Waking up alone, Budur realizes she must cope without Qamar al-Zaman and decides to dress in his clothes. Traveling as a man, Budur arrives in the capital of the Ebony Islands and is given an audience with the king, who is so taken with the beauty and regal bearing of the person he sees in front of him that he offers Budur his kingdom and his daughter, Hayat al-Nufus, in marriage. The newlyweds pass several nights together before Budur, under pressure to consummate the marriage, tells Hayat al-Nufus that she is a woman. Together they devise a ruse involving chicken blood to convince her father the consummation has taken place, thus extending the marriage and Budur's reign. During this time, all of the officials of the kingdom are fully convinced that Budur is a man, and the story describes Budur as a skillful, just, and beloved ruler.[124]

---

at her breasts at all. For Qamar al-Zaman's genitals, see Mahdi, 1:551 (*shayʾ bayn fakhidhayhi*); BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 229a; BNF Arabe 3621, fols. 3b–4a (*hādhā alladhī bayn afkhādhihi wa-huwa isbaʿ*); BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 446b; Gotha, fol. 61a; Munich, fol. 462a; Bulaq, 1:355; and Calcutta II, 1:837 (*ayrihi*). BNF Arabe 3623 does not mention his genitals at all. By contrast, in Mardrus's version Budur lingers over Qamar al-Zaman's penis, and it is implied that she inserts it into her vagina. She then later tells her nurse that she lost her virginity; see Mardrus-Mathers, 2:18, 26. In the Arabic versions, she kisses him between his eyes and on his mouth and hands and then embraces him, putting her arm under his neck; see Mahdi, 1:551; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 229a; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 4a; and BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 4a (slight variant). For variants that have Budur kissing him all over his body, see BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 446b; Gotha, fol. 61a; Munich, fol. 462a; Bulaq, 1:355; and Calcutta II, 1:837. I do not see any evidence anywhere that she "mounts him," as stated by Ghanim, *Sexual World*, 40.

122. BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 227a; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 2b. This line is dropped completely in BNF Arabe 3623. The eighteenth-century manuscript used by Mahdi reads, "the sweetness of women is different from (*ghayr*) the sweetness of men"; see Mahdi, 1:544. In the nineteenth-century manuscripts and print editions, the text reads, "the female case (*ḥāl al-unthā*) is different from the male case (*ḥāl al-dhakar*)"; see BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 441b; Gotha, fol. 56a; Munich, fol. 457a; Bulaq, 1:351; and Calcutta II, 1:827. Mardrus changes it completely: "If there is equality between a male and a female, the male bears off the prize" (Mardrus-Mathers, 2:12).

123. Sahar Amer, "Cross-Dressing and Female Same-Sex Marriage in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures," in Babayan and Najmabadi, *Islamicate Sexualities*, 72–113, at 77. Relatedly, Garcin suggests that Budur may have been modeled on the "lesbian" daughter of the Timurid ruler Shah Rukh (r. 1405–47); see Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 204.

124. Mahdi, 1:592–93; BNF Arabe 3612, fols. 237b–238a; BNF Arabe 3621, fols. 18b–19b; BNF Arabe 3623, fols. 9a–9b; BNF Arabe 3602, fols. 468b–469a; Gotha, fols. 86b–87b; Munich, fols. 485b–486a; Bulaq, 1:375; Calcutta II,

In some ways, this is a remarkable episode, both for Budur's utterly persuasive embodiment of a young man and accomplished ruler and for the extended marital relationship between Budur and Hayat al-Nufus.[125] However, in other ways it is merely an extension of the pattern already established in the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights* in which beautiful characters are marked by sameness, regardless of gender. Indeed, the nights Budur and Hayat al-Nufus spend together are very much a parallel of erotic encounters in earlier stories. There is a shared bed, conversation, playing, laughing, embracing, caressing, kissing, and sleeping, at the very least.[126] As with other ambiguous episodes (such as that between the Third Dervish and the young man in the subterranean chamber), I interpret these activities as strongly suggestive of eroticism even if the verbs used in previous stories for sexual intercourse are not used here.[127] Thus, although I would not call this an example of "homosexual marriage" or "lesbian sexuality," as Amer does, it is not because I do not believe any sex acts took place. It is because I do not believe that this episode is any more indicative of sameness in sexual relations than are any of the other pairings in the *Nights*, nor do I think it involves object choice. Amer's reading depends heavily on the assumption that Budur's and Hayat al-Nufus's bodies are to be understood as categorically different from Qamar al-Zaman's, a reading that, like others examined above, imposes modern sexual binaries onto the story.

Key to Amer's argument is the moment in which Budur declares herself to be a woman to Hayat al-Nufus. In the eighteenth-century manuscript that Mahdi follows at this point in his critical edition, Budur switches to a "real," "feminine" voice and uncovers her breasts and genitals.[128] The only earlier manuscript to include this scene does not refer to breasts or genitals at all but says rather that she uncovers "her thighs" and Hayat al-Nufus sees that she is "a virginal girl" (*bint bikr*), at which point Budur then explains that she is an "elite [secluded] woman" (*imrāʾ dhāt khidr*).[129] The earlier manuscript thus stresses sameness of

---

1:880–81. Throughout the story, the narrator uses feminine pronouns and verb forms to refer to Budur, even while she is cross-dressed. However, when she is referred to directly by another character who believes her to be a man, that character uses masculine pronouns and verb forms.

125. This has prompted Wendy Doniger to argue that Budur should be seen as the story's protagonist; see Doniger, "The Rings of Budur and Qamar al-Zaman," in *Scheherazade's Children: Global Encounters with the Arabian Nights*, ed. Philip F. Kennedy and Marina Warner, 108–26 (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

126. Mahdi, 1:592–93, 595; BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 238a; BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 19a; BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 9b; BNF Arabe 3602, fols. 468b–469b, 471b; Gotha, fols. 86b–87b, 89b–90a; Munich, fols. 485b–486b, 488b; Bulaq, 1:375, 377; Calcutta II, 1:880–81, 885.

127. Amer argues that the formulation in the eighteenth-century manuscript that Mahdi follows at this point of the story, *dakhalat Budūr ilā Ḥayāt al-Nufūs*, refers to penetrating a sexual partner; see Amer, "Cross-Dressing and Female Same-Sex Marriage," 96; and Mahdi, 1:592. The same formulation appears in Gotha, fol. 86b. In the two seventeenth-century manuscripts I consulted, the text reads, rather, *dakhalat Budūr al-bayt*; see BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 238a; and BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 19a. The line is skipped entirely in BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 468b; BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 9b; Munich, fol. 485b; Bulaq, 1:375; and Calcutta II, 1:880.

128. Mahdi, 1:595.

129. BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 238b. The other manuscripts use similar wording for her vocal change, but then say only that Budur "uncovered her situation" and "showed herself" to Hayat al-Nufus; see BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 471a; Munich, fol. 488a. One of them adds the part about Budur being an elite woman; see Gotha, fol. 89b. For

gender and status between Budur and Hayat al-Nufus rather than the sexing of the body. In either version, this moment may have been received by the audience, to use Amer's words, "in titillation" and as a "sexual act," but its cursory presentation contrasts with the lengthy and poetic evocations of Budur's memories of Qamar al-Zaman while she is with Hayat al-Nufus.[130] This is not evidence that Budur prefers Qamar al-Zaman to Hayat al-Nufus or male bodies to female bodies. It is, rather, to suggest that in that room three commensurable objects of desire are conjured.

Just before Budur declares herself a woman, she is portrayed gazing upon Hayat al-Nufus and reminiscing about Qamar al-Zaman:

> When Princess Budur entered Hayat al-Nufus's room and she found the candles burning and Hayat al-Nufus sitting there like the moon on the fourteenth night, she gazed upon her and thought about her beloved Qamar al-Zaman and what had passed between them of the good life, of embracing necks, [kissing mouths], hugging chests, letting down hair, nibbling cheeks, and biting breasts.[131]

It is significant that Budur takes in the candlelit spectacle of Hayat al-Nufus's beauty and then immediately recalls her sexual past. The generic references to activities with body parts (all plural nouns without possessive pronouns) might apply to any of the three characters "in the room" at that moment. In the nineteenth-century manuscripts, in fact, this prose passage is followed by a poem describing Qamar al-Zaman's beauty in terms that could easily be used for Budur or Hayat al-Nufus, including verses about him shaking out his locks and unveiling his face and about his slender waist and heavy buttocks.[132] It is this multidirectional circuit of desire, I would submit, rather than Budur's sexed body, that charges the scene with eroticism. While Amer sees the heightened pleasure that follows Budur's revelation as evidence of "an alternative female space" where "heterosexuality is critiqued, denaturalized, animalized," it is far from clear to me that this is about female bodies or even gendered solidarity, much less homosexuality vs. heterosexuality.[133] However, I certainly agree with Amer that scenes like this one may have provided fodder for audience members to fantasize about a multiplicity of sexual configurations, including those not sanctioned or otherwise available in their lives.[134]

---

a slightly abridged version, see BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 9b. BNF Arabe 3621 skips over this part. The print editions do not include any references to Budur's body, voice, or status and merely say she "showed herself" to Hayat al-Nufus; see Bulaq, 1:377; and Calcutta II, 1:884.

130. Amer, "Cross-Dressing and Female Same-Sex Marriage," 98–100.

131. Mahdi, 1:594. See also BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 238b; and BNF Arabe 3621, fol. 19b. I add the "kissing mouths" from the nineteenth-century manuscripts: BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 470a; Gotha, fol. 88b; Munich, fol. 487a. This passage is dropped in BNF Arabe 3623.

132. The poem ranges from twelve to fifteen verses; see Munich, fol. 487a–487b; Gotha, fol. 89a–89b; and BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 470a–470b. The printed editions do not include the prose passage and give only eight verses of the poem; see Bulaq, 1:376; and Calcutta II, 1:883.

133. Amer, "Cross-Dressing and Female Same-Sex Marriage," 99–101.

134. This could also be said of the conclusion to the story, in which the three end up in one household together. Although this restores the gender order (Qamar al-Zaman becomes king in Budur's place, while

That said, the concluding scene, particularly with the dramatic changes made to the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions, may have contributed to the tendency to see this story as exploring the relationship between the sexed body and sexual attraction. In all the manuscript versions I have consulted, when Budur finally locates Qamar al-Zaman, she plays a trick on him in which she maintains her guise as a king to force Qamar al-Zaman into sexual activity.[135] Throughout the encounter Qamar al-Zaman refuses repeatedly and expresses extreme distress, even breaking down in tears several times, while Budur alternately cajoles, threatens, and screams at him. It is a drawn-out scene in which Budur forces him first to give her a leg massage and then to straddle her and put his hand underneath her tunic, ostensibly to fondle her "stick" (*qaḍīb*).[136] In each of these two phases of physical contact, the narrative breathlessly follows Qamar al-Zaman's hands as they move up Budur's lower body, encountering skin smoother than cream at each turn. By the end, Qamar al-Zaman has transitioned from tears to exclamations of surprise and pleasure. When he touches her genitals, he exclaims: "By God, how lovely! A king with a pussy (*kuss*)!"[137] Even then, it does not occur to Qamar al-Zaman that he is with a woman, much less his long-lost wife, until she starts laughing, asks how he could have forgotten her, and takes him into her arms.

Readers today are likely to understand this as a scene of rape. There is no doubt that Qamar al-Zaman is being coerced into physical intimacy against his will. He invokes God's protection repeatedly and at one point uses the term "transgression" (*fāḥisha*) and at another "ugly thing" (*shayʾ qabīḥ*).[138] It seems that his distress is at least in part due to

---

Budur becomes a co-wife with Hayat al-Nufus), it keeps the possibilities for sexual desire open-ended and multidirectional. Garcin, however, questions this ending, wondering whether it was rewritten to enable the addition of "The Story of Amjad and Asʿad"; see Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 119–20.

135. This scene is missing from the Mahdi edition and has been rather violently crossed out in BNF Arabe 3621, fols. 23b–24a. The nineteenth-century manuscripts I have consulted are very close to the version in BNF Arabe 3612, which I will follow below, noting variants in the notes.

136. BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 242b; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 479a; Gotha, fol. 100a; Munich, fol. 496b. BNF Arabe 3623 does not include this.

137. BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 243a. BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 11a, has *faraj* rather than *kuss*. The nineteenth-century manuscripts use much the same wording: BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 479b; Gotha, fol. 100b; Munich, fol. 496b. The Breslau edition has Qamar al-Zaman laugh and say, "A king with a woman's tool!" (*malik wa-lahu ālat al-nisāʾ*); see Breslau, 3:274; and BNF Arabe 3622, fol. 25b. There is a parallel here with "The Story of ʿAli Shar and Zumurrud," which does not appear in the fifteenth-century manuscript. Zumurrud, a concubine disguised as a king, plays the same trick on her long-lost lover, ʿAli Shar, as Budur plays on Qamar al-Zaman. When ʿAli reaches between the king's legs, he exclaims, "A king with a pussy! This is a marvel!" Only after Zumurrud sees that he is thoroughly sexually aroused does she tell him who she is. Unlike the conclusion to "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur," however, the conclusion to this story seems to be the same in the nineteenth-century manuscripts I have consulted and the print editions. See, for instance, Bulaq, 2:234; and Calcutta II, 2:249–50; and compare with Gotha, fol. 226a.

138. BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 242b. BNF Arabe 3623, fol. 11a, has "the sultan wants to ruin me" (*al-sulṭān yurīd yaʿmal maʿī al-āṭil*) (?). The nineteenth-century manuscripts I have consulted insert a line that may be read as "the king wants to make me effeminate" (*al-malik yaṭlubu yukhannit[h]unī*), adding that this would be a "reprehensible act" (*munkar*), a term that, like *fāḥisha*, has a religious connotation. This may make more explicit Qamar al-Zaman's objections, though the rest of the scene is very close to that in the seventeenth-century manuscript. See BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 478b; Gotha, fol. 99a; and Munich, fol. 495b. On *takhannuth*

his belief that he is being confronted with male anatomy, as the prospect of touching a "stick" provokes a fresh round of protests and the discovery of a "pussy" cheers him up considerably, even without knowing whose it is. However, even before this, the text implies that there is mutual pleasure in the encounter. In between his protests, Qamar al-Zaman is portrayed wondering at the softness of the king's skin, and his hand keeps shaking and slipping, signs of sexual attraction elsewhere in the *Nights*. Likewise, Budur's arousal is evoked in physical terms; "her insides tremble" (*khafaqat aḥshāʾuhā*) at Qamar al-Zaman's touch.[139] These reactions may be interpreted as either increasing or belying the vehemence of Qamar al-Zaman's objections and Budur's threats. Arguably the most prominent element in the scene is the suspense generated by the gradual exploration of a body beneath clothes, as if anything is possible—including a pleasant surprise. Here clothing makes the sexed body effectively imperceptible, though perhaps not entirely irrelevant. Undress a king and who knows what you will find?

By contrast, the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions remove the ambiguity, Budur's aggression, and most of the touching. From the start, the scene is clearly about the king's preference for male sexual partners, and most of the narrative consists of a verbal debate between Budur and Qamar al-Zaman on its permissibility and appeal.[140] Qamar al-Zaman's protests focus on the issues of sin, religious law, and God's judgment. Budur attempts to persuade Qamar al-Zaman that it is not forbidden for youths below a certain age to be penetrated. Although she admits that the penetrator—which it is implied will be her—does bear blame, she explains that because her "temperament and nature" (*al-amzija wa-l-ṭabīʿa*) are corrupt, she cannot help herself.[141] Then she recites a succession of ten bawdy poems about the attractions of boys, the drawbacks of girls, and the overall pleasures of anal sex.[142] Many of

---

(effeminacy) in the premodern period, see Rowson, "Effeminates"; and idem, "Gender Irregularity." On *fāḥisha* and its association with the story of Lot in the Qurʾan, see Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle, "Sexuality, Diversity and Ethics in the Agenda of Progressive Muslims," in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi, 190–234 (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003); and Sara Omar, "In Search of Authenticity: Modern Discourse over Homosexuality through Early Islamic Thought," in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam*, ed. Herbert Berg, 339–58 (New York: Routledge: 2018).

139. The striking parallel with the scene at the beginning of the story in which Budur's hand slips and her insides tremble as she moves her hand up the thigh of the sleeping Qamar al-Zaman reinforces this sense. Compare, for example, BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 229a and fols. 242b–243a.

140. The Breslau edition follows BNF Arabe 3622 and hews much closer to the other manuscripts I have consulted than to the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions. It adds, however, a scenario in which Budur forces Qamar al-Zaman to assume a position with raised buttocks as if he were about to be anally penetrated (Breslau, 3:272; BNF Arabe 3622, fol. 25a), whereas the rest of the manuscripts say that Budur turned onto her back "as a woman lies down with a man" or "as a woman does" (BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 242b; Munich, fol. 496b; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 479a; Gotha, fol. 100a) for Qamar al-Zaman to straddle her. The Breslau edition also adds a line in which Qamar al-Zaman says to himself, "By my life, the king likes boys!" (Breslau, 3:270; BNF Arabe 3622, fol. 24b), and many times it inserts variants on the word "fuck" (*nayk*), which does not appear in any of the other versions I have consulted.

141. Bulaq, 1:382, 383–84; Calcutta II, 1:897, 899.

142. This series of short poems represents a literary subgenre known as *mujūn-maqāṭīʿ* (obscene epigrams), and at least two of them can be found in the relevant chapter of an important fifteenth-century literary anthology analyzed, edited, and translated in Talib, *"Epigram" in Arabic*, 128–56 (the epigrams that appear in

the poems play on religious symbolism, an irreverent echo of Qamar al-Zaman's concern with sin.[143] Convinced by these poems that there is no dissuading her, Qamar al-Zaman agrees to "one time only" (*ghayr marra wāḥida*), in the hope that God will forgive him this isolated transgression.[144] At this point, they get into bed, and after some brief kissing and embracing he reaches between Budur's thighs to find "a domed shrine of many blessings and motions (*barakāt wa-ḥarakāt*)."[145] He then muses to himself, "Perhaps this king is a *khunthā*, neither male nor female (*wa-laysa bi-dhakar wa-lā unthā*)," before asking Budur directly, "O King, you do not have a tool (*āla*) like the tools of men (*ālāt al-rijāl*), so what made you do this?"[146] At that point, Budur laughs and tells him who she is.

This version of the scene is very different from any of the manuscripts I have consulted, perhaps the most thoroughly altered scene in the entire story.[147] It represents a preference for male sexual partners as a matter of "temperament and nature" and in so doing appears much closer to a modern understanding of sexuality, with its emphasis on object choice and essentialism, than anything discussed thus far. The poems recited by Budur explain the king's orientation in terms of both sex and gender; men are "unique in beauty" (*farīd al-jamāl*) and comparatively more socially accessible, while women have the added drawback of menstruating and bearing children.[148] Although the poems themselves may have been considered titillating, as they describe sexual organs and positions, the actual physical encounter between Qamar al-Zaman and Budur is decidedly brief. The delight expressed in the manuscript versions over "a king with a pussy" contrasts with the rather formal consideration in the printed editions of the medical and legal status of *khunthā*, which is

---

the Bulaq and Calcutta II editions are #9 and #23). For more on *mujūn* in Arabic literature, see Zoltan Szombathy, *Mujūn: Libertinism in Medieval Muslim Society and Literature* (Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2013); and Adam Talib, Marlé Hammond, and Arie Schippers, eds., *The Rude, the Bad and the Bawdy: Essays in Honour of Professor Geert Jan van Gelder* (Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014).

143. On this use of language, as well as a comparison with "The Story of ʿAli Shar and Zumurrud," see the analysis in Naaman, "Eating Figs," 351–56.

144. Bulaq, 1:383; Calcutta II, 1:899. The manuscripts also have Qamar al-Zaman asking Budur to assure him this would be one time only, but without the lengthy passage afterwards about sin, repentance, and God's forgiveness; see BNF Arabe 3612, fol. 242b; BNF Arabe 3602, fol. 479a; Gotha, fol. 100a; and Munich, fol. 496a.

145. This is Erez Naaman's translation. Naaman points out the double entendre in the word for motions (*ḥarakāt*), which can refer to both sexual activity and prayer; see Naaman, "Eating Figs," 353, n. 59.

146. Bulaq, 1:384; Calcutta II, 1:900.

147. Garcin makes particular reference to this scene and argues that the changes were made by the Bulaq "éditeur-poète"; see Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*, 123–25. Very little is known about the editor of the Bulaq edition, nor do we know what manuscript(s) he used; all we have is ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣafatī al-Sharqāwī's name and the date of publication in a colophon on the last page of the second volume.

148. The Bulaq edition contains an additional poem that the Calcutta II edition lacks. Interestingly, it is a poem that appears earlier in both editions (but not in any of the manuscripts I have consulted) by way of praising Qamar al-Zaman's beauty as sufficient to make a man forsake women; see Bulaq, 1:382–83; and Calcutta II, 1:897–99.

immediately explained with reference to a binary construction of sex—"neither male nor female."[149] The Bulaq and Calcutta II editions are still too early to reflect the influence of the homosexuality/heterosexuality binary, and this scene does demonstrate affinities with other modes of organizing erotic life. Among these are a distinction between insertive and receptive sexual roles and the significance of age in interpreting and evaluating sexual practices.[150] However, the anxiety, religious and otherwise, around object choice that seems to pervade this version of the scene does not resonate at all with the erotics of sameness cultivated in the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights* or even elsewhere in "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur."

<div align="center">

*   *   *

</div>

Brad Epps, despite reading this scene through the Mardrus-Mathers translation, argues that it "conjures forth a different sexual economy than one that rises and falls on a modern hetero/homo, male/female divide."[151] I wholeheartedly agree and add that untethering the concepts of sameness and difference from sexual binaries helps illuminate this "different sexual economy." The pattern in the fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Nights* is that sameness is mapped onto bodies in ways that stress their physical similarity, regardless of the body parts that are (or may be imagined as being) involved. Beautiful he- and she-characters proliferate, mirroring each other in a variety of erotic encounters that draw the approving attention of onlookers from all walks of life. Repetition of descriptive poetry and prose within these encounters demonstrates that while embodiment is central to the portrayal of sexual attraction, embodied difference is not. In fact, emphasizing embodied difference serves to flag a relationship as inappropriate or dysfunctional. At the same time, triangles within the text, and the possibility that triangulation might also reach into the world outside the text, make space for a variety of erotic possibilities, if only in the realm of fantasy.

These observations should remind us that terms such as "homosexuality," "heterosexuality," and "same-sex desire" privilege anatomical notions of sameness and difference and risk sidelining other ways of understanding sexual relations. My broader goal, however, is to question any assumption that the sexed body is always already there, qualifying otherwise similar evocations of beauty, ratifying grammatical gender (or exposing it as a lie), and making sense of desire. In this view, undressing a body, whether it happens literally in a text or in the mind of a scholar, provides a stable foundation for understanding and interpreting expressions of erotic love. However, historians can only perceive bodies

---

149. It is possible that this insistence on neither/nor for the category of *khunthā*, which, as Gesink shows, was understood historically to be mutable and complex, represents an intermediate position between the greater ambiguity of the manuscript tradition and the modern fetishization of the binary; see Gesink, "Intersex Bodies," especially the conclusion.

150. On these distinctions, see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality*, especially chapter 1. For their genealogical relationship to modern homosexuality, see David M. Halperin, "How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6, no. 1 (2000): 87–123.

151. Epps, "Comparison, Competition, and Cross-Dressing," 152.

through their discursive production; we cannot assume we know what they "really" looked like, or which body parts mattered, especially when confronted with formulaic, terse, or counterintuitive evidence. Why bracket this evidence as a function of narrative technique or literary convention? What if it also reflected a historical reality in which socially legible gender was much more dependent on clothing and context and much less dependent on the shape of the body than we have come to see it today? After all, a "king with a pussy" is not the same as a queen, and the implications of this should prompt a rethinking of the extent to which we read binary constructions of sex or embodied gender into our sources.[152]

By taking descriptions of beautiful characters on their own terms in the context of a source-critical, historicist study, I hope to have shown that the *1001 Nights* offers rich possibilities for this kind of rethinking. This is particularly true since the *Nights* is "a heterogeneous work with a complex textual history," and therefore questions of point of view, voice, and reception are more open than they are for other Arabic genres associated with eroticism.[153] That said, it is crucial for scholars to look beyond the canonical print editions and perform comparative close readings of earlier manuscripts.[154] My analysis of "The Story of Qamar al-Zaman and Budur" indicates that nineteenth-century editors and translators had a heavy hand in shaping its sexual content. Given the relationship in this period between the rise of European colonialism and the production of modern discourses of gender and sexuality, it is all the more pressing to pursue source-critical and historicist projects.[155] Ultimately, if further research shows that erotic love was imaginable in ways that throw into question modern binaries, it will be important to rethink not only our language but also how we understand embodiment as part of the sexual past.

---

152. This observation may resonate with those working in the field of transgender history. For a recent discussion of "the possibilities of non-binary lives in our archives," see Shireen Hamza, "Annulling the Marriage of Two Men: A Marginal Note in a Yemeni Manuscript," *Journal of the History of Ideas Blog*, June 10, 2020, https://jhiblog.org/2020/06/10/annulling-the-marriage-of-two-men-a-marginal-note-in-a-yemeni-manuscript/.

153. See Ibrahim Muhawi, "The Arabian Nights and the Question of Authorship," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 36, no. 3 (2005): 323–37, at 323.

154. Recent examples of what can be achieved by this kind of work, although without a focus on sexuality, can be found in Chraïbi, *Arabic Manuscripts*. Unfortunately, the most recently published book on sexuality in the *Nights* does not engage in any source criticism and recycles arguments (sometimes verbatim) made by other scholars; see Ghanim, *Sexual World*.

155. For the close association between British and French colonialism in North Africa and India and the publication of the nineteenth-century Arabic print editions of the *Nights*, see Mahdi, *Thousand and One Nights*, 87–126; and Horta, *Marvellous Thieves*, especially chapter 3. For the relationship between European colonialism and the production of modern discourses of gender and sexuality, see María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, 1 (2007): 186–209.

Bibliography

Manuscripts

BNF Arabe 3598: Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Arabe 3598. *Les mille et une nuits* [1]. Early nineteenth century. http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf. fr/ark:/12148/cc314904/ca59731810403405.

BNF Arabe 3602: Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Arabe 3602. *Les mille et une nuits* [1]. Early nineteenth century. Copied by ʿAlī al-Anṣārī b. Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī. http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc31491c/ ca59731810073677.

BNF Arabe 3609–11: Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Arabe 3609–11. *Les mille et une nuits.* Fifteenth century. https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/ btv1b8433372b.

BNF Arabe 3612: Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Arabe 3612. *Les mille et une nuits.* Seventeenth century. http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ ark:/12148/cc314943.

BNF Arabe 3621: Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Arabe 3621. *Histoire de Qamar al-Zamân et de Badr al-Bodoûr.* Seventeenth century. http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc31502x.

BNF Arabe 3622: Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Arabe 3622. *Histoire de Qamar al-Zamân et de Badr al-Bodoûr.* Seventeenth century. http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc315035.

BNF Arabe 3623: Bibliothèque nationale de France. Département des manuscrits. Arabe 3623. [*Histoire de Qamar al-Zamân et de Badr al-Bodoûr.*] 1109/1698. http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc31504d.

Gotha: Forschungsbibliothek Gotha. Orientalische Handschriften. Ms. orient. A 2633. *Alf laila wa-laila* [2]. Early nineteenth century. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:urmel-934a5920-afb4-4939-a2ea-b5c1d981380f1.

Munich: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod.arab 623. *Alf laila wa-laila* [1]. 1221/1806. Copied by ʿAlī al-Anṣārī b. Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī. http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/ urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00072405-6.

Print Editions and Translations of the "1001 Nights"

Bencheikh, Jamel Eddine, and André Miquel, trans. *Les mille et une nuits.* 3 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 2005.

Burton, Richard F., trans. *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*. 10 vols. 1885. Reprint: Project Gutenberg EBook, 2001.

Haddawy, Husain, trans. *The Arabian Nights*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008.

———. *Sindbad and Other Stories from the Arabian Nights*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2008.

Habicht, Maximilien, and Heinrich Fleischer, eds. *Tausend und eine Nacht/Alf layla wa-layla*. 12 vols. Breslau: J. Max, 1825–43. [Breslau]

Macnaghten, W. H., ed. *The Alif Lailá, or Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night/Alf layla wa-layla*. 4 vols. Calcutta: W. Thacker, 1839–42. [Calcutta II]

Mahdi, Muhsin. *The Thousand and One Nights (Alf Layla wa-Layla): The Classic Edition (1984–1994)*. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2014. [Mahdi]

Mardrus, Joseph Charles. *The Book of the Thousand and One Night*. Translated by E. Powys Mathers. 4 vols. 1923. Reprint, London: Routledge, 1986. [Mardrus-Mathers]

Lyons, Malcolm C., with Ursula Lyons, trans. *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*. 3 vols. London: Penguin Books, 2008.

Al-Sharqāwī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣafatī, ed. *Alf layla wa-layla*. 2 vols. Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Kubrā bi-Būlāq, 1251/1835. [Bulaq]

Published Sources

Ackerman, Lauren. "Syntactic and Cognitive Issues in Investigating Gendered Coreference." *Glossia: A Journal of General Linguistics* 4, no. 1 (2019): 1–27 (art. 117).

Akel, Ibrahim. "Liste des manuscrits arabes des *Nuits*." In *Arabic Manuscripts of the "Thousand and One Nights*," edited by Aboubakr Chraïbi, 65–114. Paris: Espaces & Signes, 2016.

———. "Quelques remarques sur la bibliothèque d'Antoine Galland et l'arrivée des *Mille et une nuits* en occident." In *Antoine Galland et l'Orient des savants*, edited by Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat and Michel Zink, 199–215. Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2019.

Ali, Kecia. *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Almarri, Saqer A. "'You Have Made Her a Man among Men': Translating the *Khuntha*'s Anatomy in Fatimid Jurisprudence." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, nos. 3–4 (2016): 578–86.

Amer, Sahar. "Cross-Dressing and Female Same-Sex Marriage in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures." In *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of*

Desire, edited by Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, 72–113. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2008.

———. "Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 2 (2009): 215–36.

Andrews, Walter G., and Mehmet Kalpaklı. *The Age of the Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

Bauer, Thomas. "The Arabic Ghazal: Formal and Thematic Aspects of a Problematic Genre." In *Ghazal as World Literature II: From a Literary Genre to a Great Tradition; The Ottoman Gazel in Context*, edited by Angelika Neuwirth, Michael Hess, Judith Pfeiffer, and Börte Sagaster, 3–13. Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2006.

———. "'Ayna hādhā min al-Mutanabbī!': Toward an Aesthetics of Mamluk Literature." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17 (2013): 5–22.

———. *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts: Eine literatur- und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie des arabischen Ġazal*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998.

———. "Male-Male Love in Classical Arabic Poetry." In *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, edited by E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, 107–23. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Beaumont, Daniel. "Literary Style and Narrative Technique in the *Arabian Nights*." In *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, edited by Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, 2 vols., 1:1–5. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004.

———. *Slave of Desire: Sex, Love, and Death in the "1001 Nights."* Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University, 2002.

Bencheikh, Jamel Eddine. *Les mille et une nuits ou la parole prisonnière*. Paris: Gallimard, 1988.

Cadden, Joan. *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Chraïbi, Aboubakr, ed. *Arabic Manuscripts of the "Thousand and One Nights."* Paris: Espaces & Signes, 2016.

———. "Introduction." In *Arabic Manuscripts of the "Thousand and One Nights,"* edited by Aboubakr Chraïbi, 15–64. Paris: Espaces & Signes, 2016.

———. *Les mille et une nuits: Histoire du texte et Classification des contes*. Paris: Harmattan, 2008.

Doniger, Wendy. "The Rings of Budur and Qamar al-Zaman." In *Scheherazade's Children: Global Encounters with the Arabian Nights*, edited by Philip F. Kennedy and Marina Warner, 108–26. New York: New York University Press, 2013.

El-Rouayheb, Khaled. *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Epps, Brad. "Comparison, Competition, and Cross-Dressing: Cross-Cultural Analysis in a Contested World." In *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, edited by Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, 114–60. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2008.

Fausto-Sterling, Ann. "Gender/Sex, Sexual Orientation, and Identity Are in the Body: How Did They Get There?" *Journal of Sex Research* 56, nos. 4–5 (2019): 529–55.

Fudge, Bruce. "Introduction." In *A Hundred and One Nights*, edited and translated by Bruce Fudge, xiv–xxviii. New York: New York University Press, 2016.

Gadelrab, Sherry Sayed. "Discourses on Sex Differences in Medieval Scholarly Islamic Thought." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 66, no. 1 (2011): 40–81.

Garcin, Jean-Claude. *Pour une lecture historique des "Mille et une nuits."* Paris: Actes Sud, 2013.

Gelder, Geert Jan van. "Poetry and the *Arabian Nights*." In *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, edited by Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, 2 vols., 1:13–17. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004.

———. "Slave-Girl Lost and Regained: Transformations of a Story." *Marvels & Tales* 18, no. 2 (2004): 201–17.

Gesink, Indira Falk. "Intersex Bodies in Premodern Islamic Discourse: Complicating the Binary." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 14, no. 2 (2018): 152–73.

Ghanim, David. *The Sexual World of the Arabian Nights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Ghazoul, Ferial J. *Nocturnal Poetics: "The Arabian Nights" in Comparative Context*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1996.

Ghersetti, Antonella. "The Representation of Slave Girls in a Physiognomic Text of the Fourteenth Century." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 21 (2018): 21–45.

Gordon, Matthew S., and Kathryn A. Hain, eds. *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Grotzfeld, Heinz. "Contes populaires de l'époque Mamlouke dans les Mille et une nuits." *ARAM* 9–10 (1997–98): 43–54.

———. "Creativity, Random Selection, and *Pia Fraus*: Observations on Compilation and Transmission of the *Arabian Nights*." In *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective*, edited by Ulrich Marzolph, 51–63. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007.

———. "The Manuscript Tradition of the *Arabian Nights*." In *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, edited by Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, 2 vols., 1:17–21. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004.

Halperin, David M. "How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6, no. 1 (2000): 87–123.

Hamza, Shireen. "Annulling the Marriage of Two Men: A Marginal Note in a Yemeni Manuscript." *Journal of the History of Ideas Blog*, June 10, 2020. https://jhiblog.org/2020/06/10/annulling-the-marriage-of-two-men-a-marginal-note-in-a-yemeni-manuscript/.

Hees, Syrinx von. "Die Kraft der Jugend und die Vielfalt der Übergangsfasen: Eine historisch-anthropologische Auswertung von Korankommentaren des 10. bis 15. Jahrhunderts." In *Islamwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft I: Historische Anthropologie – Ansätze und Möglichkeiten*, edited by Stephan Conermann and Syrinx von Hees, 139–76. Schenefeld: EB-Verlag, 2007.

Heinrichs, Wolfhart. "The Function(s) of Poetry in the *Arabian Nights*: Some Observations." In *O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture*, edited by Arnoud Vrolijk and Jan P. Hogendijk, 353–62. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Hirschler, Konrad. *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Horta, Paulo Lemos. *Marvellous Thieves: Secret Authors of the Arabian Nights*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Ibn Ḥazm. *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma*. Damascus: Maktabat Dār al-Bayān, 2002.

Irwin, Robert. *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*. New York: Penguin Books, 1994.

———. "The Dark Side of 'The Arabian Nights.'" *Critical Muslim* 13 (2015). https://www.criticalmuslim.io/the-dark-side-of-the-arabian-nights/.

Katz, Marion Holmes. "Fattening Up in Fourteenth-Century Cairo: Ibn al-Ḥāǧǧ and the Many Meanings of Overeating." *Annales islamologiques* 48, no. 1 (2014): 31–53.

King, Helen. *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013.

Kugle, Scott Siraj al-Haqq. "Sexuality, Diversity and Ethics in the Agenda of Progressive Muslims." In *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, edited by Omid Safi, 190–234. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003.

Lagrange, Frédéric. "The Obscenity of the Vizier." In *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, edited by Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, 161–203. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2008.

Laqueur, Thomas Walter. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Leoni, Francesca, and Mika Natif, eds. *Eros and Sexuality in Islamic Art*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013.

Liebrenz, Boris. "The Library of Aḥmad al-Rabbāṭ: Books and Their Audience in 12th to 13th/18th to 19th Century Syria." In *Marginal Perspectives on Early Modern Ottoman Culture: Missionaries, Travelers, Booksellers*, edited by Ralf Elger and Ute Pietruschka, 17–59. Halle (Saale): Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Regionalstudien, 2013.

Lugones, María. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System." *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 186–209.

Mahdi, Muhsin. *The Thousand and One Nights*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995.

Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. "Homosociality, Heterosexuality, and Sharazâd." In *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, edited by Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, 2 vols., 1:38–42. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004.

———. *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Marzolph, Ulrich. "Making Sense of the 'Nights': Intertextual Connections and Narrative Techniques in the 'Thousand and One Nights.'" *Narrative Culture* 1, no. 2 (2014): 239–57.

Muhawi, Ibrahim. "The Arabian Nights and the Question of Authorship." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 36, no. 3 (2005): 323–37.

al-Musawi, Muhsin J. *The Islamic Context of "The Thousand and One Nights."* New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Myrne, Pernilla. *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2020.

Naaman, Erez. "Eating Figs and Pomegranates: Taboos and Language in the *Thousand and One Nights*." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 44 (2013): 335–70.

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Naddaff, Sandra. *Arabesque: Narrative Structure and the Aesthetics of Repetition in "1001 Nights."* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991.

Omar, Sara. "In Search of Authenticity: Modern Discourse over Homosexuality through Early Islamic Thought." In *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam*, edited by Herbert Berg, 339–58. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Park, Katharine. "Cadden, Laqueur, and the 'One-Sex Body.'" *Medieval Feminist Forum* 46, no. 1 (2010): 96–100.

Ragab, Ahmed. "One, Two, or Many Sexes: Sex Differentiation in Medieval Islamicate Medical Thought." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 24, no. 3 (2015): 428–54.

Rastegar, Kamran. "The Changing Value of *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* for Nineteenth-Century Arabic, Persian, and English Readerships." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 36, no. 3 (2005): 269–87.

Reynolds, Dwight F. "*A Thousand and One Nights*: A History of the Text and Its Reception." In *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, edited by Roger Allen and D. S. Richards, 270–91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Richardson, Kristina L. *Difference and Disability in the Medieval Islamic World: Blighted Bodies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Rosenthal, Franz. "Male and Female: Described and Compared." In *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, edited by J. W. Wright and Everett K. Rowson, 24–54. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Rowson, Everett K. "The Effeminates of Early Medina." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, no. 4 (1991): 671–93.

———. "Gender Irregularity as Entertainment: Institutionalized Transvestism at the Caliphal Court in Medieval Baghdad." In *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, edited by Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack, 45–72. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

———. "Homoerotic Narratives from Mamlūk Literature: Al-Ṣafadī's *Lawʿat al-Shākī* and Ibn Dāniyāl's *al-Mutayyam*." In *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, edited by J. W. Wright and Everett K. Rowson, 158–91. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

———. "The Traffic in Boys: Slavery and Homoerotic Liaisons in Elite ʿAbbāsid Society." *Middle Eastern Literatures* 11, no. 2 (2008): 193–204.

Scalenghe, Sara. *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500–1800*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Schine, Rachel. "Conceiving the Pre-Modern Black-Arab Hero: On the Gendered Production of Racial Difference in *Sīrat al-Amīrah Dhāt al-Himmah*." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 48 (2017): 298–326.

———. "Reading Race and Racism in the *1001 Nights.*" In *Approaches to Teaching the Arabian Nights*, edited by Paulo Lemos Horta. Forthcoming.

Selove, Emily, and Rosalind Batten. "Making Men and Women: Arabic Commentaries on the Gynaecological Hippocratic Aphorisms in Context." *Annales islamologiques* 48, no. 1 (2014): 239–62.

Szombathy, Zoltan. *Mujūn: Libertinism in Medieval Muslim Society and Literature.* Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2013.

Talib, Adam. "Citystruck." In *The City in Arabic Literature: Classical and Modern Perspectives*, edited by Nizar F. Hermes and Gretchen Head, 138–64. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018.

———. *How Do You Say "Epigram" in Arabic?: Literary History at the Limits of Comparison.* Leiden: Brill, 2018.

———, Marlé Hammond, and Arie Schippers, eds. *The Rude, the Bad and the Bawdy: Essays in Honour of Professor Geert Jan van Gelder.* Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014.

Ullah, Sahar Ishtiaque. "A Response to Zayde Antrim's 'Sex, Sameness, and Embodiments of Desire in the 1001 Nights.'" Paper presented at the Islamic History Workshop, Columbia University, February 20, 2020.

Ze'evi, Dror. *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Who Compiled and Edited the Mashhad Miscellany?

Luke Treadwell

University of Oxford

(luke.treadwell@orinst.ox.ac.uk)

Abstract

The identity of the editors of the Mashhad miscellany generated considerable scholarly debate for a couple of decades after Togan's discovery of the Mashhad manuscript in 1923, but interest in the topic declined after the middle of the century. In the last seventy years, it is the miscellany's four texts, in particular the Kitāb *of Ibn Faḍlān, that have monopolized scholarly attention. This paper reopens the file on the mysterious editors in the belief that their role remains the key to understanding the* majmūʿa *as well as its component texts. It reexamines the paratextual apparatus with which the editors framed the miscellany and concludes that the editors did not belong to the Mashriqī literary elite as earlier scholars maintained. The "editors" were in all probability not men of flesh and blood, but the fictional creations of the traveler, poet, and* nadīm *Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī, author of the miscellany's two* Risālas. *His role as the mastermind of the Mashhad miscellany compels us to reevaluate the miscellany's literary context and to think again about the provenance, structure, and contents of its four texts.*

1. Introduction

Who compiled and edited the Mashhad miscellany? This question generated much scholarly interest for a couple of decades after Togan's discovery of the Mashhad manuscript in 1923.[1] Two Russian historians, Krachkovskiĭ and Kovalevskiĭ, were particularly attentive to the issue in the first half of the twentieth century, but thereafter interest in the topic declined. The attempt to identify the miscellany's "editors" and understand their motivation seems to have reached an impasse in the middle of the century. At the same time, the rich complexities of the miscellany's constituent texts became increasingly evident as their

---

1. In this paper, the term "Mashhad manuscript" is used to refer to manuscript no. 5229 in the library of the Astane Quds shrine (i.e., the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad), which has been provisionally dated to the seventh/ thirteenth century, while the term "Mashhad miscellany" is applied to the compilation of texts (the *majmūʿa*) that was assembled in the second half of the fourth/tenth century.

details were pored over, their language scrutinized, and their literary context elucidated. This paper will reopen the file on the two mysterious "editors," building on the insights produced by Russian scholarship and the remarks made by the few scholars (including Minorsky and Miquel) who have pursued the issue since. Although all contributors to the debate have had worthwhile points to make, as this study will demonstrate, none of the hitherto proposed reconstructions of the miscellany's genesis is compelling. To start afresh, I will return to Krachkovskiĭ and Kovalevskiĭ and reexamine their careful analysis of the paratextual apparatus with which the editors framed the miscellany. This apparatus includes both the introductory remarks with which they prefaced the miscellany's texts and the critical comments that they inserted in the *Risāla*s of Abū Dulaf. The introductory remarks (henceforth referred to as the five "linking passages," or LPs), are the key to unlocking the identity and intentions of the person(s) who compiled the miscellany. As I will attempt to demonstrate, the editors were not, as earlier scholars have maintained, members of the Mashriqī literary elite but fictional creations of the real compiler and editor of the miscellany, Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī, author of the miscellany's two *Risāla*s.[2]

The argument that follows requires some background knowledge of the historiography, structure, and contents of the miscellany. I begin with an overview of the study of the Mashhad manuscript (Section 2), followed by a description of each of the texts (Section 3), a translation and analysis of the editorial linking passages (Sections 4 and 5), an examination of a unique and anomalous passage on the "towns of the Turks" at the end of Ibn al-Faqīh's book (Section 6), and, finally, some notes on the literary biography of Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī.

2. The Study of the Mashhad Manuscript

In 1924, Zaki Velidi Togan published a note about an anonymous, acephalous manuscript in the library of the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad that contained four texts.[3] They included an extended version of the second half of Ibn al-Faqīh's *Kitāb al-Buldān*;[4] two *Risāla*s describing lengthy journeys, the first through Central Asia and al-Hind and the second across Iran, both undertaken by their author, Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī; and the *Kitāb* of Ibn Faḍlān, the envoy who accompanied a caliphal mission from Baghdad to the court of the ruler of Bulghār on the River Volga in 309–10/921–23.[5] The editors inform us that the *Buldān* was already a well-known text in Ibn al-Faqīh's lifetime, whereas the other three

---

2. In Sections 2–4 of this paper, frequent reference will be made to the (two) "editors" of the miscellany, whose identity modern scholars have investigated. From the final paragraph of Section 5 onward, reference will be made to Abū Dulaf as the editor of the miscellany.

3. A. Z. Validov (Togan), "Meshkhedskaya rukopis' Ibni-l'-Fakikha," *Izvestiia Rossiĭkoĭ Akademii Nauk* (1924): 237–48.

4. No manuscript of the book bears a title page or preface. Ibn al-Nadīm called the book *Kitāb al-Buldān*, while its title in the Mashhad manuscript is given as *Kitāb Akhbār al-buldān*; F. Sezgin et al., eds., *Majmūʿa fī al-jughrāfiyya: Mimmā allafahu Ibn al-Faqīh wa-Ibn Faḍlān wa-Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī* (Frankfurt: Maʿhad Taʾrīkh al-ʿUlūm al-ʿArabiyya wa-l-Islāmiyya, 1987), 347.

5. For the purposes of clarity and brevity, the term *Kitāb* is applied to Ibn Faḍlān's text in this paper, while Abū Dulaf's texts are referred to as the first and second *Risāla*s and Ibn al-Faqīh's book as the (*Kitāb Akhbār al-*)*Buldān.*

texts were by unknown authors (see Section 4). Both the *Kitāb* and the *Risāla*s were heavily cited by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) in his voluminous gazetteer of the Islamic world, the *Muʿjam al-buldān*, and were thus known, if only in partial form, to Western scholars for several decades before the publication of the Mashhad manuscript.[6]

Of the four texts, Ibn Faḍlān's *Kitāb* has received the lion's share of attention since Togan's discovery. Togan himself published the first major study in 1939, the same year in which Krachkovskiĭ published a commentary and translation, alongside a facsimile reproduction of the text itself.[7] In his commentary, Krachkovskiĭ made an observation that is crucial to the argument presented in this paper: he pointed out that the editors of the miscellany were identical with the two patrons to whom Abū Dulaf sent copies of his *Risāla*s.[8] The editors wrote short introductions to the *Risāla*s in which they cited Abū Dulaf's dedicatory prefaces. They also inserted several critical comments in the texts of the *Risāla*s in which they expressed doubts about the reliability of certain passages in his account (see below, Section 3). A third translation of and comprehensive commentary on the *Kitāb* was written by Kovalevskiĭ in 1959.[9] Since that date, many new translations have appeared in several languages, as well as a great many academic papers on the literary aspects of the *Kitāb*, the personality and background of its author, the political context of his mission, and the wider context of premodern travel literature within which his travelogue should be read.[10]

The publication of the miscellany spurred interest in Abū Dulaf's texts as well, even if at a slower rate, yielding editions and translations of both his *Risāla*s, but fewer studies.[11]

---

6. Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.).

7. Z. V. Togan, *Ibn Faḍlān's Reisebericht* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1939); I. Yu. Krachkovskiĭ, *Puteshestvie Ibn-Faḍlāna na Volgu (perevod i kommentariĭ)* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1939). Ritter stated, without giving his sources, that Kovalevskiĭ was the author of the translation and commentary that appeared under Krachkovskiĭ's name in 1939; see H. Ritter, "Zum Text von Ibn Faḍlān's *Reisebericht*," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 9 (1942): 98–99.

8. In reference to the first *Risāla*, the editors write (in LP3), *kataba ilaynā Abū Dulaf ... fī dhikr mā shāhadahu wa-raʾāhu fī balad al-Turk wa-l-Hind wa-l-Ṣīn* ("Abū Dulaf wrote to us mentioning what he witnessed and saw in the lands of the Turk, India, and China"); see Section 4.

9. A. P. Kovaleskiĭ, *Kniga Akhmeda ibn-Faḍlāna o ego puteshestvii na Volgu v. 921–922 gg. (stat'i, perevody i kommentarii)* (Kharkov: Izdatelstvo Gos. Universiteta im. A. M. Gori'kogo, 1956).

10. For a convenient summary of the literature, see J. E. Montgomery, "Mission to the Volga," in *Two Arabic Travel Books*, ed. P. F. Kennedy and S. M. Toorawa (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 285–297 ("Further Reading"). See also the forthcoming publication of the papers of a conference on Ibn Faḍlān held in Oxford in 2016: J. Shepard and W. L. Treadwell, eds., *Muslims on the Volga: Diplomacy and Islam in the World of Ibn Faḍlān* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2021) and the catalogue of a major exhibition organized in Kazan published as A. I. Torgoev, ed., *Puteshestvie Ibn Faḍlāna: Volzhskiĭ put' ot Bagdada do Bulgara (*Moscow: Dom Mardzhani, 2016).

11. For a German translation of and commentary on the first *Risāla*, see A. von Rohr-Sauer, *Des Abū Dulaf Bericht über seine Reise nach Turkestān, China und Indien: Neu übersetzt und untersucht* (Bonn: Bonner Universitäts Buchdruckerei, 1939); for an edition and annotated English translation of the second *Risāla*, see V. Minorsky, *Abū Dulaf Miṣʿar ibn Muhalhil's Travels in Iran (circa A.D. 950)* (Cairo: Cairo University Press, 1955). For an edition and annotated Russian translation of the second *Risāla*, see P. G. Bulgakov, *Vtoraya zapiska Abu Dulafa* (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Vostochnoĭ Literatury, 1960); for articles on the second *Risāla*, see I. Yu. Krachkovskiĭ, "Vtoraya zapiska Abū Dulafa v geograficheskom slovare Iāḵūta (Azerbaĭzhan, Armeniya, Iran),"

Abū Dulaf's travelogues did not hold the same allure for modern readers as Ibn Faḍlān's narrative did, being uneven in style and lacking the immediacy of the first-person voice and the minute attention to the behaviors of steppe peoples that make the latter's account such a riveting read. Abū Dulaf's first *Risāla* has long been perceived to be a caricature of the travel genre (see Section 3),[12] although the second *Risāla* has attracted less criticism. On the whole, however, whereas Ibn Faḍlān has become a star of Arabic literature, particularly in twenty-first-century scholarship, Abū Dulaf has been largely neglected over the past half century. As for Ibn al-Faqīh, whose text opens the miscellany and takes up the bulk of the manuscript, difficulties in gaining access to a reproduction of the whole manuscript, as well as the evident disorder among the disbound folios of the manuscript, were noted by Pellat in 1973 in his foreword to the posthumous publication of Massé's French translation of the abridged version of the work.[13] A facsimile edition of the manuscript eventually appeared under the supervision of Fuat Sezgin in 1987 (which, however, omitted the crucial first folio of the manuscript).[14] An edition of the whole of Ibn al-Faqīh's work, which combines de Goeje's abridged edition and the version in the Mashhad manuscript, was published by Yūsuf al-Hādī in 2009.[15]

3. Description of the Texts in the Miscellany

The first text, which is the second part of Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī's *Kitāb al-Buldān*, is by far the longest of the four.[16] It comprises an extended version of Ibn al-Faqīh's book, which is otherwise known only from de Goeje's abridged edition. Supplementary information supplied by this text, not present in the *Mukhtaṣar*, includes additional chapters on Wāsiṭ, Nabaṭiyya, Baghdad, Samarra, the Sawād, al-Ahwāz, the *kharāj* of Khurasan, the Turks, and the titles of the Turks and their neighbors in the Mashriq.[17] The miscellany's text may have been the second of two volumes prepared by the editors, the first volume having contained Ibn al-Faqīh's material on the western Islamic world (the Maghrib), but no trace of the first volume has ever been found.[18]

Izvestiia Akademii Nauk Azerbaizhanskoi SSR 8 (1949): 65–77, repr. in *Izbrannye sochineniia*, ed. V. I. Beliaev and G. V. Tsereteli, 6 vols., 1:280–92 (Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1955), and V. Minorsky, "La deuxième risāla d'Abū-Dulaf," *Oriens* 5, no. 1 (1952): 23–27.

12. See, for example, A. Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11e siècle* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2001), 3:139–45.

13. H. Massé, trans., *Abrégé du livre du pays* (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1973), vi–vii; Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1885).

14. Sezgin, *Majmūʿa.* For an image of the missing first folio, see the final page of this paper.

15. Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. Y. Al-Hādī, 2nd ed. (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 2009).

16. It takes up 347 pages in Sezgin's facsimile (Sezgin, *Majmūʿa*).

17. For a summary of the differences between the two versions of the *Buldān*, see A. B. Khalidov, "Ebn al-Faqīh, Abū Bakr Aḥmad," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online ed., updated 2011.

18. The first line of the book begins *Hādha baqiyyat al-qawl fī al-ʿIrāq ...* ("This is what remains to be said about Iraq ..."); see LP1 in Section 4. This phrase could mean that the "remainder" referred to is the second part of the book, which followed an earlier volume on the Maghrib. Alternatively, the reference to "what remains" could conceivably have been to the extra information contained in the miscellany's version that supplemented

The three other texts in the miscellany are much shorter than the *Buldān.* They are not geographies but rather travelogues whose authors claim to have traveled through the regions that they describe. Abū Dulaf's first *Risāla* tells the story of his journey to the court of the King of "China" (al-Ṣīn, probably the Uighur ruler of Qocho) in the company of an embassy that was dispatched in 330/941 by the Samanid amir Naṣr II (r. 301–31/913–42) to escort the king's daughter back to Bukhara, where she was to marry Naṣr's son.[19] The journey begins with brief descriptions of the social, political, and dietary conditions of the Central Asian tribes through whose territory he passed, before his arrival in the capital city of Sandābīl, which he describes as a great walled conurbation crisscrossed by canals with windmills on their banks. The tribes are succinctly described in formulaic terms, often with a deliberate inflection toward parody. Although he narrates his journey in the first person, Abū Dulaf does not write about his own experience of the journey or his personal encounters with the Turks. In Sandābīl, the author claims to have met the king and answered his questions about the Dār al-Islām, but he then left the embassy and returned to Bukhara by himself via the Malay peninsula, India, Sind, and Sistan. Both the outward and return legs of his journey follow implausibly long and circuitous routes that frequently zigzag and backtrack across the regions they cover, some deviations adding several extra hundred kilometres to the journey for no discernible purpose. The description of the return journey is looser and less stylistically homogeneous than his earlier account of the Turkish territories, including quite extensive comments on mineralogy and flora, as well as remarks on towns and their buildings and the monetary and sartorial customs of their residents. Although less obviously a parody than the outward leg, the return journey is full of tall tales and unlikely assertions and has been described as a mishmash of materials borrowed from unnamed sources.[20]

The second *Risāla* describes a journey that takes the narrator all over the southern Caucasus on a meandering route from Takht-i Sulaymān to Tiflis to Ardabil to Erzurum and then to Khānaqīn, whence he sets out on an easterly course that takes him across the Iranian plateau to Tus. From there he returns in a southwesterly direction, finishing up in al-Ahwāz. The reason for the journey is not given and the narrator is barely present in the text, even though he occasionally makes comments in the first person. The text contains frequent references to mineralogy and flora and reveals the author's interest in folktales and popular interpretations of natural phenomena, as well as his curiosity about ancient buildings of the Sasanian era. On the whole, the "journey" sounds more like a compilation of field notes than a description of a traveled road.[21]

Both *Risāla*s are notable for their inclusion of several critical comments written by the editors, two of them in the first and three in the second *Risāla.* The following table lists the comments.

---

an abridged version, which was probably similar to the *Mukhtaṣar* edited by de Goeje.

19. See W. L. Treadwell, *A History of the Sāmānids: The First Islamic Dynasty of Central Asia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming in 2021), for the identification of Sandābīl with Qocho.

20. Miquel, *Géographie humaine* 3:140, n. 4.

21. See Minorsky, *Travels in Iran*, for a detailed commentary on the second *Risāla.*

Table 1: Critical comments inserted in the *Risālas* by the editors.

Comment No.	Risāla	Page No. in Sezgin's Facsimile[22]	Text to Which the Critical Comment Relates
1	First *Risāla*	356 (*Muʿjam* 3:445)	Description of the funeral of the Samanid amir, Naṣr II, the date of whose death was foretold at birth. On the appointed day, Naṣr proceeded with his notables and household to his tomb, entered it, and died therein.
2	First *Risāla*	361 (*Muʿjam* 3:447)	The height of the idol in the temple of Multān, which Abū Dulaf gives as one hundred cubits.
3	Second *Risāla*	363 (*Travels in Iran*, 2)	A report on the fire temple in Shīz near Marāgha, on the dome of which there was a silver crescent.
4	Second *Risāla*	374 (*Travels in Iran*, 14)	A building plot in Qarmīsīn, which, when excavated, revealed the remains of an older construction that exactly matched the plan of the new house that was to be built on the site.
5	Second *Risāla*	379–80 (*Travels in Iran*, 20)	A prosperous and generous Zoroastrian purveyor of supplies to the army of Rayy who never refused anyone who asked him for wine.

Comment no. 1: After the description of Naṣr's funeral, which follows the story of the daughter of the Uighur king who was brought to Bukhara as a bride for Naṣr's son, the editors state that they doubt the truth of this passage. They explain that their informant, the author (Abū Dulaf), "occasionally mentioned something for which he asked God not to take him to account/blame him."[23]

Comment no. 2: The editors dismiss Abū Dulaf's figure of one hundred cubits for the height of the idol in favor of the lower figure of twenty cubits given by al-Madāʾinī in his *Futūḥ al-Sind wa-l-Hind*.[24]

---

22. Reference is also made (in brackets) to Yāqūt's *Muʿjam* (first *Risāla*) and the Arabic text of Minorsky's Travels in Iran (second *Risāla*).

23. For the clearest version of the text, which is obscured by copyist's errors in the Mashhad manuscript, see Yāqūt's *Muʿjam*, 3:452: *Naḥnu nashukku fī ṣiḥḥat hādhā al-khabar li-anna muḥaddithanā bihi rubbamā kāna dhakara shayʾan fa-saʾala Allāha an lā yuʾākhidhahu bi-mā qāla.* The story of Naṣr's entombment may have been a popular tale that grew up around the construction of the famous Samanid mausoleum in Bukhara, said to have been built by Naṣr to house the remains of his grandfather Ismāʿīl b. Aḥmad (d. 295/907) and to have served as his own shrine as well. See S. Blair, *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 25–29.

24. The editors state, again, *Nashukku fī ṣiḥḥat hādhā al-khabar* ("We doubt the truth of this report").

Comment no. 3: The editors brand Abū Dulaf's description of the fire temple an exaggeration, although it is not entirely clear which part of the description has prompted their criticism.[25]

Comment no. 4: The editors express their skepticism about the claimed resemblance between the uncovered remains of the old building and the new building.[26]

Comment no. 5: The editors dismiss the account of the extreme generosity of the provisions merchant as another of Abū Dulaf's inventions.[27]

These editorial interventions are puzzling. The editors made no comments on the texts of Ibn al-Faqīh and Ibn Faḍlān; why should they have chosen to comment only on the work of their protégé? It is also curious that the editors retained their comments in the text of the *Risāla*s when they had them copied into the miscellany. Of what benefit to the reader did they expect their critical comments to be? Moreover, it is interesting to note that Abū Dulaf himself was aware of his own reputation for hyperbole: after a note on the enormous size of the rhubarb plants he saw when in the city of Nishapur, he wrote, "My readers will take this for an exaggeration on my part, but I have stated only what I have witnessed and seen."[28] It is as though Abū Dulaf was presciently aware of the editors' sensitivity about his tendency to be economical with the truth—yet how could this have been so, given that when he wrote this remark, he cannot have been apprised of the editors' intention to expose him?

Taken all together, the editors' criticisms, though robust, are not entirely damning of Abū Dulaf's credibility. They are focused on five rather marginal points, none of which is integral to the core of Abū Dulaf's narrative. At the same time, the editors are silent about glaring lapses in narrative objectivity, such as Abū Dulaf's description of the Turkish tribes at the beginning of the first *Risāla.* I return to these conundrums when I discuss the question of the editors' identity (see Section 5).

Ibn Faḍlān's narrative stands in marked contrast to the *Risāla*s. The scene is set with a presentation of the *dramatis personae* who organized and took part in the mission to the court of the Bulghār king. From the moment the embassy sets out from the capital, the reader has the sense that the author really did experience the discomforts of the road, the harshness of the climate, and the fears and exhilaration of traveling in unknown regions.[29] The text, like Abū Dulaf's first *Risāla*, falls into two parts. The first is the record of Ibn Faḍlān's journey from Baghdad to Bulghār, which is clearly marked by the stopping points where the embassy alighted, and punctuated by encounters with Naṣr II and the

---

25. The editors remark, *Wa-hādhā al-qawl ayḍan min ziyādāt Abī Dulaf* ("This statement is also one of Abū Dulaf's exaggerations").

26. The editors write, *Wa-hādhā al-khabar ayḍan naẓunnuhu min wahm Abī Dulaf* ("We consider this report, too, to be one of Abū Dulaf's fancies").

27. *Wa-hādhā al-khabar naẓunnuhu ayḍan baʿda hānāt Abī Dulaf* ("We also consider this report one of Abū Dulaf's whimsies").

28. *Wa-yastaʿẓimu hādhā min qawlī man yasmaʿuhu wa-mā qultu illā mā shāhadtu wa-raʾaytu*; Minorsky, *Travels in Iran*, Ar. text 27; trans., 59–60 = Sezgin, *Majmūʿa*, 386.

29. See Miquel, *Géographie humaine,* 3:138.

Khwārazmshāh. It is full of sharply observed remarks on the Turkic peoples the author encountered en route, particularly the Ghuzz chiefs to whom the envoys delivered messages from the Abbasid court.[30]

Once in Bulghār, the envoys endured two unsettling and intimidating audiences with the king, who scolded them for failing to deliver the funds he had been assured he would receive from the caliph. After the meetings with their host, the story of the embassy comes to an end; thereafter the reader hears nothing about the mission's fate and is left to assume, given their initial reception, that it was not a happy one. The second part of the *Kitāb* presents twenty-two "marvels" (*ʿajāʾib*) that Ibn Faḍlān witnessed in Bulghār, where he must have remained for a while after meeting the king. These marvels are mostly not "wonders" in the sense of unbelievable occurrences, but rather accounts of the customs and practices of the Turkic peoples and the Rus' merchants who traded with them, as well as various natural phenomena—faunal, floral, and meteorological.[31] Although the text of the Mashhad manuscript ends abruptly a few lines into the final section, which is on the Khazars, Yāqūt supplies the full text of Ibn Faḍlān's final entry in his *Muʿjam*.[32] Unlike Abū Dulaf, Ibn Faḍlān seems not to have written about his return journey, although Yāqūt states several times that he did return to the Abbasid capital.[33]

Ibn Faḍlān's *Kitāb* has been much discussed over the past century and a half. Prior to the discovery of the Mashhad manuscript, scholarly opinion had been divided between skeptics such as Marquart, who believed that Ibn Faḍlān had never traveled to Bulghār, and others who were persuaded that he had indeed experienced what he wrote about.[34] After the full version of the text in the miscellany was published, most scholars accepted as credible Ibn Faḍlān's claim to have experienced firsthand what he recorded in the *Kitāb.* Doubts persisted, however, over some aspects of his account and the difficulty of pinpointing exactly why and where the *Kitāb* had been written. The internal structure of the narrative, the structural disjunction between the first and second parts of the narrative, the occasional abrupt change of subject matter, the apparent truncation of the text, and an unsettling "doppler" or "echo" effect, which results in similar observations being recorded of different peoples—such anomalies and inconsistencies, together with the author's absence from the historical record and the lack of interest shown by contemporary authors in his text,

---

30. Montgomery, "Mission to the Volga," 210–11.

31. See J. E. Montgomery, "Travelling Autopsies: Ibn Faḍlān and the Bulghār," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 7, no. 1 (2004): 3–32.

32. For the full text, see Togan, *Reisebericht*, 43–45 (Arabic text). See also J. E. Montgomery, "Where Is the Real Ibn Faḍlān?," in Shepard and Treadwell, eds., *Muslims on the Volga*.

33. Yāqūt prefaces several of the entries in the *Muʿjam* that he extracted from Ibn Faḍlān's text with the following sentence (and variations thereof): *Qaraʾtu risālatan ʿamilahā Aḥmad b. Faḍlān … rasūl al-Muqtadir bi-llāh … dhakara fīhā mā shāhadahu mundhu infaṣala min Baghdād ilā an ʿāda ilayhā* ("I read an epistle written by Aḥmad b. Faḍlān … the envoy of al-Muqtadir bi-llāh … in which he recorded what he witnessed from the time he left Baghdad to the time that he returned to the city"); Yāqūt, *Muʿjam*, 1:486, entry on "Bulghār." See also Yāqūt's entries on the Bāshghird (1:322), Khwārazm (2:397), and the Rūs' (3:79).

34. Kovalevskiĭ, *Kniga*, 39.

continue to nourish doubts about the veracity of the account.[35] In recent decades, however, the *Kitāb* has been hailed by medievalists from different disciplines for the light it throws on the steppe peoples and for the insights it provides into the ethnic composition of the early Rus'. Confidence in the reliability of the information provided by Ibn Faḍlān continues to grow, as some of his more bizarre observations have been corroborated by recently discovered archaeological and ethnographic data,[36] while doubts about the narrative's structure and the context of its production have faded into the background. Ibn Faḍlān's account has even been praised as a rare example of the art of reportage in early Arabic literature.[37] Ibn Faḍlān has become, in the eyes of many modern readers, a heroic figure, who is celebrated not only for his exceptional skill as a social observer and his dogged and impartial recording of what he saw but also for his quiet endurance of adversity and his human qualities.[38]

4. The Compilation of the Miscellany and the Editorial "Linking Passages"

In the decades after the discovery of the Mashhad manuscript, Russian scholars paid close attention to the question of the editors' identity and their reasons for compiling the miscellany.[39] Kovalevskiĭ addressed the question of how and where the *Kitāb* and the *Risāla*s were written and how these texts came into the possession of the editors.[40] In his view, both Ibn Faḍlān and Abū Dulaf wrote their texts in Iraq. Kovalevskiĭ accepts Yāqūt's statement that Ibn Faḍlān returned from Bulghār to Baghdad and assumes that the *Kitāb* was written as an official report shortly afterward. A copy of the report found its way (by means unexplained) to Bukhara, where it came into the possession of two erudite noblemen. Abū Dulaf, for his part, presented his *Risāla*s to the famous Buyid vizier al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād at some time early in the second half of the fourth/tenth century, a full three decades or more after Ibn Faḍlān had written the *Kitāb*.[41] His *Risāla*s, like the *Kitāb*, also ended up in Bukhara: Abū Dulaf sent copies of them to former patrons of his in the city, who happened to be the very same noblemen who had earlier come into possession of Ibn Faḍlān's *Kitāb*. At some point in the second half of the fourth/tenth century, these two Bukharan noblemen—

---

35. For an analysis of these problems, see W. L. Treadwell, "Ibn Faḍlān and the Mashhad Miscellany" (forthcoming).

36. See J.-C. Ducène, *L'Europe et les géographes arabes du Moyen Âge* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2017), 139–40, for a summary of the corroborating evidence for Ibn Faḍlān's description of the funeral of the Rus' chief.

37. See a translation of the funeral of the Rus' chief in J. Carey, ed., *Faber Book of Reportage* (London: Faber, 1989), 25–28.

38. See, e.g., the introduction to Montgomery, "Mission to the Volga," 171: "I find Ibn Faḍlān the most honest of authors writing in the classical Arabic tradition. His humanity and honesty keeps this text fresh and alive for each new generation of readers fortunate enough to share in its treasures."

39. For Krachkovskiĭ's translation of four "linking passages" (LP1–4), see Krachkovskiĭ, *Puteshestvie*, 26–29. See also Kovalevskiĭ, *Kniga*, 47–48.

40. Kovalevskiĭ, *Kniga*, 47.

41. Minorsky points out that the second *Risāla* cannot have been written before the year 348/959: see Minorsky, *Travels in Iran,* 5.

Kovalevskiĭ suggests they were members of the Balʿamī family—were engaged in making a fair copy of Ibn al-Faqīh's geography (for reasons unexplained), and they decided to append to it the *Risāla*s and the *Kitāb*. They had the full text of the *Risāla*s copied into the miscellany but created an abbreviated version of Ibn Faḍlān's text, considering the *Kitāb* overlong since, in their opinion, it contained information that would have been of little interest to Bukharan readers.

In proposing this conjectural and rather tenuous reconstruction of the genesis of the miscellany, Kovalevskiĭ managed to account for the work's eastern provenance and for the widespread view, which he shared, that there existed a longer original version of Ibn Faḍlān's text of which the miscellany's version was an abridgment.[42] However, his explanation took little note of the contents of the linking passages and did not tackle the question of why the editors compiled these texts in a single volume.

Further thoughts on the question of the patrons' identity and the process of the compilation of the miscellany were offered by Minorsky and Miquel.[43] Minorsky rejected Kovalevskiĭ's proposal that Abū Dulaf's patron was al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād but concluded that he wrote the text in either Iran or Mesopotamia. Minorsky was also interested in the critical comments inserted in the *Risāla*s by the editors but did not speculate on the editors' reasons for retaining their criticisms in the miscellany beyond stating that they obviously considered Abū Dulaf an unreliable source. Miquel accounted for the bizarre mixture of fiction and fantasy in the first *Risāla* with the suggestion that the patrons must have commissioned Abū Dulaf to write the two texts. He argued that Abū Dulaf's first *Risāla* was a response to their request for a picaresque account that combined observed facts and *adab*-like flourishes, while the second was closer to Abū Dulaf's preferred style of writing and reflected his interest in mineralogy, botany, and architecture. Miquel's theory addressed the particular styles of Abū Dulaf's writing but did not comment on the editorial linking passages. It is to these linking passages that we now turn. The following table lists the five passages along with the four main texts, their authors, and their place in Sezgin's facsimile of the Mashhad manuscript, and provides brief comments on their contents (see the next page).

---

42. Kovalevskiĭ, *Kniga*, 41–49.

43. Minorsky, *Travels in Iran*, 23–26; Miquel, *Géographie humaine*, 139–41.

<div align="center">**Table 2: Linking passages and texts in the miscellany.**</div>

Linking Passage (LP1–5) or Main Text (T1–4)	Author(s)	Page No. in Sezgin's Facsimile	Comment
LP1	The editors of the miscellany	Missing (see Figure 1 below for an image of the first folio of the Mashhad manuscript on which LP1 appears)	LP1 serves as a combined table of contents and foreword. It begins with a description of the contents of T1, followed by brief summaries of T2–T4.
T1	Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadhānī	2–347	The text is an extended version of those chapters of the geography that deal with Iraq, Iran, and the Mashriq.
LP2	The editors of the miscellany	347	Brief descriptions of T2–T4 (similar to LP1)
LP3	Abū Dulaf	347	Dedication preceding the first *Risāla*, written by Abū Dulaf and reproduced by the editors of the miscellany.
T2	Abū Dulaf	347–62	Abū Dulaf's first *Risāla*, a record of his journey to the court of the king of China and his return to Bukhara via India.
LP4	Abū Dulaf	362	Dedication preceding the second *Risāla*, written by Abū Dulaf and reproduced by the editors of the miscellany.
T3	Abū Dulaf	362–90	Abū Dulaf's second *Risāla*, a description of his travels in the Caucasus and Iran.
LP5	The editors of the miscellany	390–91	Brief introduction to Ibn Faḍlān's *Kitāb*
T4	Ibn Faḍlān	391–420	Description of Ibn Faḍlān's journey from Baghdad to Bulghār

The linking passages read as follows:

LP1 (see Fig. 1): The book begins with *bism Allāh rabb al-ʿālamīn wa-ṣallā Allāh ʿalā nabīhi wa-ālihi ajmaʿīn al-ṭāhirīn hādhā baqiyyat al-qawl ʿalā al-ʿIrāq wa-l-Baṣra.* The editors then list the section headings of Ibn al-Faqīh's book as follows: Iraq and Basra, Ubulla, al-Baṭāʾiḥ, Wāsiṭ, Nabaṭ, al-Khūz, Baghdad, *kuwar Dijla*, Samarra (*Surra man rāʾa*), the raising of *kharāj*, al-Ahwāz, Fāris and its towns, al-Jabal, Qirmīsīn, Shabdīz, Hamadhān and Nihāwand, Iṣfahān, Qumm, Rayy, Dunbāvand, Baywarāsaf, Qazwīn,

Abhar, Zinjān, Tabaristan, and Khurasan and its towns and stories (*akhbār*). The final section is on the Turks and their *akhbār*, tribes, and customs (*sharāʾiʿihim*).[44] Thereafter the text continues:

We say: I have added to what Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Hamadhānī [Ibn al-Faqīh] has written (*uḍīfu ilā mā ṣannafahu*) at the end of his book (*fī ākhir kitābihi*), two letters/ treatises (*risālatayn*), both of them written to us by Abū Dulaf Masʿūd [*sic*, for Miṣʿar] b. al-Muhalhil. In one of them he mentions reports about the Turks and China based on his experience of them (*bi-mushāhadatihi dhālika*). The other [*Risāla*] includes things that he saw with his own eyes and witnessed (*raʾāhā wa-shāhadahā*) in a number of countries. To that [Abū Dulaf's *Risāla*s] we have added a book written by Aḥmad b. Faḍlān b. Rāshid b. Ḥamad [*sic*], client of Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Hāshimī, [containing] reports about the Turks, the Khazars, the Rus', the Ṣaqāliba, and the Bāshghirds, drawing on what he came across and looked at [with his own eyes] (*mimma waqafa ʿalayhi wa-naẓara ilayhi*). For al-Muqtadir bi-llāh sent him to the land of the Ṣaqāliba in 309[/921] at the request of their king, [who made this request] because he had a desire for Islam. [In his book] he related everything that he witnessed in these lands (*mā shāhada fī*[*?*] *hādhihi al-buldān*) and that which was reported to him (*wa-mā* [*?*] *nuqila ilayhi*).[45]

LP2:

We will mention [reading *dhakarnā naḥnu* for *dhakara naḥnu* in the text] in this place/ these places [i.e., in what follows] certain reports on countries that have never been mentioned before (*dhakarnā naḥnu fī hādhā al-mawāḍiʿ ashyāʾ min akhbār al-buldān lam yudhkar*). Among them are two *Risāla*s written to/for us (*katabahumā ilaynā*) by Abū Dulaf Miṣʿar b. al-Muhalhil al-Banāzaʿī [*sic*, for Yanbūʿī]. In one of them he relates the stories (*akhbār*) of the Turks and India and other countries from his own experience of [them] (*bi-mushāhadatihi dhālika*). In the other [he writes about] things that he has seen and witnessed (*raʾāhā wa-shāhadahā*) in a number of countries (*buldān*). They deserve to be set down in this book, for they are of this kind [of writing] (*min fannihi*). Also of this kind [of writing] is a book put together by Aḥmad b. Faḍlān b. al-ʿAbbās b. Rāshid b. Ḥammād, *mawlā* of Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Hāshimī, concerning the *akhbār* of the Turks, the Khazars, the Rus', the Ṣaqāliba, and the Bāshghirds and others that he came across and looked at [with his own eyes] (*mimmā waqafa ʿalayhi wa-naẓara ilayhi*). Al-Muqtadir bi-llāh sent him to the land of the Ṣaqāliba in 309[/921] at the invitation of their king, because he had a desire for Islam (*bi-istidʿā malikihim dhālika raghbatan minhu fī al-islām*). He related everything that he witnessed in these lands with his own eyes (*jamīʿ mā shāhadahā fī hādhihi al-buldān bi-muʿāyanatihi wa-naẓarihi*).

---

44. These section headings differ a little from those in the text itself, giving slightly more detail in several cases while omitting one or two headings that occur in the text (such as the sections titled "The *sawād* of Iraq" and "Buildings and their special characteristics and marvels": see Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, 377 and 430).

45. The final sentence is obscure in the Mashhad manuscript. The translation is based on Kahle's and Krachkovskiĭ's reconstructions: P. Kahle, "Islamische Quellen zum chinesischen Porzellan," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, n.s., 13 [88] (1934): 1–45; Krachkovskiĭ, *Puteshestvie*, 28.

LP3:

The first *Risāla*: Abū Dulaf Masʿūd [*sic*] b. al-Muhalhil al-Banāzaʿī [*sic*, for al-Yanbūʿī] wrote [this] for/to us, telling us what he had witnessed and seen (*dhikr mā shāhadahu wa-raʾāhu*) in the lands of the Turks and India and China. He said: "When I saw you both, my lords (to whom I am but a slave, may God lengthen your days), craving writing and addicted to composition (*lahijayni bi-l-taʾlīf mūlaʿayni bi-l-taṣnīf*), I did not wish to deprive your store of wisdom of anything that I had personally witnessed (*waqaʿat ilayya mushāhadatuhu* [text has *mushāhadatuhumā*]) or any wonder that fate had thrown across my path...

LP4:

The second *Risāla*, which he [Abū Dulaf] sent to us after the one that we have transcribed (*katabnāhā*)[46]—Abū Dulaf writes: "Praise be to God ... I prepared for you both ... a summary of my journey, which was from Bukhara to China ... and from there to India. ... In that account I mentioned some of the wonders of the countries I entered and the tribes I passed by. I did not make my account long for fear of prolixity. Now I see fit to prepare a shortened version (*tajrīd*) of a worthy epistle encompassing the greater part of what I witnessed (*ʿammat mā shāhadtuhu*) and encompassing most of what I personally observed (*akthar mā ʿāyantuhu*), so that the perspicacious might benefit from it."

LP5:

This is the written account of Aḥmad b. Faḍlān b. al-ʿAbbās b. Rāshid b. Ḥammād, the envoy (*rasūl*) of al-Muqtadir to the king of the Ṣaqāliba. His patron was Muḥammad b. Sulaymān. In it he records what he witnessed (*mā shāhada*) in the lands of the Turks, the Khazars, the Rus', the Ṣaqāliba, the Bāshghirds, and other peoples. It includes reports of their customs, stories about their kings, and many other matters pertaining to them.

5. What Do the Linking Passages Tell Us about the Editors' Agenda—and Their Identity?

The first four linking passages are written in the first-person voice, while the fifth is related by an anonymous narrator. LP5 refers to Ibn Faḍlān in the third person and alludes to the common theme of "eyewitness observation" that is also found in its predecessors. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that since it cannot have formed part of the *Kitāb*, it was most likely written by the editors as well. The linking passages convey two important messages to the reader: first, that all four texts are of the same kind or genre and belong together in the book for this reason; and second, that Abū Dulaf and Ibn Faḍlān's texts are both eyewitness reports—in other words, records of direct observations that the authors personally saw and put down in writing.

The claim that the four texts belong together because they all represent the same kind of writing appears in two consecutive statements in LP2. The first refers to Abū Dulaf's *Risāla*s,

---

46. The primary meaning of the verb *kataba* is, of course, to write rather than to transcribe. See Section 6 for a discussion regarding the meaning of the word in this context.

stating: "They deserve to be set down in this book, for they are of the kind [of writing that is in this book]' (*inna ḥaqqahā an ... narsuma[hā] fī hādhā al-kitāb idh kānat min fannihi*). What did the editors mean by this assertion? They claimed that both Abū Dulaf and Ibn Faḍlān were unknown authors who provided new information (*ashyāʾ min akhbār al-buldān lam yudhkar*). The link they make with Ibn al-Faqīh's book appears to lie in the title that they give to the latter, *Kitāb Akhbār al-buldān*. Their claim amounts to the assertion that all three authors convey information about different regions of the world. The editors do not discuss the fact that each of these three shorter texts differs from Ibn al-Faqīh's book in many respects; organization, content and voice (first- versus third-person) being among the most important, let alone the dissimilarity between the geographical work of an erudite writer and the narratives of two travelers.

The editors also underline the fact that the three new texts are all "eyewitness testimonies" of events, phenomena, and peoples that the authors observed directly in the course of their journeys. The key term used to convey the idea of witnessing, in the sense of the author's being present in person when the described event occurred, is *mushāhada*. This is a word that is used in Islamic law to refer to the testimony that a court witness provides to the judge. It appears in all five linking passages, often in combination with a verb referring to the act of seeing or looking at what transpired (*raʾā, naẓara ilā*). The point that is emphasized by the consistent use of *mushāhada/shāhada* is that the authors convey what they actually experienced, thus explicitly ruling out the possibility that they invented what they describe. The assertion of this common characteristic of the three texts implies parity between Abū Dulaf's and Ibn Faḍlān's writings. In Ibn Faḍlān's case, the claim that his text was the fruit of eyewitness observation appears justified, given the accuracy and emotional transparency of his narrative. Although they stress the role of direct observation, the editors also acknowledge at one point that Ibn Faḍlān included information that had been related to him by other parties (see *mā nuqila ilayhi*, the final phrase in LP1). Ibn Faḍlān himself frequently notes information that he heard from his Bulghār hosts and his translators, such as the remarks made to him by the *ghulām* Takīn, who accompanied the mission.[47]

In Abū Dulaf's case, by contrast, the claim to eyewitness observation lacks credibility. Granted, he claims that he has tried to be concise when writing both *Risāla*s in order to avoid prolixity;[48] and the abbreviation of the texts, it might be surmised, could have resulted in the attenuation of the autobiographical voice. Furthermore, much of the botanical, mineralogical, architectural, and historical information he supplies, especially in the second *Risāla*, has the ring of truth and might have been the fruit of his personal knowledge, garnered from the many journeys he took across Iran. But his narrative has none of the immediacy of Ibn Faḍlān's *Kitāb*, since the author's voice is only rarely heard in the first person and, moreover, he often appears to be writing with his tongue firmly in

---

47. For example, Takīn informed Ibn Faḍlān about the giant who lived in Bulghār; see Montgomery, "Mission to the Volga," 232–33).

48. See LP4: "I did not make my account [in the first *Risāla*] long for fear of prolixity. Now I see fit to prepare a shortened version (*tajrīd*) [of the second *Risāla*]."

his cheek, particularly when discussing the Turkish pastoralists whom he encountered at the beginning of the first *Risāla* (see Section 6). The second *Risāla* depicts a journey without a stated purpose; the reader is not informed why the narrator chose the routes that he did, whether he completed the lengthy course in one attempt, or whether his account is a composite of many individual expeditions. In addition, the itineraries followed in both *Risāla*s, especially the first, are wayward and prolonged. Finally, Abū Dulaf's own claim, in linking passages 3 and 4, that he wrote down what he personally observed on his travels is contradicted by the editors' criticisms of his text.

The question is why both Abū Dulaf and the editors were so insistent on the claim of eyewitness testimony in respect of two texts in which it appears to be lacking. While the indulgent reader may chalk Abū Dulaf's own claims of *mushāhada* up to authorial vanity and a desire to be seen for the kind of writer that he clearly was not, the editors' approbation is more difficult to account for. They did, after all, insert critical comments at points where they judged the author to have exaggerated or made things up. The explanation may be that the editors were determined to boost their protégé's credibility and to raise his work to parity with Ibn Faḍlān's more persuasive narrative by claiming that both works were "of the same kind."

Could the editors' decision to append the three unknown texts to Ibn al-Faqīh's well-known book have been simply an imaginative way of bringing the three texts to a wider reading public? Perhaps the editors were really bona fide lovers of good literature (as Abū Dulaf claims they were in LP4) who wished to publicize newly discovered talent. Were their criticisms of Abū Dulaf's *Risāla*s intended as lighthearted rebukes for minor infractions of the high standards of truthfulness that they expected of him? Did they believe, in spite of their criticisms, that Abū Dulaf was a genuine traveler who had accompanied the embassy and recorded all that he saw en route, only to stray into occasional hyperbole when writing up his adventures? If so, one might see the relative infrequency of their criticisms as a tacit acknowledgment of the truthfulness and accuracy of all the passages that they let pass without comment, including Abū Dulaf's descriptions of the Central Asian Turkish tribes at the beginning of the *Risāla*.

An open-minded reading that gives the benefit of the doubt to the editors' sincerity cannot be dismissed out of hand. But it severely strains the reader's credulity. Alternatively, should we assume that they were willing accomplices in Abū Dulaf's hoax, notwithstanding their demonstration of critical rigor? Did they deliberately aid and abet their protégé by identifying just a few minor lapses so as to reassure the reader that the remainder of his text had passed their scrutiny?

If they were indeed figures of literary repute, it is unlikely that they would have connived in this way. The members of the elite to which they allegedly belonged were generally happy to indulge the subversion of norms by their *nudamāʾ* because they enjoyed the entertainment, but they were less likely to have taken a leading role in a literary scam on a *nadīm*'s behalf, which might carry reputational risk. All the more so if, as Kovalevskiĭ suggests, they had not been in touch with their protégé for several years and were no longer part of his immediate cultural milieu. Even if Abū Dulaf did not present the *Risāla*s in the first instance to the Ṣāḥib, as Kovalevskiĭ suggests, but rather to his two Bukharan

patrons, the point about patronal constraint retains its force. The diversions of the *majālis* of eminent men were considered to be private business, enjoyed for the purposes of relaxation among a restricted circle of boon companions. Privileged patrons paid others to fool around and titillate them, but as a rule it was the *nudamāʾ* who cooked up elaborate hoaxes and told off-color jokes to amuse the patron, not vice versa.

If there was only a single mind behind this elaborate literary construction—the muted stropping of Occam's Razor being distinctly audible by this stage of our investigation—the finger of suspicion must fall on the person who stood to gain from its success: Abū Dulaf himself. Could it have been Abū Dulaf who compiled the miscellany and invented the fictive personae of the editors/patrons to boost the reputation of his own texts? His attempt to pass off both the parodic first *Risāla* and the rather more pedestrian second *Risāla* as shining examples of eyewitness reportage constituted a dual assault on the notion of *mushāhada* that was promoted by the linking passages. Given the difficulties of persuading others of the truth of individually observed experiences in far-off corners of the world, such playful nonsense may well have amused the real dedicatee of the miscellany (who could have been the Ṣāḥib or someone of similar stature).[49]

Yet if Abū Dulaf's goal was to promote his own work, why did he go to the trouble of copying out an extended version of Ibn Faqīh's book, or at least half of it, as the foil for his hoax? Perhaps the miscellany's version of the *Buldān* was a gift he offered his patron in expectation of a reward. Since there was probably more than one version of Ibn al-Faqīh's book in circulation in the years after its composition, the presentation of a rare edition of it to a bibliophile would be regarded as a valuable gift.[50] A well-connected poet like Abū Dulaf, who was a friend of the great bibliographer Ibn al-Nadīm[51] and probably had a large network of bookish contacts stretching from Baghdad to Bukhara, must have known where the rare copies of famous books were to be found.

But there is a more significant reason why Abū Dulaf may have selected this particular version of the *Buldān* as the principal text of the miscellany. For at the end of the *Buldān*, there is an anomalous section on the towns of the Turks, which seems quite out of place. It has none of the refinement of Ibn al-Faqīh's style and its tone is sombre and harsh: the author describes the Turks as barbarians who lack all the graces of civilized nations and spend their lives in conflict with one another. The remarkable feature of this section is that although it stands out from the rest of the book to which it belongs, it bears a strong

---

49. See Montgomery, "Travelling Autopsies," 19: "In a society in which authority is generated through, and embodied in, textual sources (or oral versions with comparable status), the problem for the traveller or the empirical scientist is the endowment of experience and experiment with appropriate authority."

50. For recent suggestions that well-known books, such as Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Masālik*, probably existed in multiple versions during the lifetimes of their authors, see the following: J. E. Montgomery, "Serendipity, Resistance and Multivalency: Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik*," in *On Fiction and* Adab *in Medieval Arabic Literature*, ed. P. F. Kennedy (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 177–230; T. Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam: Geography, Translation and the ʿAbbāsid Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017); T. Zadeh, "Of Mummies, Poets and Water Nymphs: Tracing the Codicological Limits of Ibn Khurradādhbih's Geography," in *ʿAbbāsid Studies 4*, ed. M. Bernards, 8–75 (Warminster: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2013).

51. See B. Dodge, trans., *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture 2* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 829–30, for Abū Dulaf's acquaintance with Ibn al-Nadīm.

stylistic resemblance to the first part of Abū Dulaf's first *Risāla*, which follows directly after the *Buldān* in the miscellany. The link between the last pages of Ibn al-Faqīh's *Buldān* and the first *Risāla* appears to have been deliberately signalled in the first of the editorial "linking passages".[52] As already noted, is also precisely at the juncture between these two texts that LP2 includes the enigmatic statement, 'They [i.e., the *Risāla*s] deserve to be set down in this book, for they are of this kind [of writing] (see Section 4). It seems that here, in the resemblance between these two adjacent texts, we may have an explanation for the oblique claim made by the "editors." We turn now to a detailed analysis of the issue.

6. The Section on the Turkish Towns in the *Buldān* and the First Part of Abū Dulaf's First *Risāla*

The remarkable but hitherto little studied section of the *Buldān* in question is entitled "Some of the towns of the Turks and their marvels" (*Dhikr baʿḍ mudun al-atrāk wa-ʿajāʾibihā*).[53] It is located near the very end of the book, in the chapter devoted to the Turks.[54] I will briefly summarize the chapter in which it appears before highlighting the anomalous characteristics that distinguish the section on the Turkish towns. I will then compare this section on the settled Turks in the *Buldān* with Abū Dulaf's description of the pastoralist Turks among whom he traveled on his journey to the court of the "king of China."

The chapter on the Turks opens in a manner typical of Ibn al-Faqīh with several *ḥadīth*s, related by the Prophet and his Companions. These include warnings of the Turks' predicted domination of the world at the end of times. The introduction is followed by a list of Turkish tribes, which includes the Qarluq (*Kharlukh*), the Badhakshiyya, the Ghuzz, the Toghuzghuz, the Kimak (*Kīmāk*), the Pechenegs (*Bāshnākiyya*), and the Shariyya. Of these, the Badhakshiyya is not found in any other sources on the Turks.[55] After the list, the author provides a series of short notes and brief anecdotes in the witty, elegant style of the rest of the *Buldān*. They include a summary of an encounter between an Umayyad envoy and the Turkish king whom the envoy had been sent to convert as well as short notes on an impregnable Turkish town, the fecundity of Turkish ewes, a Turkish ritual for the swearing of oaths, Turkish family culture, and the availability of *khutū* (variously translated as the horn of the rhinoceros, the walrus, or the narwhal) in their lands. These brief and randomly sequenced notices are standard fare for Ibn al-Faqīh. They are followed by two

---

52. The relevant phrase in LP1 is *uḍīfu ilā mā ṣannafahu fī ākhir kitābihi risālatayn* ("I have added two *risāla*s to that which he (Ibn al-Faqīh) composed at the end of his book"). The allusion to the *end* of Ibn al-Faqīh's book is surely a reference to the passage on the Turkish towns, which forms the last section of the *Buldān*. The editor is here, exceptionally, speaking in the first-person singular.

53. See Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, 643–48, and 34–37 for al-Hādī's commentary on the section.

54. For the chapter on the Turks (*Al-qawl fī al-Turk*) see Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, 633–49. The *Mukhtaṣar* has a much-abbreviated version of this chapter that occurs, without a specific heading, in the final couple of pages in the chapter on Khurasan (*Al-qawl fī Khurāsān*); Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar*, 314–30.

55. The "Badhakshiyya" may be a corruption of al-Adhkahiyya, the Ädhgish or Ägdhish/Igdish, noted in several accounts and commented on by Kāshgharī (Professor Peter Golden, personal communication, February 2019).

longer passages, the first a description of Tamīm b. Baḥr *al-muṭṭawwiʿī*'s journey to the Uighur capital[56] and the second a secretary's report on the Samanid ruler Ismāʿīl b. Aḥmad's (d. 295/907) terrifying encounter with Turkish shamans who used a "rainstone" to summon up a storm that threatened to overwhelm his army. The section on the Turkish towns appears next, and it is in turn followed by the final pages of the book, which contain a list of the titles of the Turkish rulers and their neighbors.[57]

The original source of much of the information in Ibn al-Faqīh's chapter on the Turks was Ibn Khurradādhbih's *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*.[58] However, the section on the Turkish towns does not occur in any of the known manuscripts of Ibn al-Khurradādhbih's book. Ibn al-Faqīh reports it on the authority of one Saʿīd b. al-Ḥasan al-Samarqandī.[59] How his account came to be included in the miscellany's version of the *Buldān* is not known, although it is likely that it came from an eastern source.[60] The section stands out for the contrast it provides with the rest of Ibn al-Faqīh's geography. It is syntactically uncomplex, crude, and direct, and it lacks any *ḥadīth* or Qurʾan references. In contrast to the whimsical style that characterizes much of the rest of the *Buldān*, in this section satire and caricature come to the fore. Short sentences and simple grammatical structures are used to describe the Turkish population as irredeemably barbaric and uncultured. Incest, adultery, public sex, a lust for fighting, religious deviancy, and improper treatment of the dead are among the main themes. Lurking behind these lurid tales is the recurrent impression that the author is not reporting factual data on the Turkish town-dwellers but indulging in a measure of black humor: his pointed remarks and glib juxtapositions discourage the reader from taking his report at face value. The description of the second named town in the list serves as a representative example:

> Another of their towns is called *Ḥ.y.w.s.*[61] It is a large town close to al-Shash.[61] Its people follow no religion and are the worst of God's creatures. They conduct raids upon each other, and the stronger kill the weak. A brother is not safe from his brother nor a father from his sons. They eat all kinds of animals. Illicit sexual intercourse is widespread among them. A man might enter the dwelling of another and bed his wife while the

---

56. See V. Minorsky, "Tamīm b. Baḥr's Journey to the Uyghurs," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12, no. 2 (1948): 275–305.

57. Brief references to some of this material on the Turks, including the rainstone and the list of titles, appear in the chapter on Khurasan in the abridged version of Ibn al-Faqīh's book (Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar*, 329).

58. See Ibn Khurradādhbih, *al-Masālik*, 31 and 39–40.

59. Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, 643.

60. See Zadeh, "Of Mummies," 51, who notes that Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* states that Ibn al-Faqīh "ripped off" (*salakha*) al-Jayhānī's geography; see Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, ed. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid, (London: Muʾassasat al-Furqān li-l-Turāth al-Islāmī, 2009), 1:473–74 (= ed. Dodge, 1:337). Could it be that the section on the Turkish towns under discussion here was originally in al-Jayhānī's *Masālik*? Perhaps Saʿīd b. al-Ḥasan was one of al-Jayhānī's informants on the world of the Turks. See Gardīzī's *Zayn al-akhbār*, translated into English by C. E. Bosworth, as *The Ornament of Histories: A History of the Eastern Islamic Lands AD 650–1041; The Persian Text of Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Ḥayy Gardīzī* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018), 57, for the remark that al-Jayhānī got his information from a network of informants who had knowledge of the Eurasian steppelands.

61. Al-Shash is located on the site of modern-day Tashkent.

householder looks on, neither expressing anger nor censuring what he sees. They are not courageous, but they are good-looking: most of their men are effeminate and drink blood. In the middle of their town is a large lake; when one of them dies, he is thrown in the lake.[62]

Of the remaining nine towns (named *D.y*, *S.w.r*, *J.r.y.s.m* [= Jarīsam, Juraysim?], Aghras, Karshīm, *D.k.s*, Kīsāh, Dānī, and *S.k.w.b*), seven are described in similarly negative terms. Aghras and *D.k.s* are treated more favorably, although the religious gullibility of the people of Aghras is described in comic fashion. They are said to have claimed that they worshipped their idols because the latter were sinless and able to intercede on their behalf with their god, and that that their huge idol temple descended, fully formed, straight out of the sky into their town. In general, however, the text portrays the Turks as the sort of mysterious and grotesque figures one might expect to find at the ends of the earth, something like the creatures who lived on the other side of Alexander's wall, which divided the barbarian from the inhabited world.[63]

The ironic tone, the short sentences (perhaps intended to sound like notes written by a weary traveler on the road), and the simple syntax are features of this section. None of the towns bears a name that can be related to any known settlement in the region.[64] As we have noted, the section is remarkable not only for the contrast it forms with the rest of the *Buldān* but also for the similarities it displays with the first part of Abū Dulaf's *Risāla*, which follows it. The final pages of the *Buldān* satirize the settled Turks, just as Abū Dulaf mocks the Turkish tribes among whom he traveled. Yet whereas the Turkish towns in the *Buldān* are described in dark tones, Abū Dulaf inclines toward lighthearted absurdity. In one case, two passages dealing with near-homonymous names (Baghrāj in the *Risāla* and Aghras in the *Buldān*) appear to mirror each other to some degree. The passage on the Baghrāj deserves to be quoted in full:

Then we left [the Jikil] and entered [the territory of] the tribe known as the Baghrāj. They have whiskers but no beards. They make good use of their weapons, both as mounted warriors and as foot soldiers. They have a great ruler (*malik*), of whom is it said that he is an ʿAlid. [It is said that he is] a descendant of Yaḥyā b. Zayd[65] and that he has a golden book on the back of which are poetic verses that elegize Zayd. They worship this book. For them, Zayd is the king (*malik*) of the Arabs and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, is the god (*ilāh*) of the Arabs. They appoint their rulers only from among the progeny of this ʿAlid. When they turn their faces to the sky, they

---

62. Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, 643–44.

63. See al-Ṭabarī's description of the three types of creature among the people of Gog and Magog in his *tafsīr*: E. von Donzel and C. Ott, "Yādjūdj wa-mādjūdj," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill Online, 2012).

64. Al-Hādī identifies the town of *S.k.w.b* as Pskov in western Russia, but the attribution is not persuasive; see Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, 34–37.

65. A descendant of the Prophet and the progenitor of the Zaydī Shīʿī sect, Yaḥyā was a rebel whose fame endured in the Mashriq; see W. Madelung, "Yaḥyā b. Zayd," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill Online, 2012).

open their mouths and gaze upward and say: "The god of the Arabs descends from [the sky] and ascends [to it]." The marvel of the progeny of Zayd whom they make their kings is that they have beards, huge noses, and enormous eyes. Their food is millet and the meat of the ram. There is neither a cow nor a goat in their land. They wear only felts. We traveled among them for a month in fear and dread, and gave them a tenth of everything we had with us...[66]

Abū Dulaf notes that the Baghrāj, whose kings were all of ʿAlid descent, considered ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib the god of the Arabs. They believed, moreover, that the "marvel" (ʿajība) of their kings lay in the fact that the kings were bearded, whereas his subjects had only whiskers, without beards. Like the people of Aghras in the *Buldān*, they claimed direct communication between heaven and earth. Whereas the people of Aghras believed that their idol temple descended from heaven, the Baghrāj had the habit of staring up at the sky, open-mouthed, for they held that ʿAlī descended from the heavens and returned there.

In addition to this direct parallel, there is a pool of common terms and descriptions used for the Turks in both works: some are described as savages (*hamaj*);[67] others conduct raids upon their neighbours;[68] some drink wine; and several follow deviant sexual practices.[69] When read in sequence, the two passages create a bridge, a transitional zone, in which the reader is taken from the discussion of the settled Turks to the pastoralist Turks, so that the *Risāla* forms a complement to the *Buldān*, providing contextual as well as tonal continuity. Were it not for the parodic elements in both texts and correspondences such as those between the passages on the Aghras and the Baghrāj, one might still be inclined to give Abū Dulaf the benefit of the doubt and accept that the record of his experiences in the steppe happened to complement Saʿīd b. al-Ḥasan's observations on the Turkish towns so neatly that he was inspired to place his *Risāla* in the miscellany at this point. But neither text reads like an objective eyewitness report. Given the fact that the *Risāla* must have been written after the *Buldān*, the most plausible explanation is that Abū Dulaf constructed the first part of the *Risāla* in such a way as to allow him to make the claim, as the author of the first two linking passages, that his *Risāla* formed a worthy complement to the *Buldān.* The suggested linkage of the two texts may sound obscure and tenuous to a degree, but this was the kind of literary trickery that Abū Dulaf enjoyed—as we will see from a brief summary of his professional biography.

7. The Professional Biography of Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī

The argument that Abū Dulaf compiled the miscellany as a literary hoax has thus far relied exclusively on textual analysis. But in addition to the evidence of the miscellany

---

66. Sezgin, *Majmūʿa*, 349–50.

67. The inhabitants of *J.r.y.s.m* (Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, 645) and the Bajanāk (Yāqūt, *Muʿjam* 3:441) are described as *hamaj* (savages).

68. Mutual raiding (the same phrase is used in both sources – *yughīru baʿḍuhum ʿalā baʿḍin*) was practised by the inhabitants of *H.y.w.s.* (Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, 643) and the Bajanāk (Yāqūt, *Muʿjam* 3: 441).

69. Sexual deviancy was ascribed to the inhabitants of *H.y.w.s* and *D.k.s* (among other towns) (Ibn al-Faqīh, *Buldān*, 644–645) and to the Jikil and Bajanāk tribes ((Yāqūt, *Muʿjam* 3:441).

itself, we are fortunate in knowing quite a bit about Abū Dulaf's professional biography as a poet, *nadīm*, traveler, and trickster. From these glimpses into his activities at the courts of his real patrons, we are able to reconstruct the outlines of a career in which he sought monetary reward for public performances and other services that he provided for the wealthiest members of the political and scribal elite of Iran.

Abū Dulaf was a notorious itinerant entertainer, with a fondness for playing tricks on his audience and his patrons and a reputation for hyperbole and quackery.[70] He was what might be called a "professional scoundrel," who thrived by delighting, shocking, and exasperating his wealthy patrons with his wit and naughtiness. He moved from one *majlis* to another throughout his long life, bantering, pontificating, and scandalizing wherever he went, and died some time in the second half of the fourth/tenth century.[71] All of his securely identifiable patrons were associated with various Buyid courts in Rayy, Iṣfahān, and Shīrāz. They included the viziers Ibn al-ʿAmīd and al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād, as well as the great Buyid ruler ʿAḍud al-Dawla (d. 371/981).[72] Although we have no direct evidence of his association with the Samanid and Saffarid elites, given his knowledge of the Samanid and Saffarid courts it is probable that he was also a popular figure in the salons of the Mashriq.

Abū Dulaf adopted the persona of a wandering poet, of no fixed abode.[73] His peripatetic existence allowed him to traverse the social boundaries that divided the educated elites from the vast and growing urban "underworld" of the Islamic city. He claimed intimate knowledge of the so-called Banū Sāsān, the urban underclass vividly brought to life by Edmund Bosworth in his dazzling monograph on the "medieval Islamic underworld."[74] These men (and a few women) made their living by indulging in all sorts of deceitful and foul practices involving fraud, impersonation, and self-mutilation, by which means they exploited the good will and charitable inclinations of their fellow citizens. Abū Dulaf contributed to the well-established literary subgenre of *sukhf* (shameless scurrility), in which men of letters delighted in giving detailed descriptions of the horrifying lengths to which tricksters and scoundrels would go in order to make a living. Al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868) devoted a part of his "Book of Misers" (*Kitāb al-bukhalāʾ*) to the story of Khālid b. Yazīd, the leader of the beggars (*mukaddūn*) in Basra, in whose biography the perpetrators of various

---

70. See C. E. Bosworth, *The Medieval Islamic Underworld: The Banū Sāsān in Arabic Society and Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 1:58–60, for the dangerously inept medical advice he offered the vizier Ibn al-ʿAmīd and the vizier's dismissive rejection of his claim to descent from the famous physician Abū Bakr al-Rāzī.

71. See R. Bulliet, "Abū Dolaf al-Yanbūʿī," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online ed., updated 2011. He died in his late eighties, according to al-Thaʿālibī (see Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*, 1:76).

72. See C. Cahen, "Ibn al-ʿAmīd," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.; C. Cahen and C. Pellat, "Ibn ʿAbbād," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.; and especially M. Pomerantz, *Licit Magic: The Life and Letters of al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād (d. 385/995)* (Leiden: Brill, 2018) for an excellent discussion of the literary accomplishments of al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād, which, however, says little about the latter's predilection for the kind of lighthearted banter in which Abū Dulaf specialized. For the reward given him by ʿAḍud al-Dawla for besting an opponent in a humorous exchange of invective, see below.

73. Ibn al-Nadīm calls him a "globe-trotter" (*jawwāla*), probably alluding to his tendency to move from one court to another (or perhaps in ironic reference to his frenetic itineraries in the first *Risāla*?); Minorsky, *Travels in Iran*, 6.

74. Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*.

kinds of hideous and unseemly acts of deception are described. Some years later, the *qāḍī* Abū al-ʿAnbas al-Ṣaymarī (d. 275/888), perhaps taking his cue from al-Jāḥiẓ, wrote several now lost treatises on behaviors regarded as aberrant, including pimping, prostitution, masturbation, and pederasty, that were listed by Ibn al-Nadīm.[75] This zany literary output earned al-Ṣaymarī the posthumous honor of having a *maqāma* written in his name by Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī.[76]

Abū Dulaf's contribution to the field was a long poem, the *Qaṣīda sāsāniyya*, which he wrote for al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād. In it he listed in gory detail the working practices of many different classes of scandalous charlatans, including, for good measure, the reigning caliph, al-Muṭīʿ li-llāh (d. 363/974), whom he portrayed as an impoverished beggar searching for crumbs at the table of his Buyid masters.[77] The poem celebrates the figure of the wandering "beggar lord," voiced in the first person by the poet, who takes on the task of introducing each of the poem's disreputable characters. The poet takes aim at the ostentatiously pious, targeting the claimants to membership of the Prophet's family and the long-bearded *shaykh* in the same breath as the self-mutilating beggar, so that both parties, the allegedly devout and the doggedly salacious, are brought down to the same level.[78] The poem's exposure of licentious indulgence is often taken to an extreme.[79] The *Qaṣīda sāsāniyya* is significant for our purposes by dint of its form as much as by its racy content, because Abū Dulaf inserted within the poem an interlinear gloss, which he used to amplify his scurrilous poem with asides detailing the Banū Sāsān's most repulsive practices and to supply explanations of the *recherché* terms used by them.[80] Like al-Ṣaymarī, Abū Dulaf may have taken his cue from al-Jāḥiẓ, for the "Book of Misers" also displays a keen interest in the explication of the rare and refined terminology used by the book's gallery of rogues. The glossary in Abū Dulaf's poem provides evidence of his taste for intertextual intervention that may be compared with the paratextual framework of the Mashhad miscellany. Both devices, that in the poem and that in the prose work, attest to Abū Dulaf's proclivity for multilayered textual productions, which is also evident in the interjections of his "patrons" in the *Risāla*s and in the fluid notion of authorial personality that characterizes these works.

---

75. Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*, 1:31.

76. Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*, 1:31. For Abū Dulaf's posthumous association with the *maqāma* genre, see Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*, 1:79, citing al-Thaʿālibī's *Yatīmat al-dahr*. Al-Thaʿālibī notes that Badīʿ al-Zamān put some of Abū Dulaf's poetry into the mouth of the protagonist of his *maqāma*, Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī.

77. Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*, 1:76.

78. See, for example, verses 52–53 in Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*, 2:196–97: "And the one who lifts up his voice during the prayers in the mosque, in the mornings and in the afternoon. / And the one who feigns an internal discharge, or who showers the passers-by with his urine, or who farts in the mosque and makes a nuisance of himself, thus wheedling money out of people."

79. See, for example, verses 25–26 in Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*, 2:192: "Our company includes every person avid for copulation, for vulvas and anuses indifferently. / And of our number is every person who masturbates, with a swollen penis, a formidable weapon."

80. See, for example, the gloss to verse 53 in Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*, 2:197: "*Dashshasha* is when he inserts a porridge-like substance into his rectum, taking it as a clyster. He then goes to sleep by the roadside and the substance oozes out of his anus like the wheaten porridge *dashīsha* ..."

Abū Dulaf was probably not the first writer in the classical period to have adopted a fictive identity in the person of the editors of the *Risālas.* Al-Jāḥiẓ himself, whose literary skills Abū Dulaf admired and emulated, may have invented the figure of an anonymous critic whom he addresses at the beginning of the *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān.*[81] He appears to have created this virtual critic as a foil to allow him to show off the merits of his earlier works and to preempt criticism of the *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān.*[82] As for Abū Dulaf, it seems he may even have laid a couple of oblique clues to the true identity of the "editors" in the dedications that he wrote to his two patrons at the beginning of his *Risāla*s. The evidence is tantalizingly thin but worth noting, given Abū Dulaf's demonstrated taste for literary horseplay.[83]

Abū Dulaf lived by his literary accomplishments and performances.[84] Like many *nudamāʾ* who attended the courts of wealthy patrons, he declaimed and wrote prose and poetry in the expectation of financial reward. For an extempore performance in which he reeled off a long list of exotic luxuries from different regions of the world, he received a gift in coin and the sardonic title of *shāhanshāh* from none other than the great Buyid king ʿAḍud al-Dawla.[85] He presented the *Qaṣīda sāsāniyya* to the Ṣāḥib, accompanied by the explanatory gloss to help him understand the more recondite words and phrases employed and to squeeze every last drop of smut and scatological excess from the text, and he obtained a generous reward for his endeavor.[86] It is quite possible that the miscellany was put together by Abū Dulaf for similar reasons—as an elaborate plaything designed to elicit a monetary reward. The miscellany, like the *qaṣīda*, was a rich and complex offering. Ibn al-Faqīh's text, written over half a century earlier and admired throughout the Islamic world, appears in a version that is still today unique and may in Abū Dulaf's time have been a rarity. The three new texts represented a full spectrum of variants within the loose category of eyewitness reportage: from the subversive parody and patent artifice of the *Risāla*s to the precise detail and personal drama of the *Kitāb*, they presented a pleasingly distorting series of perspectives on the fraught nature of the processes of direct eyewitness testimony (*mushāhada*), a theme

---

81. J. E. Montgomery, *Al-Jāḥiẓ: In Praise of Books* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 224–38. In his section on the "Enigma of the Addressee," Montgomery lists eight possible options in relation to the *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, of which the sixth is that "the address may be a rhetorical device, a fictive conceit."

82. G. Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 101–2.

83. First, in LP3, Abū Dulaf praises his patrons, saying they were "craving writing and addicted to composition" (*lahijayni bi-l-taʾlīf mūlaʿayni bi-l-taṣnīf*). Although the context demands that *taṣnīf* be understood as the (result of) composition, i.e., written text(s), the word is normally used to refer to the process of writing a text, that is, the job of the author. Could it be that Abū Dulaf is using this ambiguity to hint at the patrons' composition of the *Risāla*? In the same vein, in LP4, it appears that the two "editors" make a covert admission to being the authors of the second *Risāla*. The admission hangs on the interpretation of the word *katabnāhā* ("we wrote it [the *risāla*]"), which an initial reading would suggest should be read as "we [physically] wrote it [out]," i.e., had it copied into the miscellany, but taken in a literal sense would mean "we authored it."

84. See al-Thaʿālibī's comment that Abū Dulaf liked to keep "his knife well sharpened in begging for gifts"; Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*, 1:76.

85. C. E. Bosworth, *The "Laṭāʾif al-Maʿārif" of Thaʿālibī: The Book of Curious and Entertaining Information* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), 145–46.

86. Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*, 1:76, citing al-Thaʿālibī's *Yatīmat al-dahr*.

insistently promoted by the book's "editors." The identification of the latter as Abū Dulaf himself is the puzzle at the core of book, a puzzle that was surely designed to be solved by an attentive reader. If and when the penny dropped, Abū Dulaf must have hoped that his patron would chuckle at his audacity and throw him a bag of coins.

8. Further Thoughts

Several questions remain to be addressed relating to Abū Dulaf's role as the editor of the miscellany. On the one hand, the above account has largely avoided examination of the intellectual and cultural background of the text, both the literary world at large and the *majālis* of his patrons, particularly al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād. The recent studies of James Montgomery and Travis Zadeh, in particular, raise important issues concerning the emergence of travel accounts in the third–fourth/ninth–tenth centuries that are pertinent to the study of the miscellany and to the literary status, production, and reception of the *Kitāb*.[87]

Recent readings of the *Kitāb* have been strongly influenced by the strident insistence of the editorial linking passages that the text was the fruit of the eyewitness observations of its author. However, if the linking passages were concocted by Abū Dulaf primarily for the purpose of boosting the credibility of his own texts, the reader should be careful to distinguish between what Ibn Faḍlān claimed to have written and what his editor said he had written. The reader is primed by the linking passages to think of Ibn Faḍlān as the paragon of truthful reporting, but although Ibn Faḍlān frequently makes reference to what he saw, he does not fetishize his role as an eyewitness observer as does *The Faber Book of Reportage*, which cites his description of the Rus' chief's funeral as an outstanding example of the medieval reporter's art. We should perhaps allow him his few exaggerations and inventions without trying too hard to excuse him for his perceived shortcomings as a reporter.[88] Since the work's discovery in the miscellany in the early twentieth century, it could be said that the *Kitāb* has been treated more like a modern text than a medieval text. For example, the comparative accounts to which Montgomery has referred in an effort to elucidate the mysteries of the *Kitāb* include several dating to the period of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European colonialism, the circumstances of which were a far cry from the early Islamic exploration of the Eurasian steppelands.[89] Both the *Kitāb* and the *Risāla*s should, as far as possible, be restored to their original context by returning them to their

---

87. In addition to the works listed in the bibliography, see also J. E. Montgomery's "Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2000): 1–25.

88. See Montgomery's perceptive comments on John Carey's definition of "good reportage" apropos of his inclusion of Ibn Faḍlān's description of the Rus' chief's funeral in *The Faber Book of Reportage*: J. E. Montgomery, "Pyrrhic Scepticism and the Conquest of Disorder: Prolegomenon to the Study of Ibn Faḍlān," in *Problems in Arabic Literature*, ed. M. Maroth, 43–89 (Piliscsaba: Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2004), 44–51.

89. For example, taking his cue from G. Obeyesekere's 1998 study of accounts of Fijian cannibalism, Montgomery suggests that the Bulghār and the Rus' may have exaggerated the terrors of the Northern lights and the funerary customs of the Rus', respectively, in an attempt to intimidate their Muslim visitors ("Pyrrhic Scepticism," 72–73). This interpretation could arguably be said to reflect a notion of bilateral colonial-era relations that had no parallel in fourth/tenth-century Eurasian steppelands. The topic merits further discussion.

proper place as component elements of Abū Dulaf's *majmūʿa*. It would also be worthwhile to reconsider the reception of all three texts by Yāqūt, the first author who cited them extensively, and to gauge how far his interpretation of both texts, as well as that of later writers, was affected by the editorial commentary.[90]

A second set of questions relates to the nature and purpose of the mission to Bulghār, long considered an "Abbasid" embassy. Various unresolved anomalies in the story of the mission remain, principally its extraordinary failure to achieve its most important task—the delivery of the promised funds to the king of Bulghār. The case for seeing the mission not as an official caliphal enterprise but as a private project undertaken by a band of entrepreneurs who wished to use their status as caliphal envoys to challenge Samanid/Khwarazmian authority over the Bulghār was first laid out by the Khwārazmshāh when he met Ibn Faḍlān and his fellow emissaries in his capital city.[91] The Khwarazmian ruler identified Takīn the *ghulām*, Ibn Faḍlān's interpreter, as the main plotter. Indeed, Takīn's blithe confidence in recommending that the mission push on to Bulghār in spite of the lack of funds suggests that he was determined to complete the journey, come what may, because to abandon the mission would have fatally undermined his scheme.[92] The idea deserves closer scrutiny than it has received until now. If there were any substance to it, one would have to ask what the extent of Ibn Faḍlān's involvement in the plot was. The answer to this question must surely be that even if he was not complicit, he probably knew about it from the start and accepted his appointment to the embassy in the knowledge that he was joining a dubious enterprise. His compromised position most likely had a material effect on why, how, and where he produced the *Kitāb*, which in turn may have been a significant factor in its inclusion in the miscellany.[93]

Finally, much remains to be explored in relation to Abū Dulaf and his place in the classical Arabic literary canon. The *Risāla*s merit closer attention than it has been possible to give them here. Furthermore, Abū Dulaf's role as a literary hoaxer of the first order gives pause to think again about Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī's remark that he put some of Abū Dulaf's material into the mouth of his own protagonists in one of his *maqāma*s.[94] The proposition that he was the compiler and editor of the miscellany strengthens the case that he prefigured the heroes of the *maqāma* not only in his lifestyle but also in his literary production. Many of the elements for which the classical *maqāma* is well known are reflected in Abū Dulaf's editorial role, as well as his extant poetry and prose. The itinerant hero who is also a trickster, the penchant for picaresque humor, the fictionalization of reality, the episodicity

---

90. These themes will be pursued in W. L. Treadwell, "Ibn Faḍlān and the Mashhad Miscellany."

91. Montgomery, "Mission to the Volga," 194–97.

92. For Takīn's extraordinary indifference to the perceived danger of arriving penniless in Bulghār, see Montgomery, "Mission to the Volga," 198–99: "I [Ibn Faḍlān] said to them [Takīn and Bārs] ...– 'You will be at the court of a non-Arab king, and he will demand that you pay this sum.' 'Don't worry about it,' they replied, 'he will not ask us for them [the coins].' "He will demand that you produce them. I know it,' I warned. But they paid no heed."

93. See W. L. Treadwell, "The 'Abbasid' Mission to the Bulghār Court (309–310/921–922) Reconsidered," (forthcoming).

94. Bosworth, *Islamic Underworld*, 1:79.

of the constituent stories that make up the whole: these are all present in Abū Dulaf's works as well.[95] Fiction as a staple element of classical Arabic literature is said to have arrived only with the development of the early *maqāma*. Abū Dulaf seems to have played an important role in anticipating this process by embodying and elaborating the character of the roguish narrator before it secured universal recognition in the *maqāma* genre.

Figure 1: The first folio of the Mashhad manuscript (missing in Sezgin's facsimile edition), which opens with 'Linking passage no. 1' (by permission of the Prussian State Library, Berlin).

---

95. The only element missing from Abū Dulaf's work is the use of *sajʿ*. For the characteristics of the *maqāma*, see J. Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqāma: A History of a Genre* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002); C. Brockelmann and C. Pellat, "Maḳāma," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.

Bibliography

Blair, Sheila. *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana.* Leiden: Brill, 1991.

Bosworth, C. E. *The "Laṭāʾif al-Maʿārif" of Thaʿālibī: The Book of Curious and Entertaining Information.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968.

———. *The Medieval Islamic Underworld: The Banū Sāsān in Arabic Society and Literature.* 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1976.

———. *The Ornament of Histories: A History of the Eastern Islamic Lands AD 650–1041; The Persian Text of Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Ḥayy Gardīzī.* London: I. B. Tauris, 2018.

Brockelmann, C., and C. Pellat. "Maḳāma." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition. Leiden: Brill Online, 2012.

Bulgakov, P. G. *Vtoraya zapiska Abu Dulafa.* Moscow: Izdatelstvo Vostochnoĭ Literatury, 1960.

Bulliet, R. "Abū Dolaf al-Yanbūʿī." In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online ed. Updated 2011.

Cahen, C., "Ibn al-ʿAmīd". In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill Online, 2012.

Cahen, C., and C. Pellat. "Ibn ʿAbbād." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill Online, 2012.

Carey, J., ed. *The Faber Book of Reportage.* London: Faber, 1989.

Dodge, B., trans. *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*: *A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, 2 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1970.

Donzel, E. von, and C. Ott. "Yādjūdj wa-mādjūdj." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill Online, 2012.

Ducène, J.-C. *L'Europe et les géographes arabes du Moyen Âge.* Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2017.

Hämeen-Anttila, J. *Maqāma: A History of a Genre.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002.

Ibn al-Faqīh. *Kitāb al-Buldān.* 2nd ed. Edited by Y. al-Hādī. Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 2009.

———. *Mukhtaṣar kitāb al-Buldān.* Edited by M. J. de Goeje. Leiden: Brill, 1885.

Ibn Khurradādhbih. *Al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik.* Edited by M. de Goeje. Leiden: Brill, 1892.

Ibn al-Nadīm. *Kitāb al-Fihrist.* Edited by Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid. London: Muʾassasat al-Furqān li-l-Turāth al-Islāmī, 2009.

Kahle, P. "Islamische Quellen zum chinesischen Porzellan." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, n.s., 13 [88] (1934): 1–45.

Khalidov, A. B. "Ebn al-Faqīh, Abū Bakr Aḥmad." In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online ed. Updated 2011.

Kovalevskiĭ, A. P. *Kniga Akhmeda ibn-Faḍlāna o ego puteshestvii na Volgu v. 921–922 gg. (stat'i, perevody i kommentarii).* Kharkov: Izdatelstvo Gos. Universiteta im. A.M. Gori'kogo, 1956.

Krachkovskiĭ, I. Yu. *Puteshestvie Ibn-Faḍlāna na Volgu (perevod i kommentariĭ.* Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1939.

———. "Vtoraya zapiska Abū Dulafa v geograficheskom slovare Iāḵūta (Azerbaĭzhan, Armeniya, Iran)." *Izvestiia Akademii Nauk Azerbaizhanskoi SSR* 8 (1949): 65–77. Reprinted in *Izbrannye sochineniia*, edited by V. I. Beliaev and G. V. Tsereteli, 6 vols., 1:280–92. Moscow: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1955.

Madelung, W. "Yaḥyā b. Zayd." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill Online, 2012.

Massé, H., trans. *Abrégé du livre du pays.* Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1973.

Minorsky, V. *Abū Dulaf Miṣʿar ibn Muhalhil's Travels in Iran (circa A.D. 950).* Cairo: Cairo University Press, 1955.

———. "La deuxième *risāla* d'Abū-Dulaf." *Oriens* 5, no. 1 (1952): 23–27.

———. "Tamīm b. Baḥr's Journey to the Uyghurs." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12, no. 2 (1948): 275–305.

Miquel, A. *La géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu'au milieu du 11e siècle.* 3 vols. Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2001.

Montgomery, J. E. *Al-Jāḥiẓ: In Praise of Books.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

———. "Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah." *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2000): 1–25.

———. "Mission to the Volga." In *Two Arabic Travel Books*, edited by P. F. Kennedy and S. M. Toorawa. New York: New York University Press, 2014.

———. "Pyrrhic Scepticism and the Conquest of Disorder: Prolegomenon to the Study of Ibn Faḍlān." In *Problems in Arabic Literature*, edited by M. Maroth, 43–89. Piliscsaba: Avicenna Institute of Middle East Studies, 2004.

———. "Serendipity, Resistance and Multivalency: Ibn Khurradādhbih's *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik*." In *On Fiction and* Adab *in Medieval Arabic Literature*, edited by P. F. Kennedy, 177–230. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005.

———. "Travelling Autopsies: Ibn Faḍlān and the Bulghār." *Middle Eastern Literatures* 7, no. 1 (2004): 3–32.

———. "Where Is the Real Ibn Faḍlān?" In *Muslims on the Volga: Diplomacy and Islam in the Age of Ibn Faḍlān*, edited by J. Shepard and W. L. Treadwell. London: I. B. Tauris, forthcoming in 2021.

Pomerantz, M. *Licit Magic: The Life and Letters of al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād (d. 385/995)*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Ritter, H. "Zum Text von Ibn Faḍlān's *Reisebericht*." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 96 (1942): 98–126.

Rohr-Sauer, A. von. *Des Abū Dulaf Bericht über seine Reise nach Turkestān, China und Indien: Neu übersetzt und untersucht*. Bonn: Bonner Universitäts Buchdruckerei, 1939.

Schoeler, G. *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

Sezgin, F., et al. eds., *Majmūʿa fī al-jughrāfiyya: Mimmā allafahu Ibn al-Faqīh wa-Ibn Faḍlān wa-Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī*. Frankfurt: Maʿhad Taʾrīkh al-ʿUlūm al-ʿArabiyya wa-l-Islāmiyya, 1987.

Shepard, J., and W. L. Treadwell, eds., *Muslims on the Volga: Diplomacy and Islam in the World of Ibn Faḍlān*. London: I. B. Tauris, forthcoming in 2021.

Togan, Z. V. *Ibn Faḍlān's Reisebericht*. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1939.

Torgoev, A. I., ed. *Puteshestvie Ibn Faḍlāna: Volzhskiĭ putʼ ot Bagdada do Bulgara*. Moscow: Dom Mardzhani, 2016.

Treadwell, W. L. "The 'ʿAbbasid' Mission to the Bulghār Court (309–310/921–922) Reconsidered." Forthcoming.

———. *A History of the Sāmānids: The First Islamic Dynasty of Central Asia*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming in 2021.

———. "Ibn Faḍlān and the Mashhad Miscellany." Forthcoming.

Validov (Togan), A. Z. "Meshkhedskaya rukopisʼ Ibni-lʼ-Fakikha." *Izvestiia Rossiĭkoĭ Akademii Nauk* (1924): 237–48.

Yāqūt. *Muʿjam al-buldān*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.

Zadeh, T. *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam: Geography, Translation and the ʿAbbasid Empire*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2017.

———. 'Of Mummies, Poets and Water Nymphs: Tracing the Codicological Limits of Ibn Khurradādhbih's Geography. In *ʿAbbāsid Studies 4*, edited by M. Bernards, 8–75. Warminster: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2013.

A Call to Arms:
An Account of Ayyubid or Early Mamluk Alexandria*

Jelle Bruning

Leiden University

(j.bruning@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

Abstract

This article offers an edition, translation, and study of a hitherto unknown text about Ayyubid or early Mamluk Alexandria. The author, one Abū Khuzayma Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, gives a short yet rich description of the city based as much on Alexandria's real cityscape as on legends. The text treats famous monuments, such as the city's lighthouse and the Column of the Pillars, as well as less well-known buildings, such as mosques, colleges, watchtowers, and gates. An analysis of the account leads to the conclusion that its author wrote the account in order to mobilize Muslims for the defense of the city against Frankish or Byzantine attacks on Alexandria or Egypt's Mediterranean coast in general.

Introduction

When he arrived in Alexandria on Dhū al-Qaʿda 29, 578/March 26, 1183, and had passed through the city's chaotic customs, the well-known traveler Ibn Jubayr gazed at the city's architecture. Never had he seen, he notes in his travelogue, "a city with broader streets and higher buildings, more ancient and more densely populated" than Alexandria.[1] He also marveled at ancient monuments and well-known characteristics of the city's architecture, such as the famous lighthouse, the presence of cisterns, and the abundant use of marble. But what struck him most were "the colleges and watchtowers" built for those who traveled to Alexandria in pursuit of knowledge or a pious lifestyle. Each of these visitors, he writes, "will find a house to live in, a college to learn the art he wishes to learn, and an allowance

---

* I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on an earlier version of this article. Remaining mistakes are, of course, my own.

1. Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥlat Ibn Jubayr* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 13–14.

that enables him to sustain himself."[2] He credits Egypt's sultan, Saladin (r. 567–89/1171–93), with this concern for the wellbeing of "those foreigners who have come from remote places"[3] and thus illustrates Saladin's great interest in the city's defensive and religious architecture.[4]

One foreigner who claims to have had first-hand experience with this system is an otherwise unknown man from Khurāsān named Abū Khuzayma Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. He reports having visited Alexandria in the second half of the sixth/twelfth century in order to practice *ribāṭ*, pious defensive warfare.[5] A short account of his stay in Alexandria has been preserved in a number of manuscripts, in which it appears after a late fourth/tenth-century book on the city's religious virtues, Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's *Faḍāʾil al-Iskandariyya*.[6] Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's account offers a rich description of Alexandria and often complements information found in Ayyubid or early Mamluk descriptions of the city, such as those by Benjamin of Tudela (wr. ca. 565/1170), Ibn Jumayʿ (d. 594/1198), al-ʿAbdarī (fl. late seventh/thirteenth century), and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 770/1368–69 or 779/1377), or in documents preserved in the Cairo Genizah.[7] As we shall see, it also offers a unique window onto localized reactions to foreign attacks on Egypt's Mediterranean coast in this period. This article presents an edition and translation of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's account together with an analysis of its contents.

The account is not a straightforward text about Alexandria. Some toponyms or names of buildings are garbled; the name and patronymic of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's son, who transmitted the text (see para. 2), have been reversed;[8] the order of the paragraphs is not

---

2. Ibid., 15.

3. Ibid., 15–17.

4. See Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Topographie d'Alexandrie médiévale," in *Alexandrie médiévale 2*, ed. Christian Décobert, 113–26 (Cairo: IFAO, 2002), 116–18.

5. Admittedly, this is a very loose rendering of the term *ribāṭ*. In the period under consideration, *ribāṭ* referred to a form of religious activism that usually involved asceticism and defending the frontiers of the Realm of Islam. At the same time, the term referred to a place (not a specific type of edifice) where those who practiced *ribāṭ* (*murābiṭūn*) lived. Good discussions of the term, taking into account historical developments and geographical diversity, are Christophe Picard and Antoine Borrut, "*Rābata*, *ribāt*, *rābita*: Une institution à reconsidérer," in *Chrétiens et musulmans en Méditerranée médiévale (VIIIe–XIIIe siècle): Échanges et contacts*, ed. Nicolas Prouteau and Philippe Sénac, 33–65 (Poitiers: Université de Poitiers, Centre d'Études Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale, 2003), and *EI*[2], s.v. "Ribāṭ."

6. I am currently preparing an edition of this book.

7. Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, ed. and trans. Marcus N. Adler (London: Henry Frowde/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), 74–77; Ibn Jumayʿ, *Ṭabʿ al-Iskandariyya*, ed. Murayzin S. ʿAsīrī and Saʿd ʿA. al-Bushrī (Mecca: Markaz al-Buḥūth wa-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1997), passim; al-ʿAbdarī, *al-Riḥla al-maghribiyya*, ed. Saʿd Bū Falāqa (Bona [ʿAnāba], Algeria: Manshūrāt Būna li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt, 1428/2007), 139–48; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat al-nuzzār fī gharāʾib al-amṣār wa-ʿajāʾib al-asfār*, ed. ʿAbd al-Hādī al-Tāzī (Rabat: Akādīmiyyat al-Mamlaka al-Maghribiyya, 1417/1997), 1:179–92. See Miriam Frenkel, "Medieval Alexandria: Life in a Port City," *Al-Masāq* 26, no. 1 (2014): 5–35 for a good overview of the information some of these authors and Genizah documents present.

8. The account calls the son "Muḥammad b. Khuzayma" (para. 2) instead of Khuzayma b. Muḥammad. Perhaps a copyist confused the son with Muḥammad (b. Isḥāq) Ibn Khuzayma (d. 311/924), a prominent traditionist from Khurāsān known to have visited Egypt. For the traditionist, see *EI*[3], s.v. "Ibn Khuzayma."

entirely logical; and at times, the text is vague, cryptic, or even self-contradictory. What is more, whereas the author presents the text as an eyewitness account of Ayyubid Alexandria, using his alleged rounds through the city with Alexandria's garrison as a literary frame in order to give the text authority,[9] some passages are clearly based on legends surrounding the city's ancient monuments.

An analysis of the account's contents, offered below, shows that the text should be read not as a personal history but rather as a highly stylized call for the defense of Alexandria against non-Muslim attacks. After a short opening paragraph that refers to one of the merits of *ribāṭ* performance in general, the account starts by praising Alexandria's defenses and Islamic virtues (paras. 2–5). The text then describes the recent destruction of part of this praiseworthy city's architecture at the hands of one Uhrayqil (paras. 6–9), whom I identify as representing Islam's apocalyptic archenemy. Paragraph 8 combines these themes: it includes information about the malicious activity of Uhrayqil but also mentions some of the city's noteworthy Islamic institutions. Together, these themes emphasize the present need to defend Alexandria. At the end of the account (para. 10), the author brings his text's two themes together and reminds the reader of the ease and spiritual benefits of *ribāṭ* performance in Alexandria.

Text and Translation

At present, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's account is known to exist in the following three manuscripts, here preceded with the sigla used throughout this article:

A1 = Maktabat al-Azhar (Cairo), inv. Khuṣūṣa 1374/ʿUmūma 42050 Ādāb wa-faḍāʾil, Jawharī. The text is found on folios 21r–25v. The date and place of the manuscript's production and the name of the copyist are unknown. Folio 1r contains a *waqf* statement written in a different hand and dated Dhū al-Qaʿda 17, 1176/May 30, 1763.

A2 = Maktabat al-Azhar, inv. Khuṣūṣa 1923/ʿUmūma 54924 Ādāb wa-faḍāʾil. This is a modern copy of manuscript A1 dated Rabīʿ I 1367/January 1948. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's text appears on folios 29r–36r. In a few instances, the text of this manuscript differs from that of manuscript A1. A transcription of this manuscript (with misread passages) circulates on the internet and has been entered into the online text database *al-Maktaba al-shāmila al-ḥadītha*.[10]

St = Staatsbibliothek (Berlin), inv. Sprenger 197, folios 17r–20v. This is an almost fully vocalized manuscript. The date and place of its production as well as the name of its copyist are unknown. A transcription of this manuscript with some differences in the text and its vocalization has been entered into *al-Maktaba al-shāmila al-ḥadītha*.[11]

---

9. For this literary strategy, see Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2–3, 62–70.

10. See https://al-maktaba.org/book/11797; the account starts at the bottom of page 22 of the transcription.

11. See https://al-maktaba.org/book/30242; the account starts on page 66 of the transcription.

In all three manuscripts, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's account follows Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's *Faḍāʾil al-Iskandariyya*. A fourth manuscript originally also contained the text after Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's work: Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya (Cairo), inv. 1485 Taʾrīkh Taymūr. Some time after 1974, pages 23 to 38 of this manuscript got detached from the codex and were subsequently lost.[12] Today, this manuscript ends halfway through Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's text. Fortunately, traces of the writing on page 38 can still be seen on the manuscript's very last page (39), which has been glued to a new flyleaf and, for that reason, stuck to the cover when the other pages broke off. On that last page, traces of the following words are legible:

المعروفة با[ه]ر [ي]قل	(lines 2–3)
دَوِّر الم[را]ة	(line 5, with vocalization)
ا[لم]دين]ة اعلم الخا[ز]ند[ار	(lines 5–6)
وكذ[ا نتفرج على	(lines 7–8)
لل[خ]ير [ف]اعلين	(line 9).

These words belong unmistakably to the end of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's text; compare with paragraphs 9 and 10 of the edition below.

The copies of the text preserved in manuscripts A1, A2, and St regularly exhibit features of Middle Arabic. For example, the rules of Classical Arabic regarding the concord between numerals and counted nouns are not always followed:

خمسة وعشرين صلاة	(para. 1, only in manuscripts A1 and St, corrected in A2)
اثني عشر ألف محراب	(para. 5)
سبع محارس	(para. 8)
سبع عقود	(para. 9)
سبع وعشرون ذراعًا	(para. 9).[13]

The manuscripts also frequently exhibit a lack of concord between a noun and a resumptive pronoun:

عامودان مربعان ... مصور عليها أرهاط ... طول كل عامود منها سبعون ذراعًا	
	(para. 5, only in manuscripts A1 and A2)[14]
حوض ... منقوش عليها شخوص	(para. 6)
والباب الغربي ... ذكر أن بها ... ألف وأربعمائة شهيد	(para. 8)
الزلط الأسود ... يرصدها	(para. 8)
مركب ... بها مائة صبط	(para. 8).[15]

---

12. An unpublished typescript catalog entitled *Qāʾima bi-ḥaṣr al-makhṭūṭāt al-ʿarabiyya bi-Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya*, dated March 1974 and available in the Dār al-Kutub, still states (20:1744) that the manuscript has thirty-eight written pages.

13. Joshua Blau, *A Grammar of Christian Arabic Based Mainly on South-Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium* (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1966–67), 2:366 and 369.

14. For *-hā* referring to duals, see ibid., 1:214.

15. See also the unclear reference in لكل باب منهم ثلاثة لوالب (para. 9).

Once, *-humā* denotes the plural: رماة ... يرمي أحدهما على سبعة أميال (para. 8).[16] Plurals designating humans sometimes accompany a verb in the feminine singular:

تشيله البوابين	(para. 1)
فحملتني الخدام	(para. 3)
حطابون تكتب على الفتاوى	(para. 8)
رماة ترمي بالقسي	(para. 8).[17]

The *nūn* of the plural ending of the imperfect indicative is dropped twice: وفي كل يوم يفعلوا بأمير كذا (para. 4, only in manuscript St) and ويكثروا الصراخ (para. 6).[18] In the first paragraph, the *nūn* is preserved in the construct state of the dual: بألفين صلاة.[19] In manuscript A1, the ending *-īna* of the sound masculine plural once replaces *-ūna* in the nominative: تشيله البوابين (para. 1).[20] The use of participles is frequently unidiomatic: *bi-* instead of *fī* in بالمحرم (para. 2, only in manuscripts A1 and A2) and تأتي مركب ... للمدينة (para. 8);[22] *li-* instead of *ilā* in إن بالحوض ذخيرة (para. 5);[21] *bi-* and *fī* instead of *li-* in قلة الملك ... بها باب and وفي كل ولي وظيفة (both para. 5); *min* used to express possession instead of annexation via the construct state in الباب الشرقي منها, "its eastern gate" (para. 2).[23] In paragraph 4, *wa-lā* continues a positive sentence and negates a verb in the perfect: خرجنا ولا زلنا بالمدينة دائرين.[24] Once a definite word is written without an article: باب الأخضر الكبير (para. 8; cf. manuscript St).[25] In what is perhaps more a stylistic feature,[26] the text also regularly isolates the natural subject, especially after the word *kull*; e.g., وكل خراج يأتي إلى الملك يأمر بصرف ثلثه (para. 5).

Interestingly, manuscript St sometimes exhibits features of Middle Arabic where manuscripts A1 and A2 do not. Especially noteworthy is the spelling of the following two words, which disagrees with the rules of Classical Arabic and suggests that colloquial Arabic influenced this copy of the text in the course of its transmission: فرديت instead of فرددت (para. 3) and وتضضيفه instead of وتنظيفه (para. 8).[27] Manuscript St also has الصور instead of السور in paragraph 5. The spelling of this word is possibly corrected in manuscripts A1 and A2 because all manuscripts spell *al-sūr* with a *ṣād* in paragraph 8.[28] Further, manuscript St writes فنظنوا in scriptio plena (para. 8) instead of فنظن. In manuscript St, too, a *tanwīn*

---

16. Blau, *Grammar*, 1:134–35.

17. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, s.v. "Middle Arabic" (pp. 221–22).

18. Blau, *Grammar*, 2:259–60, 268–69.

19. Ibid., 1:222–23.

20. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, s.v. "Middle Arabic" (p. 220).

21. Blau, *Grammar*, 1:242.

22. Ibid., 1:251.

23. Ibid., 2:423.

24. Ibid., 2:302–3.

25. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, s.v. "Middle Arabic" (p. 220).

26. For isolation of the natural subject in Classical Arabic, see the references in Blau, *Grammar*, 3:471, n. 5.

27. Ibid., 1:113–14.

28. Ibid., 1:111–12.

alif twice marks a circumstantial clause: فإذا أنا بخندق ملآنًا بالماء and بابه صغير مصفحًا (both in para. 2).[29] In disagreement with Classical Arabic, manuscript St has the tendency to privilege indefinite singular nouns in the accusative after numerals: مائة دينارًا (para. 3) and ثمانية آلاف ميلًا (para. 9).[30] Once, manuscript St preserves the *nūn* of the plural ending in the construct state: لبوابين المدينة (para. 3).[31]

In deference to the manuscript copies of the text, such features of Middle Arabic have been left unchanged in the edition below. Manuscript A1 forms the base text of the edition. In case of an evident copyist mistake (such as the accidental omission of a word, a spelling mistake, or a dittography), I have privileged manuscripts A2 and/or St. The apparatus indicates variant readings in the manuscripts and when a manuscript other than A1 has been given preference in the edition. I have divided the text into paragraphs in order to facilitate referencing and added some punctuation for ease of reading.

Edition

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد[32]

Fol.	A1 21r / A2 29r / St 17r

[1¶] دل الحديث الصحيح بمفهومه[33] أن صلاة المرابط ببلد الرباط بألفين صلاة وخمسة[34] وعشرين صلاة.

[2¶] وعن محمد بن خزيمة عن أبيه أنه قال: سمعت ذلك فقصدتُ المرابطة بالمحرم بالإسكندرية[35] من شهور سنة ستين وخمسمائة في زمن [A2 29v] ولاية السيد أيوب الكردي رحمه الله[36]، فأتيت إليها فنظرت بياضها لامعًا رأيته من أربعة وعشرين[37] ميلًا عند الصباح، فلما وصلت المدينة وجدت الباب الشرقي منها مفتوحًا بابه صغير مصفح[38] بالحديد يصعد المدينة[39] منه بقنطرة من خشب وعند آخر النهار تشيله البوابين[40] بالآلات[41]،

---

29. Ibid., 2:332–33.

30. Ibid., 2:377.

31. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, s.v. "Middle Arabic" (p. 220).

32. Instead of وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد, St has وصلى الله على سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه وسلم .

33. St: بمفهوم

34. A2: وخمس

35. Instead of بالمحرم بالإسكندرية, St has بالإسكندرية في محرم الحرام .

36. رحمه الله St: Om.

37. St: عشر

38. St: مصفحًا

39. St: للمدينة

40. A2 and St: البوابون

41. St: بالآلة

فطلبت الدخول للمدينة فمنعت ⌈St 17v⌉ من ذلك إلى ثلاثة أيام، فإذا أنا⁴² بخندق ملآن⁴³ بالماء محيط بالمدينة عرضه عشرة أذرع وبه صيادون يصطادون ⌈A1 21v⌉ السمك.

[3¶] فقلت للبوابين بالمدينة⁴⁴: أريد الدخول، فقال كبيرهم: ألا⁴⁵ نستشير الملك؟ فاستشاروا وقالوا لي: ما تريد بالدخول؟ فقلت: أريد المرابطة بها، فحملوني إلى الملك⁴⁶ وأوقفت⁴⁷ بين يديه فإذا هو رجل كبير السن ⌈A2 30r⌉ فسلمت عليه فرد علي السلام وقال لي: ما اسمك؟ فقلت: محمد بن عبد الوهاب، فقال: وما كنيتك؟ فقلت: أبو خزيمة، فقال⁴⁸: وما هي بلدك؟ فقلت: خراسان، فقال: في أي شيء جئت؟ فقلت: أيها الملك المهاب سمعت أن كل من رابط بالإسكندرية له من الأجر كذا وكذا فطلبت المرابطة بها، فتركني واقفًا وبيده قرطاس وسألني ثانيًا فرددت⁴⁹ عليه ذلك وسألني⁵⁰ ثالثًا فرددت⁵¹ عليه ذلك فناداني رابعًا أزعجني بصوته وقال لي: تريد المرابطة؟ قلت⁵²: نعم، فحملتني الخدام إلى محل فيه فرش⁵³ ورتب لي طعامًا وشرابًا مثل العسكر⁵⁴ ⌈ ولا زالوا يمثلوني بين يدي الملك ثلاثة⁵⁵ أيام ويسألوني⁵⁶ كل⁵⁷ يوم أربع مرات فنرد عليه مقالتي الأولى ثم بعد ذلك قال ⌈A1 22r⌉ لي: أتريد⁵⁸ المرابطة؟ ⌈St 18r⌉ فقلت له: نعم، فقال لي⁵⁹: إن بالمدينة ثلاثمائة وستون⁶⁰ أميرًا تحت يد كل أمير ثلاثمائة وستون نفرًا

---

42. Om. St.

43. St: ملآنًا

44. Instead of للبوابين بالمدينة, St has المدينة بالبوابين.

45. St: إلى أن

46. A1 and A2 lack the words: ما تريد بالدخول؟ فقلت: أريد المرابطة بها، فحملوني إلى الملك. This is possibly a homoioteleuton: the last word before the omission, الملك, is the last of the omitted words, too. The words have been copied from St.

47. The copyist of manuscript St left this word unvocalized.

48. St: فقال لي

49. St: فرديت

50. St: فتركني وسألني

51. St: فرديت

52. St: فقلت

53. St: فراش

54. St: عساكر الملك

55. St: ثلاث

56. St: ويسألني

57. St: في كل

58. St: تريد

59. Om. St.

60. St: وستين

وكل أمير له يوم وليلة يحرس حول المدينة، فسأل عن أمير النوبة فأحضر بين يديه فسلمني إليه فكتبني في

دفتر ⁶¹ وسلمني فرسًا⁶² تساوي في ثمنها مائة دينار ⁶³ وسيفًا هنديًا ورمحًا خطيًا.

[¶4] فلما أن صلى الأمير العصر جهز ⁶⁴ الخيل وشد ⁶⁵ الرحال⁶⁶ وسلاحاتها وأسنتها وخرجنا من عند باب

الملك لابسين الزرد والخوذ وآلة الحرب ⌐A2 31r⌐ وكتبة يكتبون في العساكر ⁶⁷ كل أحد باسمه إلى أن⁶⁸ كتبوا ثلاثمائة

وستين رجلًا كلهم راكبون الخيول، فخرجنا ولا زلنا بالمدينة دائرين إلى الصباح، فضُرِبَت طشطخانة الملك فدخلنا

فنقدونا وكتبونا ثانيًا⁶⁹، وفي كل يوم يفعلون بكل أمير ⁷⁰ كذا على عدد أيام السنة، فكان يخص كل أمير في السنة

نوبة واحدة.

[¶5] وكنا نزور الأولياء ونتعاهد المساجد⁷¹ فرأيت بها ثمانمائة مسجدًا⁷² محرابًا، وذكر لنا أنه كان ⌐A1 22v⌐ بالمدينة

اثني عشر ألف محراب وبها مائة وتسعون خطبة وفي كل ولي وظيفة في يوم معين، وأزقة المدينة مفروشة

بالرخام الهيصمي عالية البناء ⌐A2 31v / St 18v⌐ شديدة البياض لا تبطل العمارة من أسوارها على الدوام، وكل خراج يأتي

إلى الملك يأمر بصرف ثلثه في عمارة السور ⁷³، بها ثلاثمائة وستون قلة مبيضة مرسومة بماء الذهب باسم

الملك وكل وزير للملك قلته مبيضة بالزلط الهيصمي⁷⁴، وكانت قلة الملك في الجانب البحري وبها باب⁷⁵ يفتح

شرقيًا وآخر قبليًا وعلى الباب القبلي عامودان مربعان⁷⁶ من الزلط الأحمر مصور عليها⁷⁷ أرهاط وشخوص

---

61. St: دفتره

62. A2: ترسا

63. St: دينارًا

64. St: جهزت

65. St: شدت

66. St: الرجال

67. St: العسكر

68. Om. St.

69. A2: فتقدونا

70. Instead of يفعلون بكل أمير, St has يفعلوا بأمير.

71. St: المساجد بها

72. Om. St.

73. St: الصور

74. Instead of قلته مبيضة بالزلط الهيصمي, St has قلة مبنية بالزلط الهيصم.

75. Instead of وبها باب, St has وبابها.

76. The words عامودان مربعان appear in St. A1 and A2 have وإن مربعان عامر.

77. St: عليهما

ملوك⁷⁸ طول⁷⁹ كل عامود منها⁸⁰ سبعون ذراعًا وهما متساويان في طولهما بينهما فسحة طولها⁸¹ سبعة عشر ذراعًا وعليها شبكة من نحاس.

[6¶] وذكر لنا بعض الإخوان ⌐ أنه كان في سابق ⌐ الزمان استخدام الصور المنقوشة⁸² على العامودين⁸³، إذا أتى عدو على⁸⁴ المدينة يرى⁸⁵ كل صورة يصعد إليها من البحر صورتها ويكثروا⁸⁶ الصراخ في جانب البحر فتعرف الناس بذلك، وبين العامودين حوض من الزلط الأسود منقوش عليها⁸⁷ شخوص وأرهاط ومراكب ودواب وأشكال على صفات مختلفة وهو مغطًا⁸⁸ مسبوك عليه بالرصاص، وكان إذا أتى المدينة⁸⁹ عدو يفور من الحوض ماء وينظر⁹⁰ إلى الحوض فترى كل صورة في الحوض صفتها طالعة ⌐ إلى البحر، وذكروا⁹¹ أن الحوض كان به مدفونًا ⌐ حكيمه الذي احتكمه فلما⁹² أخذت المدينة من أهريقل أرسل جاسوسًا في صفة راهب بأموال كثيرة⁹³ ودخل إلى المدينة وتوصل⁹⁴ إلى ملكها فقال له: إن بالحوض ذخيرة من ذخائر الحكماء، وحسن له فتحه⁹⁵ ففتحه الملك⁹⁶ فبطل استخدامه.

---

78. Om. St.

79. So in St. A1 and A2: ملوك

80. St: منهما

81. After this word, the copyist of A1 mistakenly rewrote the words:
سبعون ذراعًا وهما متساويان في طولهما بينهم فسحة طولها
Manuscript A2's copyist copied this dittography. These extra words are not found in St.

82. St: المنعوشة

83. St: العامودين المذكورين

84. St: إلى

85. So in A1 and A2. St: يرا

86. St: يكثر

87. St: عليه

88. A2: مغطى

89. St: إلى المدينة

90. A2: وتنظر

91. St: وذكر

92. St: فلما أن

93. Instead of في صفة راهب بأموال كثيرة, St has بأموال .

94. St: فتوصل

95. Instead of له فتحه, St has فتحه للملك .

96. Instead of ففتحه الملك, St has فَفُتِحَ ; cf. the end of paragraph 7.

[7¶] وذكروا⁹⁷ أيضًا⁹⁸ أنّ بقرب كوم إيماس وجامع السلسلة⁹⁹ ‏⟦A1 23v⟧‏ بحري طرف الكوم قصر مغلق¹⁰⁰ وعليه غلق كبير¹⁰¹ فلم أزل أسأل عن ذلك، قال بعضهم¹⁰² إنه كان به رصد الأترية¹⁰³، كل من رمى على بابه¹⁰⁴ كناسة يصبح يراها على كوم إيماس، فلا يزال¹⁰⁵ الملعون جاسوس أهريقل يحسن للملك فتح ذلك المكان فأمر بفتحه ففتح فوجد به مكنسة من نحاس ‏⟦A2 33r⟧‏ على زلطة سوداء، فلما أن فتح بطلت حركة¹⁰⁶ ذلك.

[8¶] وباب المدينة الشرقي الذي يسمى باب محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم كان سكنًا¹⁰⁷ للوزير الكبير فنام ليلة فرأى في منامه أن بالباب شهداء استشهدوا بالوقعة¹⁰⁸ ودفنوا به فشكوا من دوس النعال فلما أصبح الصباح¹⁰⁹ ذكر ذلك للملك¹¹⁰ فأمر بسده وبفتح باب الأخضر¹¹¹ الكبير وكان الملك يعمل به مولدًا¹¹² في كل ليلة جمعة، والباب الغربي الذي قتل فيه ابن الملك أهريقل ‏⟦St 19v⟧‏ ذكر أن بها¹¹³ من المسلمين ‏⟦A1 24r⟧‏ ألف وأربعمائة شهيد، وأما الباب الثاني¹¹⁴ فهو لوزيره الثاني¹¹⁵ ‏⟦A2 33v⟧‏ فكنا ليلة تكون نوبتنا نسمع مجالس الذكر كضجيج الحج فنظن¹¹⁶ أن الوقعة بالمدينة، وبها مائة وثمانون مدرسة لطلب العلم حتى كان بالمدينة حطابون تكتب على الفتاوى ولا ترى في المدينة¹¹⁷ ترابًا ولا حصوة¹¹⁸ ولا يعلوها دخان، وفي كل عام تأتي مركب من أهريقل للمدينة بها مائة صبطٍ¹¹⁹

---

97. St: وذكر

98. St: أنه كان

99. St: العسلية

100. Instead of قصر مغلق, St has قصرًا معلقًا .

101. St: كثير

102. Instead of قال بعضهم, St has فقال لي بعض الناس .

103. St: لنقل الأترية

104. St: باب داره

105. St: زال

106. A2: هركة

107. Instead of كان سكنًا, A2 has كا سكنى .

108. St: في الوقعة

109. Instead of فلما أصبح الصباح, St has فلما أن أصبح .

110. St: للملك يوسف

111. St: الخضر

112. St: موالد

113. St: به

114. St lacks the words وأما الباب الثاني .

115. Instead of لوزيره الثاني, St has لوزير ثاني .

116. St: فنظنوا

117. St: أزقة المدينة

118. St: حصوًا

119. St: صنداد . See also note 208 below.

حاملين الزلط الأسود منكسين الروس يرصدونها[120] بداخل الصور[121] ومعهم هدايا وذلك كله لأجل زيارتهم كنيسة ولد أهريقل التي قتل بها وهي بوسط البلد ولها شهرة بعمارتها[122] وبنائها بقرب مسجد يقال له قَيْلُولَاَ[123] في الصف[124] القبلي يصعد إليه بسلم من ⌐A2 34r¬ هيصم وهو مشهور بكثرة العلماء، وبها مسجد يعرف[125] بابن عوف به ستون شهيدًا دفنوا به، وبها[126] مسجد في الجانب الغربي يسمى بالعمري وآخر لابن عوف وآخر بالباب الشرقي يسمى بالفخرية[127] به ستون من طلبة العلم، ⌐A1 24v¬ وبالمدينة من الجانب البحري سبع محارس عالية البناء بها رماة ترمي بالقسي يرمي أحدهما على سبعة أميال، وفي الجانب الغربي باب يسمى باب البركة وباب الخضر عليه السلام يزوره الملك كل[128] ⌐St 20r¬ يوم جمعة ويتصدق فيه بخير كثير، والجامع الكبير يسمى[129] بجامع الغرباء به ثلاث مائة[130] مجاور لطلب العلم وفي ركنه البحري منزل عمرو بن العاص لما ⌐A2 34v¬ رمى بالمنجنيق حين أخذت المدينة، وبظاهر المدينة مسجد يعرف بجامع السارية بجانبه عامود كبير وآخر صغير، وذكروا[131] أن العامود إشارة كنز، وكان الملك في زمن الشتاء وزمن الزهورات يأمر بنصب الصيوان تحت العامود الكبير[132] ويخرج الملك وينصب[133] البيارق على الأسوار خضر وبيض وحمر ومفترجات ويأمر الملك في ذلك الوقت بفتح الخليج وتنظيفه[134] حتى يبان قاعه لأنه مرخم بالهيصم، وفي زمن النيل تجيء المراكب فيه وتطلع الناس للمفترجات ⌐A1 25r¬ والبيع والشراء والتنزه إلى أيام عديدة، وبأبواب مساجدها قناديل معلقة ⌐A2 35r¬ حتى إذا كان الليل[135] يحتاج أحد إلى شيء وقع منه يراه.

---

120. St: يرصونها

121. So in all manuscripts; lege السور.

122. St: بعمادها

123. St: قيليلا

124. Om. St.

125. Om. A1 and A2.

126. St: به

127. St: بالفخر

128. St: في كل

129. St: يعرف

130. Instead of ثلاث مائة, St has ثلاثمائة.

131. St: وذكر

132. Om. St.

133. St: وتنصب

134. St: وتضيفه

135. St: بالليل

[9¶] وظاهر¹³⁶ المدينة من الجانب البحري على خمسة أميال¹³⁷ منارة في البحر¹³⁸ خراب بها سبع عقود أسفلها تعلوها خمسة عقود تعلوها ثلاثة عقود يعلوها عقد واحد، طول كل عقد من العقود¹³⁹ الأولى سبع¹⁴⁰ وعشرون ذراعًا بذراع العمل وعرضه كذلك، وفي وسطه منارة مربعة الأركان ⌐St 20v⌐ يصعد إليها بتسعة وتسعين¹⁴¹ سلمًا طول¹⁴² كل سلم أربعون ذراعًا وعرضه كذلك من النحاس الأصفر، منقوش عليه شخوص وأرهاط¹⁴³، لكل باب منهم ثلاثة لوالب إذا فُرِك¹⁴⁴ يسمع¹⁴⁵ لها دوي¹⁴⁶ كالرعد، وخلف الأبواب الأربعة مرآة من ⌐A2 35v⌐ هانبذان¹⁴⁷ مزينة بالذهب وفوقها علم من فضة يدور معها أينما¹⁴⁸ دارت، فإذا كانت الشمس شرقًا أو غربًا تدور بالآلات¹⁴⁹ إلى ناحيتها، فيرى من فيها من قابلها من مسيرة¹⁵⁰ ثمانية آلاف ميل ⌐A1 25v⌐ مكتوب¹⁵¹ عليها ذلك، ولكن وجدناها معطلة باقية على تلك الصورة¹⁵²، وذكروا¹⁵³ أن سبب تعطيلها أن ولد أهريقل¹⁵⁴ لما¹⁵⁵ أتى إلى¹⁵⁶ الثغر عند الوقعة المعروفة بأهريقل وكان لما تحول المرآة إلى ناحيته فيرى ما يجري في المدينة وكان أهريقل أوصى لولده¹⁵⁷ وقال له إذا كان القتال دور المرآة نحوي لأرى ما أنت فيه، فلما¹⁵⁸ وصل المدينة أعلم الخازندار¹⁵⁹ بذلك

---

136. St: وبظاهر

137. St: أميال من المدينة

138. St omits the words في البحر.

139. St: ذلك العقود

140. St: سبعة

141. St: وتسعون

142. So in St. Om. A1 and A2.

143. Instead of أرهاط وشخوص, St has شخوص وأرهاط.

144. St: فركت

145. St: تسمع

146. St: دويًا

147. St: هانيدان

148. St: أين

149. St: بالآلة

150. St: مسير

151. St: ميلًا

152. St: الصفة

153. St: وذكر

154. So in St. A1 and A2: هرقيل

155. St: لما أن

156. Om. St.

157. St: ولده

158. St: فلما أن

159. St: الخازن

فلما¹⁶⁰ وقع الحرب قتل ابن أهريقل | وأسر¹⁶¹ قومه فبطل الخازندار¹⁶² حركتها وفر هاربًا وكنا نتفرج على ذلك.

[10¶] وأقمت بها أربعين سنة¹⁶³ كأنها أربعين¹⁶⁴ يومًا، فيا لها من مدينة، بها حدائق وماء رائق وماء للخير فاعلين، لا تبطل القراءة منها ولا طلب العلم لا ليلًا ولا نهارًا إيمانًا ساطعًا ونورًا لامعًا، بها أولياء أسرارهم واضحة وكراماتهم باهرة وأقوالهم صحيحة، أعاد الله علينا من بركاتهم¹⁶⁵ ونفعنا بمددهم أجمعين¹⁶⁶.¹⁶⁷

Translation

<div align="center">

In name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate.
May God bless our lord Muḥammad.[168]

</div>

[¶1] In the sense in which it is [commonly] understood, a sound tradition indicates that a *murābiṭ*'s prayer in a town in which *ribāṭ* is practiced equals two thousand and twenty-five prayers.[169]

[¶2] On the authority of Muḥammad b. Khuzayma,[170] who cited his father, who said: I heard that [tradition] and so [decided to] pursue *ribāṭ* in Alexandria in Muḥarram[171] of the year five hundred sixty[172] during the governorship of the lord Ayyūb al-Kurdī, may God have mercy upon him. I went there, and in the morning I saw the city's brilliant whiteness from a distance of twenty-four[173] miles. When I reached the city I found its eastern gate opened. It has a small gate plated with iron. From it, one enters the city via a wooden bridge. At the end of the day, the gatekeepers raise

---

160. St: فلما أن

161. St: وأسرت

162. St: الخازن

163. Instead of وأقمت بها أربعين سنة, St has وأقمت بالمدينة أربعون عامًا.

164. St: أربعون

165. St: بركات الجميع

166. Om. St.

167. Ad. St.: أمين والحمد لله رب العالمين

168. St: "May God bless our lord Muḥammad, his family, and his companions, and grant him peace."

169. I have been unable to find this tradition in *ḥadīth* works. Similar traditions do exist. See, e.g., two traditions in al-Mundhirī, *al-Targhīb wa-l-tarhīb min al-ḥadīth al-sharīf*, ed. Muṣṭafā M. ʿImāra (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1388/1968), 2:246 (nos. 16 and 17): "A *murābiṭ*'s prayer equals five hundred prayers" (*inna ṣalāt al-murābiṭ taʿdil khamasmiʾa ṣalāt*) and "A prayer in *ribāṭ* territory equals two million prayers" (*al-ṣalāt bi-arḍ al-ribāṭ bi-alfay alf ṣalāt*).

170. See note 8 above.

171. St: "in Alexandria in the sacred [month of] Muḥarram"

172. November–December 1164

173. St: "fourteen"

it with the help of machines.[174] I sought to enter the city but for three days I was refused. There I was, at a moat, filled with water, that surrounded the city. It was ten cubits wide, and fishermen were catching fish in it.

[¶3] I said to the city's gatekeepers, "I wish to enter." Their headman said, "Shouldn't we seek council from the king?" After seeking council, they asked me, "Why do you want to enter?" I said, "I wish to engage in *ribāṭ* in the city." They then took me to the king. Standing[175] before him, I was surprised to see that he was an old man. I greeted him, and he returned the greeting and asked, "What is your name?" I replied, "Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb." He asked, "What is your *kunya*?" "Abū Khuzayma," I answered. Then he asked,[176] "What is your country?" I said, "Khurāsān." He asked, "Why have you come?" I said, "O revered king! I have heard that such-and-such will be the wage of anyone who performs *ribāṭ* in Alexandria. For that reason I have come to pursue *ribāṭ* here." He left me, holding a piece of paper in his hand and leaving me standing [there]. He then interrogated me a second time and I gave him the same answers. He interrogated me[177] a third time and I gave him the same answers. The fourth time he shouted at me, his voice leaving me shaken. He asked me, "You wish to perform *ribāṭ*?" I answered, "Indeed." Then the servants brought me to a place with furniture and assigned to me food and drink like the soldiery.[178] For three days they did not cease to bring me before the king, and they interrogated me four times each day. I gave him my initial answers. After that, he asked me, "Do you wish to engage in *ribāṭ*?" I answered, "I do." He then said, "There are three hundred and sixty commanders in the city, each of whom commands three hundred and sixty individuals. Each commander patrols the city one day and night [of the year]." Then he asked after the commander whose turn it was and summoned him. He assigned me to him and registered me in an account book.[179] He gave me a horse, the price of which equaled one hundred dinars, an Indian sword, and a spear from al-Khaṭṭ.[180]

[¶4] After the commander had performed the afternoon prayer, he fitted out the horsemen, saddled the riding beasts, and fixed their weapons and spearheads.[181]

---

174. St: "a machine"

175. I interpret the Arabic not as a passive of form IV, *ūqiftu* ("I was made to stand"), but as a form IV with the meaning of form I. This is a frequently attested feature of Middle Arabic; see Blau, *Grammar*, 1:157–63, and *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, s.v. "Middle Arabic" (page 221). See also note 47 above.

176. St: "Then he asked me"

177. St: "He left me and interrogated me"

178. St: "the king's soldiery"

179. St: "his account book"

180. For the meaning of *khaṭṭī* here, see Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon Derived from the Best and Most Copious Eastern Sources* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–93), 2:760. According to Yāqūt al-Rūmī, *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1397/1977), 2:378, al-Khaṭṭ denotes the coasts of ʿUmān and al-Baḥrayn.

181. It is unclear to what the possessive *-hā* in *silāḥātahā* (*sic*) and *asinnatahā* refers. In the current translation, I have understood it to be a general reference to the horsemen. If it refers to the riding beasts, it is also possible to translate "the weapons and spearheads they were carrying."

We departed from the king's gate, wearing a coat of mail, a helmet, and fighting equipment, while scribes registered the troops,[182] each individual by name, until they had registered three hundred and sixty men, each riding a horse. We departed and patrolled the city until morning. We [finally] reached the king's *ṭishṭakhāna*.[183] We entered, and they paid and registered us again. This they did each day of the year for each commander. Each commander was assigned one rotation per year.

[¶5] We regularly visited the saints and frequented mosques. I saw eight hundred mosques, places of worship,[184] in the city. We were informed that there are [in fact] twelve thousand places of worship in the city and [that each Friday] one hundred and ninety sermons [are delivered] there. Each saint is charged [with giving a sermon] on a specific day. The city's lanes are paved with hard, white marble;[185] they are [lined with] tall buildings and are bright white. The construction of its [i.e., the city's] walls is never impaired. The king orders a third of all the taxes that he collects to be spent on repairing the city walls. There are three hundred and sixty towers that are whitewashed and decorated with the king's name written in gold ink. The tower of each of the king's viziers has been whitened[186] with white stones. The king's tower stood in the northern part. It had a gate that opened toward the east and one that opened toward the south. Two rectangular columns, made of red stone,[187] stood in front of the southern gate. They were decorated with images of groups of kings[188] and individuals. The height of each of the columns was seventy cubits;[189] they were equal in height.[190] Between them was a court, seventeen cubits long, roofed over with a copper lattice.

---

182. Ar. *al-ʿasākir*; St: "the army" (*al-ʿaskar*).

183. A *ṭishṭakhāna*, more commonly spelled *ṭishṭakhānāh* (طشتخاناه), was a room or building where the sultan's cloths, cushions, and carpets were washed and stored. See Reinhart Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill/Paris: Maisonneuve, 1927), 2:44. Al-Qalqashandī writes that in addition to textiles, the sultan's swords, too, were kept there; *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Q. al-Baqlī (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1331–38/1913–19), 4:10.

184. Ar. *masjidan miḥrāban* (in A1 and A2); manuscript St only has *miḥrāban*, "places of worship." I have translated the asyndetic apposition of *miḥrāban* to *masjidan* in A1 and A2 as a permutative (*badal*; see William Wright, *Arabic Grammar*, 3rd ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896–1898], 2:284–85), interpreting the two words as near synonyms.

185. Ar. *al-rukhām al-hayṣamī*. Dictionaries point at the smoothness and solidity of the type of stone called *hayṣam*. See, e.g., Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab* (Bulaq: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīriyya, 1300–1308/1883–91), 16:96. Al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿarab*, ed. David H. Müller (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1884–91), 1:202, gives the following definition: "a stone that resembles marble but is whiter."

186. St: "built"

187. Ar. *zalaṭ*, lit. "pebbles" or "little pieces of stone."

188. Ar. *shukhūṣ mulūk*; St: "people" (*shukhūṣ*).

189. Seventy cubits equals 37.83 meters.

190. The columns are most probably Cleopatra's Needles.

[¶6] Some of our brothers mentioned to us that in the past, people made use of the images engraved on the columns.[191] When an enemy arrived at the city, he would see the likeness of each image he approached from the sea. There would be much shouting at the shore, and thus the people would come to know of that [i.e., the enemy's arrival]. Between the two columns is a basin made of black stones engraved with individuals, groups of people, ships, animals, and different shapes. It is covered with a sheath of lead.[192] Water would gush forth from the basin when an enemy arrived at the city. He would look at the basin and then see the likeness of each of the basin's images rising upon the sea.[193] They stated that a wise man who was in charge of the basin was buried in it. When Uhrayqil[194] lost the city, he sent a spy in the guise of a monk with a large sum of money. He entered the city, gained access to the king and said to him, "One of the wise men's treasures lies in the basin." He tempted him[195] to open it. The king opened it[196] and thereby made it unusable.

[¶7] They also reported that near Kawm Īmās and the Mosque of the Chain,[197] to the north of the hill, there is a fortress locked[198] with a large lock.[199] I kept asking about it. Some of them said[200] that it possessed a talisman used against dust.[201] Anyone who threw sweepings against its gate[202] would find them the following morning on Kawm Īmās. The accursed spy of Uhrayqil ceaselessly tempted the king to open that place. He [i.e., the king] ordered it to be opened and found there a copper broom on a black stone. Once it was opened it ceased to operate.

[¶8] The city's eastern gate, called the Gate of Muḥammad, God bless him and grant him peace, is the residence of the chief vizier. One night, in his sleep, he dreamt that there were martyrs at the gate who had fallen during the Battle[203] and been buried there. They complained about [being humiliated by] being trodden on. The

---

191. St: "the mentioned columns"

192. Lit. "with melted lead"

193. I read *yarā* instead of *tarā* on the basis of the text's similar wording and syntax a few lines earlier. The copyists grappled with the words *yanẓur* and *tarā*. The copyist of A2 chose not to follow manuscript A1 and read *tanẓur* instead of *yanẓur*, interpreting the text as "You would look at the basin and then see the likeness of ..." The copyist of manuscript St changed his initial vocalization of *yanẓur* into *yunẓar* and seems to have interpreted the text as "The basin would be looked at, and you would then see the likeness of ..."

194. For the identity of Uhrayqil, see below at notes 267–68.

195. St: "the king"

196. St: "he ordered it to be opened and it was opened"

197. St: "ʿAsaliyya Mosque"

198. St: "a hanging fortress"

199. St: "many locks"

200. St: "So some people said to me"

201. St: "a talisman for the transfer of dust"

202. St: "the gate of his house"

203. For this apocalyptic battle, see below at note 270.

next morning he reported this to the king,[204] who ordered it [i.e., the gate] to be closed[205] and the great Green Gate[206] to be opened. Each Friday evening, the king organized a festival there. It is said that at the western gate, where the son of King Uhrayqil was killed, there are [buried] fourteen hundred Muslim martyrs. As to [this] second gate, it belongs to his [i.e., the king's] second vizier. One night, when it was our turn [to patrol], we heard *dhikr* sessions as loud as [festivities celebrating] the Hajj such that we thought that the Battle was taking place in the city. There are one hundred and eighty colleges for the pursuit of knowledge in the city, to the point that there were firewood vendors in the city writing on [sheets of paper used for] fatwas. One never saw any dust or pebbles in the city[207] nor smoke in the air. Each year, Uhrayqil sends a ship to the city with a hundred silent men[208] carrying black stones, their heads bowed. They lay them on the ground within the circuit of the city wall. They [also] bring gifts. [They do] all of that in order to visit the church of Uhrayqil's son, which is where he was killed. It stands in the center of the city and is famous for its architecture.[209] It was built just south of a mosque called Qaylūlā,[210] which can be reached by way of a staircase of white stone. It is famous for its many scholars. There is a mosque known as Ibn ʿAwf. Sixty martyrs are buried there. In the western part of the city, there is a mosque called al-ʿAmrī[211] and another one belonging to Ibn ʿAwf.[212] Another [mosque] stands at the eastern gate. It is called al-Fakhriyya[213] and houses sixty students. In the north of the city, there are seven tall

---

204. St: "the king Yūsuf"

205. Note that the Ayyubid Ibn Jumayʿ (*Ṭabʿ al-Iskandariyya*, 55) writes that the Rosetta Gate is closed.

206. St: "al-Khiḍr's Gate"

207. St: "the city's lanes"

208. Manuscripts A1 and A2 have *ṣ.b.ṭ*, whose meaning I have been unable to determine. Here, I interpret it as *sabt*; see Lane, *Lexicon*, 4:1288. Manuscript St has *ṣ.n.d.ʾ.d*, which may be related to *ṣindīd*, "chief" or "brave man."

209. St: "for its columns"

210. St: "Qaylīlā"

211. I prefer to interpret the name of this mosque as "al-ʿAmrī," referring to the mosque ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ built after conquering Alexandria in 21/642. See the similar use of this *nisba* in, e.g., al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, ed. Aḥmad Zakī Bāshā et al. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya/al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1342–1418/1923–97), 19:319 in reference to the Mosque of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ in Fusṭāṭ. Considering the explicit western location of the mosque mentioned here, it seems less likely that the text refers to the mosque known as al-Jāmiʿ al-ʿImarī, located on today's Shāriʿ Abī Dardāʾ. The text would probably have considered this to have lain in the southern part of the city.

212. See al-Nuwayrī, *Kitāb al-Ilmām bi-l-iʿlām fī-mā jarat bihi al-aḥkām wa-l-umūr al-maqḍiyya fī waqʿat al-Iskandariyya*, ed. Étienne Combe and ʿAzīz S. ʿAṭiyya (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1968–76), 4:45, who writes that it was customary to appoint a descendant of the Companion ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf as the Western Mosque's overseer.

213. St: "al-Fakhr." This is the Fakhr or Fakhriyya college. Al-Nuwayrī writes that during Pierre de Lusignan's sack of Alexandria in 767/1365, European raiders "set fire to the gate of the Fakhr college, located near the Rosetta Gate" (*al-Ilmām*, 2:166). See also ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Sālim, *Taʾrīkh al-Iskandariyya wa-ḥaḍāratihā fī al-ʿaṣr al-islāmī* (Alexandria: Muʾassasat Shabāb al-Jāmiʿa, 1982), 477.

watchtowers where archers are stationed, each of whom can shoot up to seven miles. In the western part of the city is a gate called the Gate of Blessing and al-Khiḍr's Gate, peace be upon him. The king visits it each Friday and spends much charity on it. The large congregational mosque is called[214] the Strangers' Mosque. It has three hundred resident students. In its northern corner is where ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ stayed when he fired mangonels when the city was taken. Outside the city is a mosque known as the Mosque of the Pillar. Next to it stand two columns, one large and one small.[215] They say that the column marks [the location of] a treasure. In the winter and spring,[216] the king orders a large tent to be set up at the base of the large column. The king goes out and has green, white, and red banners hung on the walls and places [built] for amusement. This is also the time when the king orders the opening of the canal and has it cleaned until its bottom is clearly visible because it is paved with white marble. Ships come [to the city] via the canal during the period of the Nile flood. Over many days, people visit the places for amusement and engage in buying and selling or stroll. At the gates of the city's mosques are hung so many lamps that someone who has dropped something at night will easily find it.

[¶9] Five miles north of the city stands a ruined lighthouse in the sea. There are seven vaults, on top of which stand five vaults, on top of which three vaults, on top of which one vault. The height and width of each of the first [i.e., lowest] vaults[217] is twenty-seven practical cubits.[218] At its center stands a rectangular lighthouse, which one ascends via ninety-nine stairs. The height and width of each stair is forty cubits. It is made of yellow copper and engraved with individuals and groups of people. Each of their [sic] doors has three pipes, which make a thunderous sound when they are turned.[219] Behind the four doors is a mirror made of ...[220] and decorated with gold. On top of it stands a silver banner, which turns in whatever direction the mirror turns. When the sun is in the east or the west, it is turned in that direction with the help of devices. Whoever is inside can see someone opposite at a distance of up to eight thousand miles. That is what is written about it. We found it inoperative [but] still matching that description. It is said that the reason that it no longer operated is that

---

214. St: "is known as"

215. The large pillar is the so-called Column of the Pillars (ʿamūd al-sawārī; Diocletian's Column/Pompey's Pillar), which appears in nearly all descriptions of the city. Like our text, al-Harawī, *Kitāb al-Ishārāt ilā maʿrifat al-ziyārāt*, ed. Janine Sourdel-Thomine, *Guide des lieux de pèlerinage* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1953), 47, locates a Mosque of the Pillar near the Column of the Pillars.

216. Lit. "when the flowers bloom"; cf. Persian *bahār*.

217. St: "those first vaults"

218. A practical cubit (*dhirāʿ al-ʿamal*) equals 66.5 centimeters; see Walther Hinz, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte umgerechnet ins metrische System* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), 55. Twenty-seven practical cubits equals 17.955 meters.

219. Or "rubbed"

220. Manuscripts A1 and A2 have *h.ʾ.n.b.dh.ʾ.n* here and manuscript St has *h.ʾ.n.y.d.ʾ.n*.

the son of Uhrayqil, when he came to the fortified city[221] during the battle known as Uhrayqil, saw what was happening in the city when the mirror was turned in his direction. Uhrayqil had enjoined his son, saying, "When the fighting starts, turn the mirror in my direction so that I see what you are doing." So, when he reached the city, he informed the treasurer about this. When the battle ensued, Uhrayqil's son was killed and his people made captive. The treasurer destroyed its [i.e., the mirror's] ability to move and fled. We witnessed that.

[¶10] I stayed there[222] for forty years, [which felt] like forty days. Oh, what a city! There one finds gardens and pure water. Its inhabitants do only what is good. They unceasingly recite the Qur'ān and pursue knowledge, day or night. Their faith illuminates and an inner light shines forth. There one finds saints whose secrets are clear, whose miracles are overwhelming, and whose sayings are correct. May God renew to us their blessings[223] and make us benefit by the support of them all![224]

The Account's Date

Having established the text, we are now in a position to analyze the account's contents. Before we do so, some words on the date of its composition are in order. At the beginning of the text, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb writes that he arrived in Alexandria in the month of Muḥarram in the year 560 (November–December 1164), during the governorship of one Ayyūb al-Kurdī (para. 2). This governor is not mentioned among the city's governors in accounts by Muslim historians of the turbulent last years of the Fatimid caliphate.[225] Perhaps the

---

221. Ar. *thaghr*, a word that can mean "fortified city" as well as "frontier" and is often associated with *jihād*. For discussions of this term, see Ralph W. Brauer, *Boundaries and Frontiers in Medieval Muslim Geography* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1995), 14, and Asa Eger, "Ḥiṣn, Ribāṭ, Thaghr or Qaṣr? Semantics and Systems of Frontier Fortifications in the Early Islamic Period," in *The Lineaments of Islam: Studies in Honor of Fred McGraw Donner*, ed. Paul M. Cobb, 427–55 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 437–40. Medieval Muslim authors frequently called Alexandria a *thaghr*. See *EI²*, s.v. "al-Thughūr," and *EI³*, s.v. "Alexandria."

222. St: "in the city"

223. St: "the blessings of all people"

224. St adds: "Amen! Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds!"

225. If the text refers to a historical person, he may have been a successor of the popular *amīr* Murtafiʿ b. Faḥl (or Mujallā), better known as al-Khalwāṣ, whom the Fatimid grand vizier Ḍirghām appointed over Alexandria in an attempt to strengthen his own power base in Cairo and who was killed on Rabīʿ II 8, 559/March 5, 1164. See Claude Cahen, "Un récit inédit du vizirat de Dirghām," *Annales islamologiques* 8 (1969): 27–46, at 41–42; al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ al-ḥunafāʾ bi-akhbār al-aʾimma al-fāṭimiyyīn al-khulafāʾ*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyya, 1416/1996), 3:262, 264; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 28:332; ʿUmāra al-Yamanī, *al-Nukat al-ʿaṣriyya fī akhbār al-wuzarāʾ al-miṣriyya*, ed. Hartwig Derenbourg in *ʿOumara du Yémen: Sa vie et son oeuvre*, vol. 1: *Autobiographie et récits sur les vizirs d'Égypte* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1897), 140–44; cf. the dating in ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (attr.), *al-Bustān al-jāmiʿ li-jamīʿ tawārīkh ahl al-zamān*, ed. ʿUmar ʿA. Tadmurī (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 1423/2002), 385. In mid-562/early 1167, historians report, Najm al-Dīn Ibn Maṣāl (d. 574/1178), son of a well-known and homonymous vizier (on whom see *EI²*, s.v. "Ibn Maṣāl"), was governor of Alexandria. See Ibn Abī Ṭayy, cited in Abū Shāma, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn al-nūriyya wa-l-ṣalāḥiyya*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Zaybaq (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1418/1997), 2:96; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 28:336–37; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-l-iʿtibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-āthār*, ed. Ayman F. Sayyid

date is corrupted and should be read as 562/1167, when Saladin (Yūsuf b. Ayyūb al-Kurdī) briefly controlled Alexandria on behalf of his uncle, the Zengid commander Shīrkūh,[226] or as 565/1169, when Saladin's father, Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb al-Kurdī, received Alexandria as an *iqṭāʿ*.[227] At the end of the text, our author writes that he stayed in Alexandria for forty years (para. 10). This suggests that he composed the text around 600/1203–4. However, these words cannot be accepted uncritically. The number forty is often used in a symbolic way, usually to indicate a great multitude or divine presence.[228] Here, the author seems to address the reader's religio-activist sentiments. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's claim to have conducted *ribāṭ* in Alexandria "for forty years, [which felt] like forty days" evokes the many traditions on the virtues of performing *ribāṭ* in Alexandria for forty days or nights. One such tradition, recorded in Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh's *Faḍāʾil al-Iskandariyya*, for example, has the Meccan scholar ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abī Rawwād (d. 159/775–76) say:

> "For sixty years, I resided near God's sacred House [i.e., the Kaʿba], living a pious and ascetic life. But would God have granted me the possibility to depart for Alexandria in order to engage in *ribāṭ* there for forty nights, I would have preferred that over the sixty years of pious life near God's House."[229]

Other traditions state that performing *ribāṭ* in Alexandria for the duration of forty days or nights is better than sixty pilgrimages in addition to the Hajj and frees the *murābiṭ* from punishment after death.[230] Many traditions recommend a forty-day period of *ribāṭ* in other coastal regions.[231] Like the reports on Alexandria, they agree with a reportedly Prophetic tradition saying that "a full period of *ribāṭ* consists of forty days,"[232] which many

---

(London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2002–3), 1:472; ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Bustān*, 393. Ayyūb al-Kurdī, then, may have governed the city between 559/1164 and 562/1167.

226. Abū Shāma, *al-Rawḍatayn*, 2:13, 98; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 28:336–37. Note that manuscript St identifies Alexandria's governor elsewhere as a certain Yūsuf; see note 110 of the edition.

227. Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1411/1991), 2:380 (no. 896).

228. Lawrence I. Conrad, "Abraha and Muḥammad: Some Observations Apropos of Chronology and Literary *Topoi* in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50, no. 2 (1987): 225–40, at 230–32.

229. Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, *Faḍāʾil al-Iskandariyya*, ed. Jelle Bruning (in preparation), no. 9.

230. Ibid., nos. 4, 5, 7, 27, and 38.

231. See Suliman Bashear, "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 1, no. 2 (1991): 173–207, at 194–95, for such traditions concerning *ribāṭ* on the Syrian coast.

232. Most sources refer to Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-muṣannaf fī al-aḥādīth wa-l-āthār*, ed. ʿAbd al-Khāliq al-Afghānī, Sayyid Yūsuf ʿAlī, and Mukhtār Aḥmad al-Nadwī (Hyderabad: n.p./Mumbai: al-Dār al-Salafiyya, 1386–1403/1966–83), 5:328 = ed. Muḥammad ʿA. Shāhīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1416/1995), 4:225 (nos. 19449–50), and al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī ʿA. al-Salafī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1344/2001–2), 8:133 (no. 7606). See also al-Suyūṭī, *Jāmiʿ al-aḥādīth: Al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr wa-zawāʾiduhu wa-l-Jāmiʿ al-kabīr*, ed. ʿAbbās A. Ṣaqr and Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Jawwād (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1414/1994), 4:127 (no. 10604), and

scholars knew, although not all accepted its historicity.[233] Our author's claim to a forty-year residence in Alexandria is, most likely, part of his rhetoric to convince the reader of the virtues of *ribāṭ* in Alexandria and cannot be taken at face value.

In fact, circumstantial evidence from Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's description of the city makes it very likely that the text dates to the late Ayyubid or early Mamluk period. First, the account clearly postdates the foundation of Alexandria's ʿAwfiyya college by the Fatimid vizier Riḍwān b. Walakhshī in 532/1137–38 on the city's main east-west street, the *maḥajja*.[234] Although he calls it a mosque,[235] Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb refers to this college in paragraph 8. References to this college in historical sources decline after the death of its first professor and eponym, Abū Ṭāhir Ibn ʿAwf, in 581/1185. Importantly, it is highly unlikely, as Gary Leiser has noted, that the college's initial fame, if not its existence, endured into the Mamluk period.[236]

Second, the author's identification of the city's main congregational mosque as "the Strangers' Mosque" (*jāmiʿ al-ghurabāʾ*, para. 8) supports a date of composition between the mid-sixth/twelfth and early eighth/fourteenth century. Without doubt, what is meant here is the Western Mosque (*al-jāmiʿ al-gharbī*), one of the city's two main mosques after the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim built the Mosque of al-ʿAṭṭārīn in 404/1013 in the center of the city.[237] (In the course of the text's transmission, the word *al-ghurabāʾ* must have replaced its near homograph *al-gharbī*.) The Western Mosque stood in the northwestern part of the city in the immediate vicinity of the city's oldest mosque, built by the conqueror ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ in the early 20s/640s.[238] The text's association of the Strangers' Mosque with ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (its northern corner being described as "where ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ stayed when he fired mangonels when the city was taken") further supports its identification with the Western Mosque. What is relevant for the dating of our text is that Muslim historians report that Saladin (re)built the Western Mosque and made it the city's sole congregational mosque by prohibiting delivery of Friday sermons in the Fatimid Mosque of al-ʿAṭṭārīn.[239] The text

al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-ʿummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afʿāl*, ed. Ṣafwat al-Saqqā and Bakrī al-Ḥayyānī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1405–7/1985–86), 8:531 (no. 24014).

233. The Mālikī Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, in *al-Nawādir wa-l-ziyādāt ʿalā mā fī al-Mudawwana min ghayrihā min al-ummahāt*, ed. Muḥammad Amīn Būkhubza (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1999), 3:15, and the Ḥanbalī Ibn Qudāma, in *al-Mughnī*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ M. al-Ḥilw (Riyadh: Dār ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1417/1997), 13:18–25, include the tradition in their discussions on *ribāṭ*. Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Ajwiba al-murḍiya*, ed. Muḥammad I. M. Ibrāhīm (Riyadh: Dār al-Rāya, 1418/1997–98), 1:126, notes that the *isnād* includes a rejected transmitter.

234. Paul E. Walker, "Fāṭimid Alexandria as an Entrepôt in the East-West Exchange of Islamic Scholarship," *Al-Masāq* 26, no. 1 (2014): 36–48, at 38–39. For the college's location on the *maḥajja*, see al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 10:458.

235. See Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 17, for the multifunctional nature of some of Alexandria's mosques.

236. Gary Leiser, "The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisūn, 495–647/1101–1249" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1976), 148–51, esp. 150–51. See also Walker, "Fāṭimid Alexandria," 47–48.

237. Behrens-Abouseif, "Topographie d'Alexandrie," 116–18 and 121–23.

238. Ibid., 114 and 117.

239. Al-Nuwayrī, *al-Ilmām*, 4:40; al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ*, 2:321.

seems to refer to this situation. It is unaware of the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reintroduction of the (now Sunni) Friday sermon in the Mosque of al-ʿAṭṭārīn in 731/1330,[240] after which Alexandria had two congregational mosques.

Third and last, our author's description of Alexandria's famous lighthouse narrows down the possible date of text's composition considerably. He writes about "a rectangular lighthouse" that is no longer fully functional (para. 9). For centuries the lighthouse had a three-level composition, but by the late seventh/thirteenth century it is known to have lost its two upper structures; only its first, rectangular tier still stood.[241] The latest known author to describe the lighthouse as a three-story building is Yāqūt al-Rūmī, who wrote ca. 622/1225. Later authors mention only a rectangular single-story tower.[242] The lighthouse did not survive into the second half of the eighth/fourteenth century. When Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited Alexandria in 750/1349–50, he saw the lighthouse fully in ruins.[243] Taken together, these three features of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's description of Alexandria leave little room for doubt that we are dealing with a text written between 622/1225 and 731/1330. The account's reference to the ʿAwfiyya college makes a date of composition before the eighth/fourteenth century most likely.

Analysis: A Call for the Defense of Alexandria

Alexandria's Defenses and Islamic Virtues

As noted earlier, this Ayyubid or early Mamluk text ascribes to Alexandria a special place in the Realm of Islam and calls for its defense. In order to mobilize Muslims to perform *ribāṭ* in Alexandria, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb first argues that the city stands out for its defenses and Islamic virtues (paras. 2–5, 8). He starts with a hyperbolic description of Alexandria's fortifications and garrison, combining fact and fiction. An account of his difficult entry into the city allows our author to describe in detail the city's eastern gate, which he calls the Gate of Muḥammad.[244] He describes it as "a small gate plated with iron" reached by crossing a heavy drawbridge over a moat that protected the city. The gatekeepers, he writes, refused to let him enter the city without official permission to do so (para. 2). This account agrees with contemporary descriptions of Alexandria. Writing in 688/1289, the North African pilgrim al-ʿAbdarī, for example, describes the doors of the city's gates as "most precisely and perfectly plated with iron, on both the inside and the outside."[245] The Mamluk historian Ibn Shāhīn al-Ẓāhirī, writing ca. 857/1453, similarly notes that "each gate [in Alexandria's

---

240. Al-Nuwayrī, *al-Ilmām*, 4:40.

241. Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "The Islamic History of the Lighthouse of Alexandria," *Muqarnas* 23 (2006): 1–14, at 8.

242. Ibid., 7–8.

243. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār*, 1:181.

244. See paragraph 8. This name for the city's eastern gate, which was more commonly known as Rosetta Gate, is also found in works on Alexandria's religious virtues: Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, *Faḍāʾil al-Iskandariyya*, no. 9, and *al-Risāla al-ʿAwfiyya fī faḍl al-Iskandariyya*, cited in Ibn Duqmāq, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār li-wāsiṭat ʿiqd al-amṣār*, ed. Karl Vollers (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīriyya, 1309–14/1893–96), 5:117–18.

245. Al-ʿAbdarī, *al-Riḥla al-maghribiyya*, 140.

city walls] has three iron doors." Like our author, he also writes that a moat surrounds the city, and that the moat was filled with water from the Mediterranean in the event of an attack.[246] Al-Nuwayrī (d. 775/1372) confirms this moat's existence in Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's time.[247] Some references to the city's defenses elsewhere in the text, such as the "seven tall watchtowers" our author locates in the north of the city (para. 8), also agree with what is known about Alexandria's seventh/thirteenth- or eighth/fourteenth-century cityscape.[248] But his emphatic description of the city's inaccessibility—not only the fortifications and the steadfast gatekeepers, but also the repeated interrogations to which the city's governor allegedly subjected him (para. 3)—serves to highlight the exclusiveness of Alexandria as a location of *ribāṭ* performance.

In fact, the text's opening paragraphs describe Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's enlisting in Alexandria's garrison as an initiation into a brotherhood of companions-in-arms. The governor's severe interrogations form a liminal stage our author had to pass through in order to join the garrison. Once he had successfully endured these interrogations, the governor is said to have assigned him to an army unit and to have given him expensive weapons and a horse (para. 3). Here, our author evidently weaves fictional elements into his text. In reality, voluntary warriors were not registered into army units but supported Ayyubid and early Mamluk armies as auxiliary forces.[249] They were not on a military payroll but were paid from the alms tax (*ṣadaqa*) and may have received a part of the war booty.[250] In Alexandria, volunteer warriors are known to have joined religious (often Sufi) communities, many of which preferred not to receive financial support from the state and lived in *ribāṭ*s located on the coast, in the city wall's towers, or in religiously meaningful locations, such as in or near the lighthouse.[251]

---

246. Al-Ẓāhirī, *Zubdat Kashf al-mamālik wa-bayān al-ṭuruq wa-l-masālik*, ed. Paul Ravaisse (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1894), 39.

247. Al-Nuwayrī, *al-Ilmām*, 3:212–14, esp. 213.

248. For these or similar watchtowers, called *ribāṭ*s, see Ibn Rusta, *Kitāb al-Aʿlāq al-nafīsa*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1892), 118; Isḥāq b. al-Ḥusayn, *Ākām al-marjān fī dhikr al-madāʾin al-mashhūra fī kull makān*, ed. Fahmī Saʿd (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1408/1988), 86; and al-Nuwayrī, *al-Ilmām*, 2:131–32, 152. As noted above, Ibn Jubayr, too, saw watchtowers in the city, but he does not specify their location. See Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 15.

249. Hamilton A. R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, ed. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 83–85; Reuven Amitai, "Foot Soldiers, Militiamen and Volunteers in the Early Mamluk Army," in *Texts, Documents and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D. S. Richards*, ed. Chase F. Robinson, 233–49 (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

250. Abbès Zouache, *Armées et combats en Syrie (491/1098–569/1174): Analyse comparée des chroniques médiévales latines et arabes* (Damascus: IFPO, 2008), 305, 308.

251. Al-Bakrī, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, ed. Adriaan P. van Leeuwen and André Ferré (Tunis: al-Dār al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Kitāb/al-Muʾassasa al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Tarjama wa-l-Taḥqīq wa-l-Dirāsāt "Bayt al-Ḥikma," 1992), 2:634 (§ 1058). See also the preceding notes and Éric Geoffroy, "Les milieux de la mystique musulmane à Alexandrie aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles," in *Alexandrie médiévale 2*, ed. Christian Décobert, 169–80 (Cairo: IFAO, 2002), 170–71; Nathan Hofer, *The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173–1325* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 52.

Part of the initiation, too, was that the governor reportedly explained to Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb the garrison's organization. The governor informed him that "[t]here are three hundred and sixty commanders in the city, each of whom commands three hundred and sixty individuals" (para. 3). Again, these words do not reflect Alexandria's military organization around the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century. The city's governor himself, for example, held the rank of "amīr of forty"; that is, he was entitled to the service of forty horsemen (the city probably also housed auxiliary forces who fell under the governor's command).[252] The governor's statement that "[e]ach commander patrols the city one day and night [of the year]" (see also para. 4) reveals the numerical symbolism in these words. Using the number 360, these passages convey the image of a city enjoying the year-round protection of a large garrison.[253] Paragraph 5, which emphasizes the governor's concern for the city's protection, drives the text's symbolism home when it states that the city walls have "three hundred and sixty towers that are … decorated with the king's name written in gold ink."

These passages concerning Alexandria's defenses serve more than one purpose. They describe Alexandria as a well-fortified city and its garrison as a military organization whose spiritual benefits (see para. 1) are restricted to those Muslims who are sincerely devoted to the city's protection. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ascribes the state of the city's fortifications and the size of its garrison to the local governor's commitment to protecting the city. It is perhaps not a coincidence that he identifies this governor as "Ayyūb al-Kurdī" (para. 2). Thus, he evokes the legacy of Ayyubid rule over Alexandria, especially that of Saladin, whose patronage of the city's defenses and especially his restoration of Alexandria's walls is well known.[254]

In addition to praising the city's defenses, the account also portrays Alexandria as a thoroughly Islamic city. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb again combines fact and fiction and uses his rounds as a literary frame. He stresses, for example, the city's large number of mosques and writes that he "saw in the city eight hundred mosques" (para. 5). That he includes this observation in his account is understandable: Alexandria was famous for its many mosques.[255] When he visited Alexandria in 578/1183, Ibn Jubayr noted that there could be as many as four or five mosques in one place. He also writes that because of their omnipresence, various estimates of the total number of mosques in the city circulated.[256] Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb himself writes, for instance, that people told him that the city counted 12,000 mosques (para. 5). Al-Harawī (d. 611/1215) also mentions various estimates. Whereas

---

252. Martina Müller-Wiener, *Eine Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias von 564/1169 bis in die Mitte des 9./15. Jahrhunderts: Verwaltung und innerstädtische Organisationsformen* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1992), 97.

253. Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 276.

254. Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Notes sur l'architecture musulmane d'Alexandrie," in *Alexandrie médiévale 1*, ed. Christian Décobert and Jean-Yves Empereur, 101–14 (Cairo: IFAO, 1998), 102–3; Müller-Wiener, *Eine Stadtgeschichte*, 14, 16.

255. See also Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-akhbāruhā*, ed. Charles C. Torrey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1922), 41–42, partially copied in al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara fī taʾrīkh Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, ed. Muḥammad A. Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1387/1967–68), 1:85.

256. Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 17.

one of his sources maintained that there are 20,000 mosques in Alexandria, Ibn Munqidh told him that their number is 12,000.[257] Likewise, Ibn Jubayr says he heard people claim the city houses 12,000 mosques but also notes that others maintained that there are 8,000 mosques in Alexandria.[258] No doubt, these are not real estimates but rather express reverence for Alexandria's Islamic character. Stressing the large number of mosques in a city was quite a common literary strategy that can be found in discussions concerning other cities as well.[259]

In addition to showcasing Alexandria's many mosques, the account emphasizes the city's many and esteemed religious authorities. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb writes in detail about Alexandria's scholars and their colleges, of which he mentions some by name and notes the number of students they attract (para. 8).[260] He is even more interested in Sufism, which flourished in Alexandria at the time when he composed the account and often involved (temporary) *ribāṭ* performance.[261] Indeed, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb claims to have heard "*dhikr* sessions as loud as [festivities celebrating] the Hajj, such that we thought that the [apocalyptic] Battle was taking place in the city" (para. 8). He also highlights the presence of many Sufi masters and writes that it is only these Sufi masters who deliver Friday sermons in Alexandria's congregational mosques (para. 5). Throughout the year, then, the city's Muslim community enjoys not only the alleged protection of 360 commanders and their troops but also the year-round religious guidance of those who have access to esoteric knowledge or "secrets" (para. 10) of their religion.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb also points to religiously significant sites in Alexandria and highlights noteworthy features of its real cityscape. For example, he refers to veneration of the city's western gate, called the Green Gate (*al-bāb al-akhḍar*), and the nearby graves of "fourteen hundred Muslim martyrs" who gave their lives for the cause of Islam (para. 8). Although this number of graves must probably be taken with a grain of salt, our author clearly refers to the cemetery of Waʿla, which was, in Ibn Khallikān's (d. 681/1282) words, "a graveyard within the circuit of the walls at the Green Gate where a good number of pious Muslims… are buried."[262] Our author writes that each Friday evening Alexandria's ruler used to organize a religious festival at the Green Gate (para. 8). Other sources confirm that the Green Gate was a site of religious significance. Al-Harawī notes, for instance, that people visit the gate for religious purposes.[263] Abū al-Fidāʾ (d. 732/1331) and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa write that the Green Gate is opened only on Fridays.[264] Other authors provide an etymology for the gate's

---

257. Al-Harawī, *al-Ishārāt*, 47–48, paraphrased in al-Ẓāhirī, *Zubda*, 40.

258. Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥla*, 17.

259. Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 74–75, with notes 64–65.

260. For the ʿAwfiyya college, see above. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb also mentions a Fakhriyya or Fakhr college, located near Alexandria's eastern gate and housing sixty students (para. 8); see note 213 above.

261. Geoffroy, "Les milieux."

262. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1397–98/1977–78), 1:106.

263. Al-Harawī, *al-Ishārāt*, 50.

264. Abū al-Fidāʾ, *Taqwīm al-buldān*, ed. Joseph T. Reinaud and William Mac Guckin de Slane, *Géographie d'Aboulféda: Texte arabe* (Paris: L'Imprimerie Royale, 1840), 105; Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār*, 1:179.

name that connects it with the age of prophets. The probably eighth/fourteenth-century or later *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-l-Iskandariyya* derives the gate's name from al-Khiḍr, the name of a Qurʾānic servant of God with which the name of the gate shares its grammatical root (*kh-ḍ-r*).[265] Possibly attesting to the antiquity of the Green Gate's association with al-Khiḍr, the third/ninth-century historian Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871) locates a "mosque of Dhū al-Qarnayn or al-Khiḍr at the city gate when you exit through the gate."[266] In light of the religious meaning placed upon the Green Gate and its venerated surroundings, it is not surprising that Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb writes that in the west of the city stands "a gate called the Gate of Blessing and al-Khiḍr's Gate," which Alexandria's ruler visits each Friday and to which he devotes considerable charity (para. 8). Most likely, these are alternative names for the Green Gate.

By describing Alexandria as possessing sturdy city walls and gates, a large and committed garrison, numerous mosques, colleges, and religious authorities, and venerated architecture in the first part of the account, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb depicts the city as a true bastion of Islam worthy of being defended.

Fulfillment of Apocalyptic Prophecies

From paragraph 6 onward, however, the text becomes grim. It describes the destruction of ancient monuments that once had supernatural qualities and protected Alexandria against enemy attacks. In contrast to earlier passages, which extoll the qualities of Alexandria's fortifications, those concerning these monuments highlight breaches in the city's defenses. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb does not fail to identify the source of this destruction and ascribes it to the activity of one Uhrayqil and his son. Uhrayqil is a diminutive form of Hiraql, that is, a pejorative reference to the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610–41) and his offspring. Although Muslim historical tradition generally offers a favorable view of this emperor,[267] in religious and especially apocalyptic literature the Heraclian dynasty represents Islam's archenemy who will initiate battles heralding the end of time.[268] Muslim apocalyptic literature holds that in one or two such battles, Muslims will fight this enemy in Alexandria, but the battles will nonetheless lead to the city's total destruction.[269] Our author

---

265. Pseudo-al-Wāqidī, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-l-Iskandariyya*, ed. Hendrik A. Hamaker (Leiden: S. and J. Luchtmans, 1825), 117–18. For the date of this text, see Christian Décobert, "La prise de Maryût par les Arabes: Conquête et conversion religieuse," in *Alexandrie médiévale 3*, ed. Jean-Yves Empereur and Christian Décobert, 145–70 (Cairo: IFAO, 2008), 146–50.

266. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 41, copied in al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara*, 1:85.

267. Lawrence I. Conrad, "Heraclius in Early Islamic Kerygma," in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. Gerrit J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte, 113–56 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002); Nadia El-Cheikh, "Muḥammad and Heraclius: A Study in Legitimacy," *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 5–21; and Walter E. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 14–17.

268. Michael Cook, "The Heraclian Dynasty in Muslim Eschatology," *Al-Qanṭara* 13 (1992): 3–23, and idem, *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies* 1 (1992): 23–47, at 30–32.

269. Jelle Bruning, "The Destruction of Alexandria: Religious Imagery and Local Identity in Early Islamic Egypt," in *Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean World: From Constantinople to Baghdad, 500-1000 CE*, ed. Jelle Bruning, Janneke H. M. de Jong, and Petra M. Sijpesteijn (forthcoming).

believes that these eschatological prophecies are now unfolding and presents the activity of Uhrayqil and his son as direct evidence. He writes about people who died for the cause of Islam during "the Battle" (*al-waqʿa*, para. 8), a clear reference to the so-called Battle of Alexandria (*waqʿat* or *malḥamat al-Iskandariyya*) frequently mentioned in apocalyptic lore.[270] Later in the account, he claims to have witnessed "the battle known as Uhrayqil," which caused severe damage to the city's lighthouse (para. 9). Although Uhrayqil's son died during this battle, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb describes the apocalyptic threat as real and permanent: "Each year," he writes, "Uhrayqil sends ... a hundred silent men" who are able to reach the city's central quarters and show reverence for Uhrayqil's deceased son (para. 8). Thus, the author stresses the contemporary urgency of defending Islam in Alexandria.

Our author locates this destruction at meaningful sites and uses literary themes known from other literature about Alexandria when describing the sites' destruction. For example, he mentions the existence of "a fortress locked with a large lock [or, many locks]" that had protected a wondrous copper broom (para. 7). He locates this fortress in the northeast of the city: it stands to the north of a hill called Kawm Īmās and near an otherwise unknown Mosque of the Chain.[271] The hill he refers to is probably Kawm al-Dīmās. Muslim authors from the sixth/twelfth century and later know this hill, which they call simply al-Dīmās,[272] as a graveyard in which a number of prominent scholars were interred.[273] Al-Dīmās was a site of some religious significance. The graveyard facilitated performance of burial rituals for those who were buried elsewhere. In his *Muʿjam al-safar*, al-Silafī writes that during the burial of the Alexandrian *qāḍī* Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Kinānī in 529/1135, a large crowd

270. E.g., Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād, *Kitāb al-Fitan wa-l-malāḥim*, ed. Majdī b. M. b. S. al-Shawrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1423/2002), 351–53 (nos. 1310-12); Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. ʿUmar b. Gh. al-ʿAmrawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1415–21/1995–2000), 12:444–45 (no. 1269), 68:227–28 (no. 9234); *al-Risāla al-ʿAwfiyya fī faḍl al-Iskandariyya* in Ibn Duqmāq, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, 5:116–17.

271. This mosque's name, Mosque of the Chain (*jāmiʿ al-silsila*), recalls a name given to the Western Harbor, "Harbor of the Chain" (*baḥr al-silsila* in al-Nuwayrī, *al-Ilmām*, e.g., 1:112; *marsā al-silsila* in Leo Africanus, *Description de l'Afrique*, trans. Alexis Épaulard [Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1956], 2:496). Étienne Combe, in a review of *The Crusades in the Later Middle Ages*, by ʿAzīz S. ʿAṭiyya, in *Bulletin de la Société Royale d'Archéologie d'Alexandrie* 32 (1938): 205–8, at 207–8 (referring to al-Nuwayrī, *al-Ilmām*, 3:214), rightly notes that this toponym dates to the mid-eighth/fourteenth century. Hence, it is unlikely to be related to our author's Mosque of the Chain. Today, al-Silsila is the name of the promontory east of the city's Eastern Harbor (ancient Akra Lochias). But although tenth/sixteenth-century sources refer, in addition to the Harbor of the Chain, also to a Gate of the Chain (Étienne Combe, "Notes de topographie et d'histoire alexandrine," *Bulletin de la Société Royale d'Archéologie d'Alexandrie* 36 [1946]: 120–45, at 121–22), I found no information that verifies the existence of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's Mosque of the Chain. Note that manuscript St calls this mosque the ʿAsaliyya Mosque, also unknown.

272. For the identification of al-Dīmās with one of Alexandria's two hills, see notes 275 and 276 below.

273. Al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-jumān fī taʾrīkh ahl al-zamān*, vol. 2: *ʿAṣr salāṭīn al-Mamālīk*, ed. Muḥammad M. Amīn (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya, 1431/2010), 2/2:108; al-Fāsī, *al-ʿIqd al-thamīn fī taʾrīkh al-balad al-amīn*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥ. al-Fiqqī, Fuʾād Sayyid, and Maḥmūd M. al-Ṭanāḥī (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1381–1406/1962–86), 2:241; Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1929–72), 11:194; al-Silafī, *Muʿjam al-safar*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh ʿU. al-Bārūdī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1414/1993), 259, 260, 315, 464.

"prayed over him in the graveyard of al-Dīmās" although the *qāḍī* himself was laid to rest in a private garden neighboring the graveyard.[274] Al-Dīmās also housed venerated religious architecture. In his book on pilgrimage sites, al-Harawī writes about the existence of a tomb of the prophet Jeremiah at al-Dīmās.[275] The Coptic synaxarium locates a church with relics of St. John the Baptist and the prophet Elisha on one of the city's two hills and reports that the church was known as al-Dīmās.[276] Without hard evidence, modern scholars often identify (Kawm) al-Dīmās with the northern or western slope of Kawm al-Dikka, where a Muslim graveyard has indeed been excavated.[277]

Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb reports that people told him about a miracle associated with the locked fortress north of Kawm Īmās: rubbish placed at the gate would miraculously be transferred to the top of the hill. Although this precise story is not known from other sources, he is drawing here on existing themes in literature about Alexandria.[278] The late Mamluk and early Ottoman historian Ibn Iyās (d. ca. 903/1524) provides the closest parallel to Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's story. In his discussion of the Muslim conquest of Alexandria, he includes an anecdote about "an ever-locked gate with twenty-four locks," whose location goes unmentioned. Egypt's Byzantine ruler at that time, al-Muqawqis, wished to open the gate but was strongly advised not to do so. When he eventually did open it, he found not the treasures he expected but instead images and inscriptions on the walls foretelling the establishment of Muslim rule in the year in which the gate was opened. In that same year, according to the anecdote, Muslims conquered Alexandria.[279] Using a similar motif, our

---

274. Al-Silafī, *Muʿjam al-safar*, 54.

275. Al-Harawī, *al-Ishārāt*, 47. When he visited the city in 987/1579, Alexandrians pointed Hans Jacob Breüning to a site at which the house of Jeremiah was believed to have stood and which had been turned into a mosque. He confirms that it stood on "a mountain"; see Hans Jacob Breüning, *Orientalische Reiß des edlen unnd besten Hans Jacob Breüning* [...] (Strasbourg: Carolus, 1612), 122.

276. *Le synaxaire arabe-jacobite (rédaction copte)*, ed. and trans. René Basset (in *Patrologia Orientalis* 1, 3, 11, 16, 17, 20), 1:346–47 [132–33], which also connects the church with one of the city's hills (*akwām*).

277. E.g., Combe, "Notes," 143–44; Mieczyslaw Rodziewicz, "Remarks on Kom el Demas in Alexandria," *Graeco-Arabica* 5 (1993): 315–19. For the graveyard, see Barbara Tkaczow, "The Historical Topography of Kom el-Dikka: Notes on Plans XII–XV," in *Fouilles polonaises à Kôm el-Dikka (1986–1987)*, ed. Zsolt Kiss et al., 131–43 (Warsaw: Centre d'Archéologie Méditerrannéenne de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences, 2000), 139–43, and recent archaeological reports in Emanuela Kulicka, "Islamic Necropolis at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria: Research in the 2010–2013 Seasons," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 24, no. 1 (2015): 62–72; Grzegorz Majcherek and Emanuela Kulicka, "Alexandria, Kom el-Dikka: Season 2014–2015," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 25 (2016): 33–63, at 53–62; Grzegorz Majcherek and Renata Kucharczyk, "Alexandria, Kom el-Dikka: Season 2016," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 26, no. 1 (2017): 37–58, at 38–45. See Ibn Jumayʿ, *Ṭabʿ al-Iskandariyya*, 54 for the location of Alexandria's (main) graveyards.

278. In addition to what follows, see also Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam's anecdote about ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ's clever entry into and escape from "the fortress in the bath (*dīmās*)" during the conquest of Alexandria. Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 77–78, copied in al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:445–46, and al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 19:304–5. Al-Ẓāhirī's description of the city's Dār al-Sulṭān as "always locked" (*Zubda*, 40) is not relevant in this context. He means that this building was reserved strictly for the sultan's use.

279. Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974–92), 1/1:106. Ibn Iyās's anecdote has its roots in a very similar story connected with the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, which can already be found in the third/ninth- and early fourth/tenth-century works

text claims that a spy sent by Uhrayqil opened the locked fortress and thus destroyed the monument's talisman.

The cessation of the miraculous activity associated with the locked fortress occurred together with that of another monument. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb writes about a basin decorated with a large variety of images in which a sage lay buried (para. 6). He locates the basin on the coast between Cleopatra's Needles. Before a Muslim king opened up the basin, it used to warn the city of approaching enemies and, in the event of their arrival, to scare them off. Benjamin of Tudela, who visited Alexandria around 565/1170, records a very similar monument in the same location. At the coast, he writes, stands

> a sepulchre of marble on which are engraved all manner of beasts and birds; an effigy is in the midst thereof, and all the writing is in ancient characters, which no one knows now. Men suppose that it is the sepulchre of a king who lived in early times before the Deluge.[280]

Describing why this basin/tomb and the locked fortress stopped performing their miracles, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb uses a literary theme commonly found in anecdotes about the destruction of the miraculous mirror on top of the city's lighthouse, to which we will return shortly. Like these anecdotes, our author ascribes the destruction of the city's marvels to a Byzantine emperor (Uhrayqil). As in some of these anecdotes, the Byzantine emperor had sent a spy who convinced the city's Muslim ruler of the presence of treasures in these monuments.[281] It is the Muslim ruler who eventually caused the monuments' destruction through his attempt to retrieve the treasures.[282]

But of all the city's monuments that Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb discusses, the Pharos, Alexandria's famous lighthouse, receives most attention—and understandably so. The lighthouse played a central role in Muslim collective memory of Alexandria's past. Tellingly, authors such as the fourth/tenth-century al-Masʿūdī and Ibn al-Kindī, but also the early seventh/thirteenth-century al-Harawī, record the popular idea that the Pharos had once stood literally in the center of the city,[283] possibly reflecting the idea that the lighthouse

---

of Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam (*Futūḥ Miṣr*, 206) and Ibn Khurdādhbih (*Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1889], 156–57). In later sources the anecdote exhibits a more elaborate narrative that is closer to Ibn Iyās's version; e.g., al-Masʿūdī (attr.), *Akhbār al-zamān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṣāwī (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd A. Ḥanafī, 1357/1938), 73; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān*, 5:327–28; Ibn al-Wardī, *Jazīrat al-ʿajāʾib wa-farīdat al-gharāʾib*, ed. Anwar M. Zannātī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 1428/2008), 74. For the territorialized articulation of Muslim power in this anecdote, see Travis Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam: Geography, Translation and the ʿAbbasid Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 46.

280. Benjamin of Tudela, *Itinerary*, 76–77 (English).

281. For such anecdotes involving a spy, see al-Qazwīnī, *Āthār al-bilād wa-akhbār al-ʿibād* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 145–46, and al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb fī al-muḍāf wa-l-mansūb*, ed. Muḥammad A. Ibrāhīm (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 1424/2003), 422.

282. See the references in notes 298–300 below.

283. Al-Masʿūdī, *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1894), 48; Ibn al-Kindī, *Faḍāʾil Miṣr*, ed. Ibrāhīm A. al-ʿAdawī and ʿAlī M. ʿUmar (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1391/1971), 51; al-Harawī, *al-Ishārāt*, 48; pseudo-Ibn Ẓuhayra, *al-Faḍāʾil al-bāhira fī maḥāsin Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā and Kāmil al-Muhandis (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1969), 57. See also Bruning, "Destruction of Alexandria."

stood at the center of the universe.[284] Other authors identified the Pharos as one of the buildings built by the Qurʾānic semi-prophet Dhū al-Qarnayn and, as such, considered it a precious remnant of the age of prophets and other God-sent messengers.[285] As we shall see, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's description of the Pharos shares many elements with descriptions of the lighthouse by other Muslim authors, including its partial destruction. But what sets the text apart from these other descriptions is that our author uses his description of the Pharos to bring home his argument about the urgency of pursuing *ribāṭ* in Alexandria.

The beginning of his description of the lighthouse is remarkable for its degree of detail. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb claims that the lighthouse stands in the center of four stories of vaults (*ʿuqūd*), for which he gives very precise measures. What he means here is not entirely clear. Perhaps this is a somewhat cryptic description of a cistern,[286] but it also recalls the idea that the lighthouse once stood on bridges or columns.[287] Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb continues with a detailed description, including measurements, of the ninety-nine stairs that allegedly lead up to the lighthouse. That no other source confirms this description is not important.[288] The details are a rhetorical device that is meant to give the impression that the author is intimately familiar with the monument he describes.[289]

According to our author, the lighthouse has many noteworthy features. These features resemble aspects of the Pharos's architecture as described by other authors, but our text is never identical to other descriptions of the lighthouse. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb writes, for

---

284. François de Polignac, "*Al-Iskandariyya*: Œil du monde et frontière de l'inconnu," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'École Française de Rome* 96 (1984): 425–39.

285. Faustina C. W. Doufikar-Aerts, "Alexander the Great and the Pharos of Alexandria in Arabic Literature," in *The Problematics of Power: Eastern and Western Representations of Alexander the Great*, ed. M. Bridges and J. Ch. Bürgel, 191–202 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996).

286. Most authors do not hold, however, that the lighthouse stood on a cistern. If they do not give a (somewhat) realistic impression of its foundation (see the discussion in Behrens-Abouseif, "Islamic History"), they mostly write that it stood on one or more crabs made of glass or marble; e.g., Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1885), 70, 118; Ibn Khurdādhbih, *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, 160; Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-nafīsa*, 80; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar*, ed. Charles Barbier de Meynard and Abel Pavet de Courteille, rev. Charles Pellat (Beirut: Publications de l'Université Libanaise, 1966–79), 2:105 (§ 837), cited in al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:423; cf. al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, 422. For possible interpretations of these crabs' symbolism, see de Polignac, "*Al-Iskandariyya*," 431–34. The idea that the lighthouse stood on a cistern finds a parallel in stories about a Muslim ruler who tore down the lighthouse in search of treasures that were said to lay hidden in storage rooms underneath it. See Aḥmad b. Muṭarrif, *al-Tartīb fī al-lugha*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. Fuhayd b. Rashūd al-Baqamī (MA thesis, Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurā, Mecca, 1412/1993), 2:19–20, (copied in Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār: L'Égypte, la Syrie, le Ḥiǧāz et le Yémen*, ed. Ayman F. Sayyid [Cairo: IFAO, 1985], 90–92); al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr fī ʿajāʾib al-barr wa-l-baḥr*, ed. Christian M. J. Fraehn and A. F. Mehren, *Cosmographie de Chems-ed-Din Abou Abdallah Mohammed ed-Dimichqui* (St Petersburg: M. M. Eggers/H. Schmitzdorff, 1866), 37; al-Ḥimyarī, *al-Rawḍ al-miʿṭār fī khabar al-aqṭār*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1975), 54–55; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 2:105–6 (§ 838), cited in al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:423–24, and al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 1:396–97; al-Qazwīnī, *Āthār al-bilād*, 145–46.

287. Isḥāq b. al-Ḥusayn, *Ākām al-marjān*, 85; al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:425; al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara*, 1:89.

288. For an overview of descriptions of the lighthouse in Muslim sources, see Behrens-Abouseif, "Islamic History."

289. Antrim, *Routes and Realms*, 62–70.

example, that the lighthouse possesses four doors equipped with pipes "which make a thunderous sound when they are turned [or rubbed]." Other sources, al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956) being the earliest currently known, speak of a statue standing on top of the lighthouse that makes a horrible sound when an enemy approaches the city so that Alexandria's inhabitants can prepare for battle.[290] Our author also describes a banner on top of the Pharos which turns with the mirror inside the lighthouse and claims that this mirror always points at the sun. Other sources do not speak of banners but do mention a second statue that always points at the sun, whatever its position in the sky.[291]

But the lighthouse's most noteworthy feature was its miraculous mirror, which, according to Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, allowed one to see over a distance of 8,000 miles. It is not surprising that he discusses the mirror (and its destruction) in detail. The mirror that supposedly stood on or, according to others, hung in Alexandria's lighthouse was widely considered (to have been) one of the wonders of the world.[292] Like the Pharos itself, the mirror was part and parcel of the collective memory of Alexandria in medieval Islam, and it features in many descriptions of the city. From the fourth/tenth century on, Muslim historians generally dated the mirror to one of two distinct periods in Egypt's history. Some ascribed the building of the mirror to an ancient Egyptian king.[293] A popular fourth/tenth- or fifth/eleventh-century text, mostly known as *Kitāb al-ʿAjāʾib* or *Akhbār al-zamān* and regularly cited by Ayyubid and Mamluk authors,[294] dates it to the reign of King Miṣrāyim, a great-grandson of Nūḥ and the first to rule Egypt after the Flood. His sons are said to have built in the center of Raqūda (to be understood as a predecessor of Alexandria[295]) a copula of gilded

---

290. Al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, 36–37; al-Ḥimyarī, *al-Rawḍ al-miʿṭār*, 54; Ibn Waṣīf Shāh, *Mukhtaṣar ʿajāʾib al-dunyā*, ed. Sayyid K. Ḥasan (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1421/2001), 185; al-Ibshīhī, *al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaẓraf*, ed. Mufīd M. Qumayḥa (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1406/1987), 2:306–7; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 2:105 (§ 837), cited in al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:423; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 1:396.

291. Al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, 36–37; Ibn Waṣīf Shāh, *Mukhtaṣar*, 185; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 2:105 (§ 837), cited in al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:423; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 1:396; al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara*, 1:89.

292. See, e.g., a popular tradition going back to ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 65/684) on the four wonders of the world in Ibn al-Faqīh, *Mukhtaṣar*, 72; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*, ed. Muḥammad ʿA. ʿAṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿA. ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1415/1995), 1:164 and 165; Ibn Khurdādhbih, *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, 115; Ibn Rusta, *al-Aʿlāq al-nafīsa*, 78; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr al-maʾthūr* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1432–33/2011), 3:488; al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, 422; see also Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār*, 92. Not everyone believed that this miraculous mirror had existed. Doubters included the author of the *Kitāb al-Baḥth*, ascribed to the second/eighth-century alchemist Jābir b. Ḥayyān (cited in Paul Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān: Contribution à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'Islam* [Cairo: IFAO, 1942–43], 1:296–97). Al-Harawī (*al-Ishārāt*, 48–49) argues that because the mirror no longer exists, the lighthouse cannot be considered a wonder.

293. In addition to what follows, Ibn Ḥawqal (writing between 331/942 and 378/988) ascribes the building of the lighthouse and its mirror to a mighty king in *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-arḍ*, ed. J. H. Kramers (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1938), 1:151. The fourth/tenth-century Isḥāq b. Ḥusayn ascribes it to ancient "sages" in *Ākām al-marjān*, 86.

294. The text is explicitly copied in al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:425. See also al-Bakrī, *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, 2:533 and 594 (§§ 881 and 988); Murtaḍā b. al-ʿAfīf, *L'Égypte de Murtadi fils du Gaphiphe*, trans. Pierre Vattier, introd. and annot. Gaston Wiet (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1953), 119; and al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 15:44.

295. Bruning, "Destruction of Alexandria."

brass on which they placed a mirror. But the text also credits other ancient Egyptian kings with building Alexandria's famous mirror.[296] Like Archimedes's mirror, it allowed those who controlled it to shoot beams of sunlight at approaching enemy ships.[297] However, the idea that Alexander the Great, in this context often identified as Dhū al-Qarnayn, built the city's lighthouse and its mirror enjoyed greater popularity and can be found in many sources. Like Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's mirror, the mirror Alexander the Great built was believed to have been a powerful instrument to identify approaching enemy ships from afar—especially those from Constantinople, the seat of Islam's Byzantine archenemy—and, like King Miṣrāyim's mirror, to burn these ships with sunlight.[298] In short, Alexandria's miraculous mirror was thought to have formed the city's most important defense mechanism.

In contrast to these sources, which describe the mirror as an artifact of the ancient past, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb claims that the mirror existed until very recently. He writes that he witnessed a Byzantine attack on the city, led by the son of Uhrayqil, during which the city's treasurer sided with the Byzantines and destroyed the mirror's ability to move. Having done this, the treasurer fled the city. Stories of the mirror's destruction circulated in various forms.[299] Our text's version is not known from other sources. Nonetheless, it shows its author's familiarity with more popular versions. A version al-Masʿūdī recorded in Egypt became widespread and has frequently been cited.[300] It involves an unnamed Byzantine emperor who sent a servant to make the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 86–96/705–15) believe that much wealth lay hidden underneath the Pharos. Only after the caliph had torn down the lighthouse's upper half in search of these treasures, and thus had destroyed the mirror, did Alexandrians realize that the caliph was being misled. By that time, the Byzantine emperor's servant had fled.[301] By and large, this version's plot is identical to that of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb: the Byzantine emperor sends someone (a servant or his son) to destroy the mirror; this person convinces a Muslim (the caliph or the city's treasurer) to cooperate; and after the successful destruction of the mirror someone flees

---

296. Al-Masʿūdī, *Akhbār al-zamān*, 131.

297. Ibn Waṣīf Shāh, *Mukhtaṣar*, 114 = al-Masʿūdī, *Akhbār al-zamān*, 154.

298. Aḥmad b. Muṭarrif, *al-Tartīb fī al-lugha*, 2:18–19 (copied in Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār*, 91); al-Gharnāṭī, *Tuḥfat al-albāb* (*wa-nukhbat al-aʿjāb*), ed. Gabriel Ferrand in *Journal asiatique* 207 (1925): 1–148 and 193–303, at 70–71; al-Ḥimyarī, *al-Rawḍ al-miʿṭār*, 54; Ibn Waṣīf Shāh, *Mukhtaṣar*, 114 = al-Masʿūdī, *Akhbār al-zamān*, 154; al-Ibshīhī, *al-Mustaṭraf*, 2:306–7; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 2:105–6 (§ 838), cited in al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:423–24; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 1:396; and al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara*, 1:89); Murtaḍā b. al-ʿAfīf, *L'Égypte*, 119; al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara*, 1:90–91; Yāqūt al-Rūmī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 1:186.

299. E.g., Benjamin of Tudela, *Itinerary*, 75 (English); Yāqūt al-Rūmī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 1:186–87. For short references to the mirror's destruction on the orders of a Byzantine emperor, see Isḥāq b. al-Ḥusayn, *Ākām al-marjān*, 86; al-Masʿūdī, *Akhbār al-zamān*, 154 (partially cited in al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:425, but ascribed to Ibn Waṣīf Shāh); al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1877), 211; Murtaḍā b. al-ʿAfīf, *L'Égypte*, 119–20; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Book of Travels (Safarnāma)*, trans. W. M. Thackston Jr. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 42.

300. E.g., in al-Bakrī, *al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*, 2:635 (§ 1059); al-Dimashqī, *Nukhbat al-dahr*, 37; al-Ibshīhī, *al-Mustaṭraf*, 2:307; al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1:423–24; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, 1:396–97; and al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara*, 1:89–90. Al-Qazwīnī, in *Āthār al-bilād*, 145–46, presents a very similar version.

301. Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 2:105–6 (§ 838).

the city. Our text's description of Alexandria's lighthouse, with its various noteworthy features, is firmly rooted in ideas circulating about Alexandria's past.

However, our text differs from these other descriptions of the Pharos in one significant way. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb uses the story about the mirror's destruction at the hands of the city's treasurer not to highlight the lighthouse's fantastic past but rather to mobilize contemporary Muslims for the defense of Alexandria against enemy attacks. Whereas, he writes, the preceding part of his description of the lighthouse was based on texts, he emphasizes that he himself found the lighthouse "inoperative [but] still matching that description." Indeed, the text implies that some of the Pharos's noteworthy features, such as the doors that make a sound or the banner that follows the course of the sun, still function. But perhaps more significantly, his story about the mirror's destruction stresses that now is the time to engage in *ribāṭ* in Alexandria. Other sources date the mirror's destruction to the first Islamic century. In addition to al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik, also the Egyptian governor ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (in office 19–25/640–45 and 38–43/658–64) and the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 65–86/685–705) appear as the Muslim ruler who ordered the Pharos's destruction.[302] By contrast, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb writes that he himself witnessed the city lose its most famous and important defense. Thus, he not only points out that the city is partially unprotected but also adds urgency to his message.

Conclusion

Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's account of Ayyubid or early Mamluk Alexandria is a rich and complex literary creation. The author exhibits some familiarity with the city itself (e.g., its gates, cemeteries, city walls, mosques, and colleges) and with stories about the city's ancient monuments and its place in eschatological schemes. This feature of the text makes it an interesting source on (ideas about) Alexandria and its cityscape in a rather tumultuous period of Egypt's history. At the same time, the author seems uninterested in or incapable of accurately describing the city's defenses and exaggerates the strength of its garrison. Indeed, accuracy seems not to be of prime importance for our author. He uses literary motifs and amplifies the role of religious authorities, notably Sufi masters, in his praise of Islam in Alexandria. Similarly, his description of the Pharos may share features with legends surrounding it but is far removed from the building's real sixth/twelfth- through eighth/fourteenth-century architecture. Despite being framed as an insider's description of the city, the account is evidently highly stylized.

In fact, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb wrote the account with the aim of mobilizing Muslims for *ribāṭ* performance in Alexandria. I have argued that he first praises the city's military and religious character in order to make the city an attractive destination for volunteer warriors before focusing on weaknesses in the city's defenses. The text reaches its dramatic climax with the destruction of part of the city's most famous monument, the Pharos, at

---

302. Al-Gharnāṭī, *Tuḥfat al-albāb*, 70–71; Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr*, 1/1:106–7; Ibn Waṣīf Shāh, *Mukhtaṣar*, 185; al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara*, 1:91. In al-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb*, 422, the Muslim ruler is not identified. Aḥmad b. Muṭarrif, *al-Tartīb fī al-lugha*, 2:18–20 (copied in Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār*, 90–92) refers to an unnamed Alexandrian ruler.

the hands of non-Muslim aggressors coming from outside Egypt. That Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ascribes the lighthouse's partial destruction to a recent attack on the city reveals that his concern for Alexandria's protection rests on heightened fears of a real attack. Such fears were certainly not groundless. Sicilians besieged Alexandria in 569–70/1174, and awareness among Crusaders of the strategic benefit that control over Egypt offered for their conquest of the Holy Land led to attacks on Egypt's Mediterranean coast, culminating in the Frankish occupation of Damietta in 615/1219 and 647/1249.[303] Because Alexandria itself hardly suffered attacks after 569–70/1174 until Pierre de Lusignan's sack of the city in 767/1365,[304] the account may voice fear of an assault on Alexandria as well as a general sense of anxiety about Frankish or Byzantine attacks on the Egyptian coast. Indeed, studies of prose and poetry written in this period show that the Frankish threat was sometimes understood in eschatological terms and gave impetus to the composition of a variety of literature, exhorting Muslims to defend the Realm of Islam against non-Muslim aggressors, regularly including fictitious elements and possessing a strong spatial character (such as local histories and *faḍāʾil* works).[305] Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's account seems to belong to this wave of literary composition. It calls for a highly localized reaction against what its author perceived as an eschatological threat to Islam.

---

303. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-taʾrīkh*, ed. Abū al-Fidāʾ ʿA. al-Qāḍī et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1407/1987), 10:375–80; al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad M. Ziyāda (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1934–73), 1/2:333–36.

304. Niall Christie, "Cosmopolitan Trade Centre or Bone of Contention? Alexandria and the Crusades, 487–857/1095–1453," *Al-Masāq* 26, no. 1 (2014): 49–61. Franks are said to have attacked the city's harbor in 658/1260; see Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, 7:148–49.

305. E.g., Abbès Zouache, "Les croisades en Orient: Histoire, mémoires," *Tabularia* 15 (2015): 75–119, at 80–87; Osman Latiff, *The Cutting Edge of the Poet's Sword: Muslim Poetic Responses to the Crusades* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 30–39, 172–83; Kenneth A. Goudie, *Reinventing* Jihād: Jihād *Ideology from the Conquest of Jerusalem to the End of the Ayyūbids (c. 492/1099–647/1249)* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 83–116.

Bibliography

Sources

Al-ʿAbdarī, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad. *Al-Riḥla al-maghribiyya.* Edited by Saʿd Bū Falāqa. Bona (ʿAnāba), Algeria: Manshūrāt Būna li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt, 1428/2007.

Abū al-Fidāʾ, Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlī. *Taqwīm al-buldān.* Edited by Joseph T. Reinaud and William Mac Guckin de Slane, *Géographie d'Aboulféda: Texte arabe.* Paris: L'Imprimerie Royale, 1840.

Abū Shāma, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ismāʿīl. *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn al-nūriyya wa-l-ṣalāḥiyya.* Edited by Ibrāhīm al-Zaybaq. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1418/1997.

Aḥmad b. Muṭarrif b. Isḥāq b. Ḥammād al-Kinānī. *Al-Tartīb fī al-lugha.* Edited by ʿAbd Allāh b. Fuhayd b. Rashūd al-Baqamī. MA thesis, Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurā, Mecca, 1412/1993.

Al-ʿAynī, Maḥmūd. *ʿIqd al-jumān fī taʾrīkh ahl al-zamān.* Vol. 2: *ʿAṣr salāṭīn al-Mamālīk.* Edited by Muḥammad M. Amīn. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya, 1431/2010.

Al-Bakrī, Abū ʿUbayd ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamalik.* Edited by Adriaan P. van Leeuwen and André Ferré. Tunis: al-Dār al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Kitāb/al-Muʾassasa al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Tarjama wa-l-Taḥqīq wa-l-Dirāsāt "Bayt al-Ḥikma," 1992.

Benjamin of Tudela. *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela.* Edited and translated by Marcus N. Adler. London: Henry Frowde/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907.

Breüning, Hans Jacob. *Orientalische Reiß des edlen unnd besten Hans Jacob Breüning* [...]. Strasbourg: Carolus, 1612.

Al-Dimashqī, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm. *Nukhbat al-dahr fī ʿajāʾib al-barr wa-l-baḥr.* Edited by Christian M. J. Fraehn and A. F. Mehren, *Cosmographie de Chems-ed-Din Abou Abdallah Mohammed ed-Dimichqui.* St Petersburg: M. M. Eggers/H. Schmitzdorff, 1866.

Al-Gharnāṭī, Abū Ḥāmid ʿAbd al-Raḥmān/Raḥīm. *Tuḥfat al-albāb* (*wa-nukhbat al-aʿjāb*). Edited by Gabriel Ferrand. *Journal asiatique* 207 (1925): 1–148 and 193–303.

Al-Fāsī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. *Al-ʿIqd al-thamīn fī taʾrīkh al-balad al-amīn.* Edited by Muḥammad Ḥ. al-Fiqqī, Fuʾād Sayyid, and Maḥmūd M. al-Ṭanāḥī. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1381–1406/1962–86.

Al-Hamdānī, al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad. *Ṣifat jazīrat al-ʿarab.* Edited by David H. Müller. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1884–91.

Al-Harawī, ʿAlī b. Abī Bakr. *Kitāb al-Ishārāt ilā maʿrifat al-ziyārāt.* Edited by Janine Sourdel-Thomine, *Guide des lieux de pèlerinage.* Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1953.

Al-Ḥimyarī, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Munʿim. *Al-Rawḍ al-miʿṭār fī khabar al-aqṭār.* Edited by Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1975.

Ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥakam, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd Allāh. *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-akhbāruhā*. Edited by Charles C. Torrey. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1922.

Ibn Abī Shayba, ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad. *Al-Kitāb al-muṣannaf fī al-aḥādīth wa-l-āthār*. Edited by ʿAbd al-Khāliq al-Afghānī, Sayyid Yūsuf ʿAlī, and Mukhtār Aḥmad al-Nadwī. Hyderabad: n.p./Mumbai: al-Dār al-Salafiyya, 1386–1403/1966–83.

———. *Al-Kitāb al-muṣannaf fī al-aḥādīth wa-l-āthār*. Edited by Muḥammad ʿA. Shāhīn. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1416/1995.

Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī, ʿAbd Allāh. *Al-Nawādir wa-l-ziyādāt ʿalā mā fī al-Mudawwana min ghayrihā min al-ummahāt*. Edited by Muḥammad Amīn Būkhubza. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1999.

Ibn ʿAsākir. *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*. Edited by ʿUmar b. Gh. al-ʿAmrawī. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1415–21/1995–2000.

Ibn al-Athīr, ʿAlī b. Muḥammad. *Al-Kāmil fī al-taʾrīkh*. Edited by Abū al-Fidāʾ ʿA. al-Qāḍī et al. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1407/1987.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh. *Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār fī gharāʾib al-amṣār wa-ʿajāʾib al-asfār*. Edited by ʿAbd al-Hādī al-Tāzī. Rabat: Akādīmiyyat al-Mamlaka al-Maghribiyya, 1417/1997.

Ibn Duqmāq, Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad. *Kitāb al-Intiṣār li-wāsiṭat ʿiqd al-amṣār*. Edited by Karl Vollers. Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīriyya, 1309–14/1893–96.

Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā. *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār: L'Égypte, la Syrie, le Ḥiǧāz et le Yémen*. Edited by Ayman F. Sayyid. Cairo: IFAO, 1985.

Ibn al-Faqīh, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad. *Mukhtaṣar kitāb al-Buldān*. Edited by Michael Jan de Goeje. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1885.

Ibn Ḥawqal, Abū al-Qāsim b. ʿAlī. *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-arḍ*. Edited by J. H. Kramers. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1938.

Ibn Iyās, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. *Badāʾiʿ al-zuhūr fī waqāʾiʿ al-duhūr*. Edited by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974–92.

Ibn al-Jawzī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī. *Al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*. Edited by Muḥammad ʿA. ʿAṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿA. ʿAṭā. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1415/1995.

Ibn Jubayr, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. *Riḥlat Ibn Jubayr*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.

Ibn Jumayʿ, Hibat Allāh b. Zayn. *Ṭabʿ al-Iskandariyya*. Edited by Murayzin S. ʿAsīrī and Saʿd ʿA. al-Bushrī. Mecca: Markaz al-Buḥūth wa-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1417/1997.

Ibn Khallikān, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad. *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān*. Edited by Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1397–98/1977–78.

Ibn Khurdādhbih, ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿAbd Allāh. *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-mamālik*. Edited by Michael Jan de Goeje. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1889.

Ibn al-Kindī, ʿUmar. *Faḍāʾil Miṣr*. Edited by Ibrāhīm A. al-ʿAdawī and ʿAlī M. ʿUmar. Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1391/1971.

Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad b. Mukarram. *Lisān al-ʿarab*. Bulaq: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīriyya, 1300–1308/1883–91.

Ibn Qudāma, ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad. *Al-Mughnī*. Edited by ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī and ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ M. al-Ḥilw. Riyadh: Dār ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1417/1997.

Ibn Rusta, Aḥmad b. ʿUmar. *Kitāb al-Aʿlāq al-nafīsa*. Edited by Michael Jan de Goeje. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1892.

Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, al-Ḥasan b. ʿUmar. *Faḍāʾil al-Iskandariyya*. Edited by Jelle Bruning. In preparation.

Ibn Taghrī Birdī, Yūsuf. *Al-Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1929–72.

Ibn al-Wardī, Sirāj al-Dīn ʿUmar. *Jazīrat al-ʿajāʾib wa-farīdat al-gharāʾib*. Edited by Anwar M. Zannātī. Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 1428/2008.

Ibn Waṣīf Shāh, Ibrāhīm. *Mukhtaṣar ʿajāʾib al-dunyā*. Edited by Sayyid K. Ḥasan. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1421/2001.

Al-Ibshīhī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. *Al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaẓraf*. Edited by Mufīd M. Qumayḥa. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1406/1987.

ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, Muḥammad b. Muḥammad (attr.). *Al-Bustān al-jāmiʿ li-jamīʿ tawārīkh ahl al-zamān*. Edited by ʿUmar ʿA. Tadmurī. Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 1423/2002.

Isḥāq b. al-Ḥusayn. *Ākām al-marjān fī dhikr al-madāʾin al-mashhūra fī kull makān*. Edited by Fahmī Saʿd. Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1408/1988.

Leo Africanus. *Description de l'Afrique*. Translated by Alexis Épaulard. Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1956.

Al-Maqrīzī. Aḥmad b. ʿAlī. *Ittiʿāẓ al-ḥunafāʾ bi-akhbār al-aʾimma al-fāṭimiyyīn al-khulafāʾ*. Edited by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl. Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyya, 1416/1996.

———. *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*. Edited by Muḥammad al-Yaʿlāwī. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1411/1991.

———. *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk*. Edited by Muḥammad M. Ziyāda. Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1934–73.

———. *Al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-l-iʿtibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-l-āthār.* Edited by Ayman F. Sayyid. London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2002–3.

Al-Masʿūdī, ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn (attr.). *Akhbār al-zamān.* Edited by ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṣāwī. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd A. Ḥanafī, 1357/1938.

———. *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf.* Edited by Michael Jan de Goeje. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1894.

———. *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar.* Edited by Charles Barbier de Meynard and Abel Pavet de Courteille, revised by Charles Pellat. Beirut: Publications de l'Université Libanaise, 1966–79.

Al-Mundhirī, ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm b. ʿAbd al-Qawī. *Al-Targhīb wa-l-tarhīb min al-ḥadīth al-sharīf.* Edited by Muṣṭafā M. ʿImāra. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1388/1968.

Al-Muqaddasī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm.* Edited by Michael Jan de Goeje. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1877.

Murtaḍā b. al-ʿAfīf. *L'Égypte de Murtadi fils du Gaphiphe.* Translated by Pierre Vattier, introduced and annotated by Gaston Wiet. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1953.

Al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-Malik. *Kanz al-ʿummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afʿāl.* Edited by Ṣafwat al-Saqqā and Bakrī al-Ḥayyānī. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1405–7/1985–86.

Nāṣir-i Khusraw. *Book of Travels (Safarnāma).* Translated by W. M. Thackston Jr. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād. *Kitāb al-Fitan wa-l-malāḥim.* Edited by Majdī b. M. b. S. al-Shawrī. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1423/2002.

Al-Nuwayrī, Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab.* Edited by Aḥmad Zakī Bāshā et al. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya/al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1342–1418/1923–97.

Al-Nuwayrī, Muḥammad b. Qāsim. *Kitāb al-Ilmām bi-l-iʿlām fī-mā jarat bihi al-aḥkām wa-l-umūr al-maqḍiyya fī waqʿat al-Iskandariyya.* Edited by Étienne Combe and ʿAzīz S. ʿAṭiyya. Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1968–76.

Pseudo-Ibn Ẓuhayra. *Al-Faḍāʾil al-bāhira fī maḥāsin Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira.* Edited by Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā and Kāmil al-Muhandis. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1969.

Pseudo-al-Wāqidī. *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-l-Iskandariyya.* Edited by Hendrik A. Hamaker. Leiden: S. and J. Luchtmans, 1825.

Al-Qalqashandī, Aḥmad b. ʿAlī. *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ.* Edited by Muḥammad Q. al-Baqlī. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1331–38/1913–19.

Al-Qazwīnī, Zakariyā b. Muḥammad. *Āthār al-bilād wa-akhbār al-ʿibād.* Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.

Al-Sakhāwī, Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. *Al-Ajwiba al-murḍiya.* Edited by Muḥammad I. M. Ibrāhīm. Riyadh: Dār al-Rāya, 1418/1997–98.

Al-Silafī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad. *Muʿjam al-safar.* Edited by ʿAbd Allāh ʿU. al-Bārūdī. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1414/1993.

Al-Suyūṭī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. *Al-Durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr al-maʾthūr.* Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1432–33/2011.

———. *Ḥusn al-muḥāḍara fī taʾrīkh Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira.* Edited by Muḥammad A. Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1387/1967–68.

———. *Jāmiʿ al-aḥādīth: Al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr wa-zawāʾiduhu wa-l-Jāmiʿ al-kabīr.* Edited by ʿAbbās A. Ṣaqr and Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Jawwād. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1414/1994.

Le synaxaire arabe-jacobite (rédaction copte). Edited and translated by René Basset. In *Patrologia Orientalis* 1, 3, 11, 16, 17, 20 (1904–29).

Al-Ṭabarānī, Sulaymān b. Aḥmad. *Al-Muʿjam al-kabīr.* Edited by Ḥamdī ʿA. al-Salafī. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1344/2001–2.

Al-Thaʿālibī, ʿAbd al-Malik b. Muḥammad. *Thimār al-qulūb fī al-muḍāf wa-l-mansūb.* Edited by Muḥammad A. Ibrāhīm. Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 1424/2003.

ʿUmāra al-Yamanī. *Al-Nukat al-ʿaṣriyya fī akhbār al-wuzarāʾ al-miṣriyya.* Edited by Hartwig Derenbourg in *ʿOumara du Yémen: Sa vie et son oeuvre*, vol. 1: *Autobiographie et récits sur les vizirs d'Égypte.* Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1897.

Yāqūt al-Rūmī. *Muʿjam al-buldān.* Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1397/1977.

Al-Ẓāhirī, Khalīl b. Shāhīn. *Zubdat Kashf al-mamālik wa-bayān al-ṭuruq wa-l-masālik.* Edited by Paul Ravaisse. Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1894.

Studies

Amitai, Reuven. "Foot Soldiers, Militiamen and Volunteers in the Early Mamluk Army." In *Texts, Documents and Artefacts: Islamic Studies in Honour of D. S. Richards*, edited by Chase F. Robinson, 233–49. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Antrim, Zayde. *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Bashear, Suliman. "Apocalyptic and Other Materials on Early Muslim-Byzantine Wars: A Review of Arabic Sources." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser., 1, no. 2 (1991): 173–207.

Behrens-Abouseif, Doris. "The Islamic History of the Lighthouse of Alexandria." *Muqarnas* 23 (2006): 1–14.

———. "Notes sur l'architecture musulmane d'Alexandrie." In *Alexandrie médiévale 1*, edited by Christian Décobert and Jean-Yves Empereur, 101–14. Cairo: IFAO, 1998.

———. "Topographie d'Alexandrie médiévale." In *Alexandrie médiévale 2*, edited by Christian Décobert, 113–26. Cairo: IFAO, 2002.

Blau, Joshua. *A Grammar of Christian Arabic Based Mainly on South-Palestinian Texts from the First Millennium*. Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1966–67.

Brauer, Ralph W. *Boundaries and Frontiers in Medieval Muslim Geography*. Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1995.

Bruning, Jelle. "The Destruction of Alexandria: Religious Imagery and Local Identity in Early Islamic Egypt." In *Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean World: From Constantinople to Baghdad, 500–1000 CE*, ed. Jelle Bruning, Janneke H. M. de Jong, and Petra M. Sijpesteijn. Forthcoming.

Cahen, Claude. "Un récit inédit du vizirat de Dirghām." *Annales islamologiques* 8 (1969): 27–46.

Christie, Niall. "Cosmopolitan Trade Centre or Bone of Contention? Alexandria and the Crusades, 487–857/1095–1453." *Al-Masāq* 26, no. 1 (2014): 49–61.

Combe, Étienne. "Notes de topographie et d'histoire alexandrine." *Bulletin de la Société royale d'archéologie d'Alexandrie* 36 (1946): 120–45.

———. Review of *The Crusades in the Later Middle Ages*, by ʿAzīz S. ʿAṭiyya. *Bulletin de la Société Royale d'Archéologie d'Alexandrie* 32 (1938): 205–8.

Conrad, Lawrence I. "Abraha and Muḥammad: Some Observations Apropos of Chronology and Literary *Topoi* in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50, no. 2 (1987): 225–40.

———. "Heraclius in Early Islamic Kerygma." In *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, edited by Gerrit J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte, 113–56. Leuven: Peeters, 2002.

Cook, Michael. "Eschatology and the Dating of Traditions." *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies* 1 (1992): 23–47.

———. "The Heraclian Dynasty in Muslim Eschatology." *Al-Qanṭara* 13 (1992): 3–23.

De Polignac, François. "*Al-Iskandariyya*: Œil du monde et frontière de l'inconnu." *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'École Française de Rome* 96 (1984): 425–39.

Décobert, Christian. "La prise de Maryût par les Arabes: Conquête et conversion religieuse." In *Alexandrie médiévale 3*, edited by Jean-Yves Empereur and Christian Décobert, 145–70. Cairo: IFAO, 2008.

Doufikar-Aerts, Faustina C. W. "Alexander the Great and the Pharos of Alexandria in Arabic Literature." In *The Problematics of Power: Eastern and Western Representations of Alexander the Great*, edited by M. Bridges and J. Ch. Bürgel, 191–202. Bern: Peter Lang, 1996.

Dozy, Reinhart. *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes.* 2nd ed. Leiden: E. J. Brill/Paris: Maisonneuve, 1927.

Eger, Asa. "Ḥiṣn, Ribāṭ, Thaghr or Qaṣr? Semantics and Systems of Frontier Fortifications in the Early Islamic Period." In *The Lineaments of Islam: Studies in Honor of Fred McGraw Donner*, ed. Paul M. Cobb, 427–55. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

EI[2] = *Encyclopaedia of Islam.* 2nd ed. Edited by P. J. Bearman et al. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960-2004.

EI[3] = *Encyclopaedia of Islam Three.* Edited by Kate Fleet et al. Leiden: Brill, 2007-2020.

El-Cheikh, Nadia M. "Muḥammad and Heraclius: A Study in Legitimacy." *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 5–21.

Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics. Edited by Kees Versteegh. Leiden: Brill, 2006-9.

Frenkel, Miriam. "Medieval Alexandria: Life in a Port City." *Al-Masāq* 26, no. 1 (2014): 5–35.

Geoffroy, Éric. "Les milieux de la mystique musulmane à Alexandrie aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles." In *Alexandrie médiévale 2*, edited by Christian Décobert, 169–80. Cairo: IFAO, 2002.

Gibb, Hamilton A. R. *Studies on the Civilization of Islam.* Edited by Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.

Goudie, Kenneth A. *Reinventing* Jihād*: Jihād Ideology from the Conquest of Jerusalem to the End of the Ayyūbids (c. 492/1099–647/1249).* Leiden: Brill, 2019.

Hinz, Walther. *Islamische Masse und Gewichte umgerechnet ins metrische System.* Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955.

Hofer, Nathan. *The Popularisation of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, 1173–1325.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

Kaegi, Walter E. *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Kraus, Paul. *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān: Contribution à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'Islam.* Cairo: IFAO, 1942–43.

Kulicka, Emanuela. "Islamic Necropolis at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria: Research in the 2010–2013 Seasons." *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 24, no. 1 (2015): 62–72.

Lane, Edward W. *An Arabic-English Lexicon Derived from the Best and Most Copious Eastern Sources.* London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–93.

Latiff, Osman. *The Cutting Edge of the Poet's Sword: Muslim Poetic Responses to the Crusades.* Leiden: Brill, 2017.

Leiser, Gary. "The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and Mudarrisūn, 495–647/1101–1249." PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1976.

Majcherek, Grzegorz, and Renata Kucharczyck. "Alexandria, Kom el-Dikka: Season 2016." *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 26, no. 1 (2017): 37–58.

Majcherek, Grzegorz, and Emanuela Kulicka. "Alexandria, Kom el-Dikka: Season 2014–2015." *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 25 (2016): 33–63.

Müller-Wiener, Martina. *Eine Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias von 564/1169 bis in die Mitte des 9./15. Jahrhunderts: Verwaltung und innerstädtische Organisationsformen.* Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1992.

Picard, Christophe, and Antoine Borrut. "*Râbata, ribât, râbita*: Une institution à reconsidérer." In *Chrétiens et musulmans en Méditerranée médiévale (VIIIe–XIIIe siècle): Échanges et contacts*, edited by Nicolas Prouteau and Philippe Sénac, 33–65. Poitiers: Université de Poitiers, Centre d'Études Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale, 2003.

Rodziewicz, Mieczyslaw. "Remarks on Kom el Demas in Alexandria." *Graeco-Arabica* 5 (1993): 315–19.

Tkaczow, Barbara. "The Historical Topography of Kom el-Dikka: Notes on Plans XII–XV." In *Fouilles polonaises à Kôm el-Dikka (1986–1987)*, edited by Zsolt Kiss et al., 131–43. Warsaw: Centre d'Archéologie Méditerrannéenne de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences, 2000.

Sālim, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. *Taʾrīkh al-Iskandariyya wa-ḥaḍāratihā fī al-ʿaṣr al-islāmī.* Alexandria: Muʾassasat Shabāb al-Jāmiʿa, 1982.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *The Mystery of Numbers.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Walker, Paul E. "Fāṭimid Alexandria as an Entrepôt in the East-West Exchange of Islamic Scholarship." *Al-Masāq* 26, no. 1 (2014): 36–48.

Wright, William. *Arabic Grammar.* 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896–98.

Zadeh, Travis. *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam: Geography, Translation and the ʿAbbasid Empire.* London: I. B. Tauris, 2011.

Zouache, Abbès. *Armées et combats en Syrie (491/1098–569/1174): Analyse comparée des chroniques médiévales latines et arabes.* Damascus: IFPO, 2008.

———. "Les croisades en Orient: Histoire, mémoires." *Tabularia* 15 (2015): 75–119.

The Rebellious Son:
Umayyad Hereditary Succession
and the Origins of Ḥijāzī Opposition*

Abed el-Rahman Tayyara
Cleveland State University

(a.tayyara@csuohio.edu)

Abstract

This article concerns early representations in Arabic-Islamic sources of Ḥijāzī opposition to the dynastic succession initiated by Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān shortly before his death in 41/661. The study emphasizes the importance of Qurʾānic exegesis for understanding the origin of the Ḥijāzī-Umayyad debate over rightful caliphal succession. It also demonstrates that examining how this episode is depicted in various literary genres offers a wider perspective on the construction of historical narratives in terms of provenance, protagonists, and objectives. The analysis of tafsīr *interpretations of Q 46:17, which serve as the article's underpinning, reveals that the Umayyad court promoted the view that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr was the rebellious son mentioned in this verse. Depictions of this dispute in the* ḥadīth, ansāb, *and* adab *genres clearly connect Marwān b. al-Ḥakam with this interpretation after ʿAbd al-Raḥmān questioned Muʿāwiya's appointment of his son Yazīd as his successor. The portrayals of the Ḥijāzī-Umayyad debate in* taʾrīkh *accounts represent a different perspective, one that shows a transition from a tribal and provincial setting to a broader caliphal political framework. The gradual shift from a reliance on Medinan transmitters to a focus on Iraqi authorities testifies to this orientation, as does the appearance of new leading protagonists. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's central role as a leader of the Ḥijāzī opposition to the Umayyads in the* tafsīr, ḥadīth, *and* adab *literature becomes secondary and overshadowed by other Ḥijāzī figures, particularly ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr.*

1. Introduction

The establishment of the Umayyad caliphate by Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (r. 41–60/661–680) represents a new stage in early Islamic history. Not only did he come to power under contentious circumstances, but he also initiated disputed religio-political transformations.[1]

His most controversial venture was turning the office of the caliph into a dynastic monarchy by asking Muslims to pledge allegiance to his oldest son Yazīd (r. 60–64/680–683). This shift also brought about modifications to the succession traditions established by previous caliphs,[2] particularly Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (r. 11–13/632–634) and ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13–23/634–644). Besides hereditary succession, Muʿāwiya also introduced changes to the accession ritual[3] and the oath of allegiance (bayʿa) ceremony.[4] Thus, the question of rightful succession and legitimate leadership lay at the center of Islamic religio-political discourses. The main opposition to Muʿāwiya's plan for dynastic succession came from the Ḥijāz,[5] and it was spearheaded particularly by Medinan leaders. In response, the Umayyads adopted certain strategies to silence opposition: they used force and constructed counternarratives[6] that could bestow religio-political legitimacy upon their caliphate.[7]

This article examines portrayals of the Ḥijāzī opposition to Muʿāwiya's initiation of dynastic succession in early Islamic sources from different literary perspectives. It pivots around the analysis of early interpretations of Qurʾān 46:17, seeking to identify connections between the Umayyad-Ḥijāzī dispute over succession and the circulation of competing interpretations regarding the identity of the rebellious son mentioned in this verse. It also

et premiers développements de l'historiographie jusqu'au II/VIII siècle (Paris: Sindbad-Actes Sud, 2004), 38; Najam Haider, "Muʿāwiya in Ḥijāz: The Study of a Tradition," in *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought: Studies in Honor of Professor Hossein Modarressi*, ed. Michael Cook et al., 43–64 (New York: Palgrave, 2013).

2. Hugh Kennedy, *Caliphate: A History of an Idea* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 34–38; Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 81–83; Stephen Humphreys, *Muʿawiya ibn Abi Sufyan: From Arabia to Empire* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 98–101; Khaled Keshk, *The Historians' Muʿāwiya: The Depiction of Muʿāwiya in the Early Islamic Sources* (Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008), 142–75.

3. Muʿāwiya's accession ritual was a combination of Roman Christian kingship and Ḥijāzī religio-political traditions. See Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, 89–90.

4. Since the inception of the caliphate the *bayʿa* served as the central ritual through which Muslim dignitaries and tribal leaders pledged allegiance to the newly elected caliph. Turning the caliphate into a hereditary position, the Umayyads introduced the institution of *wilāyat al-ʿahd* (succession). In doing so, they transformed the *bayʿa* "from a consensus-based, tribal custom into an instrument of monarchic power." Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, 40–44, 83.

5. For a good discussion on this phase of Islamic history, see Humphreys, *Muʿawiya ibn Abi Sufyan*, 77–84; Matthew Gordon, *The Rise of Islam* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 33–35; Mizrap Polat, *Der Umwandlungsprozess vom Kalifat zur Dynastie: Regierungspolitik und Religion beim ersten Umayyadenherrscher Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), 56–65; Gerald Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate, AD 661–750* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1987), 34–35.

6. For the use of the past and genealogy, see Cheddadi, *Les Arabes*, 55–63.

7. For discussions on the Umayyads' concept of caliphate (*khilāfa*) and the religious foundations of their political power, see Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 24–42, 58–80; Uri Rubin, "Prophets and Caliphs: The Biblical Foundation of the Umayyad Authority," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, ed. Herbert Berg, 87–99 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Fred Donner, "Umayyad Efforts at Legitimization: The Umayyads' Silent Heritage," in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, ed. Antoine Borrut and Paul Cobb, 187–211 (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Wadad al-Qadi, "The Religious Foundation of Late Umayyad Ideology and Practice," in *The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures*, ed. Fred Donner, 37–79 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

explores how the interplay between these Qurʾānic commentaries and other literary genres can enhance our understanding of the dynamics affecting narrative construction in terms of arrangements, settings, main characters, motives, and objectives. This study thereby touches on a number of topics pertinent to the study of the formative period of Islam. Such is the case with power relationships between the Umayyad central government and regional Ḥijāzī leadership,[8] the emergence of new Islamic religious elite,[9] and the transmission of reports from the Ḥijāz (particularly Medina) to other centers of learning, such as Basra and Kufa.[10] The examination of these themes also offers insights into the evolution of early Islamic historical writing.

Methodologically, the article rests primarily on a source-critical comparative analysis of relevant reports. The evaluation of the chains of transmission (*isnād*s) and relevant biographical details about the narrators as well as about some protagonists are essential to a full appreciation of the provenance, evolution, and reliability of these reports. Diverse literary genres, such as Qurʾānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*), belles-lettres (*adab*), and historical narratives (*akhbār)*, are vital to this study*. Before we analyze the different views of Q 46:17 presented in the commentaries, a few words ought to be said about modern scholarship on the Umayyad period.

2. The Umayyads in Modern Scholarship

The Umayyad caliphate represents a significant stage in the formative period of Islam and one that is regarded as controversial by modern scholars. The complexity of this subject stems from the nature of the early Islamic sources, which are not contemporaneous to the events they purport to describe. Two major procedural premises inform modern scholarship on this period, the first of which concerns the question of the authenticity of early Islamic traditions. Second, scholars differ on the methodological approaches and strategies best suited to investigating this stage of Islamic history. This debate permeates all areas of Islamic studies, including Qurʾānic studies,[11] Qurʾānic exegesis,[12] prophetic

---

8. For discussion on the relations between caliphs and Ḥijāzī elites during the second/eighth century, see Harry Munt, "Caliphal Imperialism and Hijazi Elites in the Second/Eighth Century," *al-Masāq* 28 (2016): 6–21.

9. Asad Ahmed applies matrilineal lineages to examine the sociopolitical networks that five Ḥijāzī families developed during the Umayyad and eary Abbasid period. See *The Religious Elite of the Early Islamic Hijaz: Five Prosopographical Case Studies* (Oxford, 2011).

10. Medina was the first center of learning in Islam, and many Companions and Successors moved from there to the two Iraqi cities of Kufa and Basra. Scott Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam: The Legacy of the Generation of Ibn Saʿd, Ibn Maʿīn, and Ibn Ḥanbal* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 221–37, 332–58.

11. Angelika Neuwirth, "Qurʾan and History: A Disputed Relationship; Some Reflections on Qurʾanic History and History of the Qurʾan," *Journal of Qurʾānic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2003): 1–18, esp. 1–11.

12. For an informative discussion about this debate, see Harald Motzki, *Analysing Muslim Traditions: Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghāzī Ḥadīth* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 231–303; idem, "The Question of the Authenticity of Muslim Traditions Reconsidered: A Review Article," in *Method and Theory*, ed. Herbert Berg, 211–57; Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (Richmond: Curzon, 2003), 6–64; C. H. M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qurʾānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 41–61.

tradition, jurisprudence,[13] and historical narratives.[14]

Besides the question of the reliability of the sources, scholars of the Umayyad caliphate face two additional obstacles. The first is that almost all materials available on the Umayyads were composed during the caliphate of their sworn enemies, the Abbasids. Hence, the construction of the Umayyads' historical memory was greatly inspired by an Abbasid ideological agenda that manipulated authors' historical objectives. Second, these Abbasid-inspired portrayals of the Umayyads, being composed in Iraq, were geographically distant from the center of the Umayyad caliphate.[15] Modern scholars, therefore, have to resort to more effective methodologies and strategies for a better understanding of the Umayyad period.[16] The application of different genres to illuminate the Umayyad-Ḥijāzī dispute over hereditary succession is this article's methodological contribution.

3. Who Is the Rebellious Son in Qurʾān 46:17?

This section considers divergent views on the identity of the rebellious son in early commentaries on Qurʾān 46:17 (*Sūrat al-Aḥqāf*). The verse reads:

> The one who said to his parents: "Uff to you; are you promising me that I will be raised up when generations before me had already passed while they cried for the help of God?" [The parents' response:] "Woe to you! Believe! Indeed, the promise of God is true." But he said: "These are nothing but the tales of previous generations."

The verse depicts a disobedient son whom his devout parents are entreating to renounce paganism and embrace the path of God. The son not only rudely defies these appeals but also dismisses the imminence of the Day of Judgment as a worthless tale of the ancients. Besides the theme of infidelity (*kufr*), the verse emphasizes rebelliousness to parents (*ʿuqūq*), which amounts to a grave sin in Islam.[17] The Qurʾānic exegetical tradition is full of references to this verse, seemingly, as we shall see, for its political implications. We ought to remember

---

13. Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*, trans. Marion Katz (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1–49.

14. Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1998), 1–31; Albrecht Noth and Lawrence Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, trans. Michael Bonner (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1994), 2–25.

15. Steven Judd, *Religious Scholars and the Umayyads: Piety-Minded Supporters of the Marwānid Caliphate* (London: Routledge, 2014), 3–20; Antoine Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides (v. 72–193/692–909)* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 11–37; idem, "The Future of the Past: Historical Writing in Early Islamic Syria and the Umayyad Memory," in *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam*, ed. Alain George and Andrew Marsham, 275–300 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

16. Tayeb El-Hibri, "The Redemption of Umayyad Memory by the ʿAbbāsids," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 61, no. 4 (2002): 241–65; Antoine Borrut, "La memoria omeyyade: Les Omeyyades entre souvenir et oubli dans les sources narratives islamiques," in Borrut and Cobb, *Umayyad Legacies*, 25–61, esp. 33–35.

17. The Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* literature are full of admonitory references to rebelliousness to parents. See Qurʾān 2:83; 4:36; 17:23–24; 29:6; 29:14; 31:14; 46:15. See also ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf* (Beirut: al-Majlis al-ʿIlmī, 1983), 11:163–67; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir and Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Bāqī (Cairo: Dār Ibn al-Haytham, 2004), 707–8 (nos. 5975–77).

that the early *tafsīr* tradition emerged initially to provide brief lexical explanations and clarity regarding syntactical ambiguities in selected Qurʾānic verses.[18] The use of Qurʾānic exegesis to gain political profit seems to have arisen at a later stage.[19]

Early Qurʾānic commentaries on Q 46:17, which can be traced back as early as to the mid-second/eighth century, center on the identity of the rebellious son in this verse. The first of four major interpretations identifies the disobedient son as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr (d. 53/673). This view, henceforth referred to as the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative, is the preponderant one in the commentaries. The second interpretation reflects early counterreports to the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative. The third view associates the disobedient son in Q 46:17 with other sons of Abū Bakr. The fourth position sees the rebellious son as a broad concept, unconnected to any specific individual.

An examination of the transmission of these views contributes to understanding their provenance and evolution. The authorities affiliated with these interpretations are, as we shall see, absent from commentaries composed before the beginning of the third/ninth century, particularly in presentations of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative. Identifying the authorities for these competing views involves dealing with a number of contradictions and inconsistencies, especially as few of these *tafsīr* accounts provide full *isnāds.* Finally, Basran scholars, who maintained scholarly connections with Medinan authorities, are notably present in the transmission histories of these reports. The following subsections offer a detailed analysis of the origins and evolution of the four interpretations of Q 46:17.

3.1 The ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Narrative

The identification of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr with the rebellious son in Q 46:17 is, as previously mentioned, the predominant view in early Islamic *tafsīr* works. Given his centrality to these interpretations, it is instructive first to outline his biography. He was the oldest son of the first caliph, Abū Bakr, and the full brother of ʿĀʾisha (d. 58/678), the Prophet's wife. He had also two half-brothers, ʿAbd Allāh (d. 8/630) and Muḥammad (d. 38/658), and two half-sisters, Asmāʾ (d. 73/692) and Umm Kulthūm. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's pre-Islamic past somewhat tarnished his biographical image. First, during the battles of Badr and Uḥud he sided with the Quraysh against the Muslims, and he even sought to meet his

---

18. There is debate among modern scholars about how and when the *tafsīr* tradition began. Some trace its genesis to Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 67/687). However, others consider him a mythical figure and they place the beginning of the exegetical tradition somewhere in the second/eighth century. Claude Gilliot, "The Beginnings of Qurʾanic Exegesis," in *The Qurʾan: Formative Interpretation*, ed. Andrew Rippin, 1–27 (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1999); Motzki, *Analysing Muslim Traditions*, 231–303; Fred Leemhuis, " Origins and Early Development of the *Tafsīr* Tradition," In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, ed. Andrew Rippin, 13–30 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013).

19. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar*, 63–65, 84–89; Gilliot, "Beginnings of Qurʾanic Exegesis," 20–22; Y. Goldfeld, "The Development of Theory on Qurʾānic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship," *Studia Islamica* 67 (1988): 5–27, esp. especially 14–16; idem, "Discussion and Debate in Early Commentaries of the Qurʾān," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Jane McAuliffe et al., 320–28 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

father in a duel at Badr, which was prevented thanks to the Prophet's intervention.[20] Second, he converted to Islam relatively late, around the time of the signing of the Ḥudaybiya treaty in 6/628. Finally, Islamic sources refer to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's passionate love of a Ghassānid woman named Laylā, the daughter of al-Jūdiyy. He is reported to have been so consumed by his passion that he composed amatory verses for the woman, which reverberate in the Islamic sources.[21] This biographical background elucidates ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's blackened image in terms of religiosity, earnestness, and precedence in Islam. Perhaps his past made him an easy target of criticism for his detractors, especially since he was the oldest son of the first caliph who served as a model of devotion and legitimate rulership. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's biography provides the justification for his identification as the disobedient son in Q 46:17 in Ibn ʿAṭiyya al-Andalusī's (d. 541/1146) *tafsīr* work, which justifies the identification on three grounds: ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's siding with the Quraysh against the Muslims at Badr, seeking to fight his father in a duel, and being the oldest but weak-willed son of the first caliph.[22]

Muqātil b. Sulaymān's (d.150/767) *tafsīr*, considered the first still extant exegesis to provide comprehensive commentary on the entire Qurʾān, contains the earliest reference to the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative.[23] Muqātil's teachers included Mujāhid b. Jabr (d.104/722) and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741–742).[24] Many subsequent scholars viewed Muqātil as a controversial figure and an unreliable *ḥadīth* transmitter and exegete.[25] The absence of *isnād*s in his *tafsīr* raised suspicions among many scholars regarding the reliability of his work.[26]

Muqātil's interpretation of Q 46:17, presented without an authority, names ʿAbd al-Raḥmān as the rebellious son. Echoing the Qurʾānic narrative, he also relates that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's parents, Abū Bakr and Umm Rūmān bt. ʿAmr b. ʿĀmir[27] (d. 6/628),[28] worked to convince him to embrace Islam, but their efforts were to no avail. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān not only denied the Day of Judgment but also claimed that none of the deceased Qurayshite

20. Al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. M. Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 1:257.

21. Al-Zubayrī, *Kitāb Nasab Quraysh*, ed. Evariste Lévi-Provençal (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1976), 276; Ibn Abī Khaythama, *al-Taʾrīkh al-kabīr*, ed. Ṣalāḥ Hilāl (Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Nashr, 2006), 2:882–84.

22. Ibn ʿAṭiyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001), 5:99.

23. Nicolai Sinai, "The Qurʾanic Commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān and the Evolution of Early *Tafsīr* Literature," in *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre,* ed. Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink, 113–43 (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), 113; Kees Versteegh, "Grammar and Exegesis: The Origins of Kufan Grammar and the *Tafsīr Muqātil*," *Der Islam* 67 (1990): 206–42, 207–9.

24. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2005), 5:255.

25. Al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Baghdād*, ed. Bashshār Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001), 15:208–19; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 5:256–57; Sinai, "Qurʾanic Commentary," 113–14.

26. Al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh*, 15:208–13.

27. He appears in other sources as ʿĀmir b. ʿUwaymir. See al-Zubayrī, *Kitāb Nasab Quraysh*, 276; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1996), 5:169.

28. Umm Rūmān was from the tribe of Kināna. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, ed. ʿAbbās, 5:167–68.

dignitaries, such as ʿAbd Allāh b. Jadʿān, ʿUthmān b. ʿAmr, and ʿĀmir b. ʿAmr,[29] would make it back from the dead.[30] A similar presentation of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative appears in the *tafsīr* works of al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822)[31] Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Hawwārī (d. ca. 280/893),[32] and Ibn Abī Zamanīn (d. 399/1009).[33] However, unlike Muqātil and Hūd, the other two commentators include other views regarding the identity of the disobedient son, which will be discussed later.

ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī's (d. 211/827) *tafsīr*[34] seems to be the earliest work to present the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative along with its transmitters. It is worth noting that his account includes other interpretations as well, which will be examined later. ʿAbd al-Razzāq traces the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān version through his teacher, Maʿmar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770),[35] back to the Basran Qatāda b. Diʿāma al-Sadūsī (d. 117/735) and the Kufan Muḥammad b. Ṣāʾib al-Kalbī (d. 146/767). More than other scholars, Qatāda is associated with the transmission of commentaries on Q 46:17, particularly the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative. A few biographical details about Qatāda, therefore, are useful for understanding his role in the debate. Qatāda occupies a conspicuous place in Islamic traditions as a knowledgeable expert on language, genealogy, *tafsīr*, and *ḥadīth* literature.[36] He was among the prominent Successors who contributed to the evolution of the *tafsīr* tradition. His famous teachers included the Medinan Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib (d. 94/715) and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728).[37] Qatāda had many students, the closest of whom was Maʿmar b. Rāshid,[38] who also studied for many years with

---

29. These were some of the tribe's notables in pre-Islamic Meccan society. Al-Sadūsī, *Kitāb Ḥadhf man nasaba Quraysh*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1976), 76–77.

30. Muqātil b. Sulymān, *Tafsīr*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Shiḥāta (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 2002), 4:21–22.

31. Al-Farrāʾ, *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muḥammad al-Najjār and Aḥmad Najātī (Beirut: Dār ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1983), 3:53–54.

32. Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Hawwārī, *Tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz*, ed. Balḥāj Sharīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990), 4:149.

33. Ibn Abī Zamanīn, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz*, ed. Ḥusayn ʿUkāsha and Muḥammad al-Kanz (Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 2002), 4:227.

34. Fuat Sezgin argues that this work is basically a modification of the work of his teacher Maʿmar b. Rāshid (d. 154/770). See Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 1:99.

35. ʿAbd al-Razzāq relies heavily on Maʿmar b. Rāshid, especially in his *tafsīr* and his *Muṣannaf*. Ibn Rāshid was a native of Basra and was a student of a number of renowned scholars, such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Qatāda (d. 117/735), and al-Zuhrī (d. 124/741–42). See Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muḥammad*, ed. and trans. Sean Anthony (New York: NYU Press, 2014), xix–xxiv; Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, "The *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī: Searching for Earlier Source-Material," in *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki*, ed. Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers, 27–48 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 30–31.

36. Al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983), 2:47–48; Abdulrahman Al-Salimi, *Early Islamic Law in Basra in the 2nd/8th Century: Aqwāl Qatāda b. Diʿāma al-Sadūsī* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 4.

37. Suleiman Mourad mentions that Qatāda was one of the most renowned students of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. See Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110 H/728 CE) and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 47.

38. Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *Expeditions*, xxiii.

al-Zuhrī.[39] However, some Muslim scholars criticized Qatāda for being an untrustworthy *ḥadīth* transmitter[40]and for his failure to provide *isnād*s in his *tafsīr*.[41] Like other prominent scholars, Qatāda was involved in theological controversies with far-reaching political implications for Umayyad politics. For example, there are contradictory reports about the extent to which he professed Qadarite beliefs.[42] However, there are some allusions to the good relations that Qatāda maintained with the Umayyad rulers.[43] For example, Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) relates that Umayyad emissaries frequented Qatāda's house, seeking his expertise on different matters.[44] The Umayyads' recruitment of well-known religious scholars to promote their religio-political propaganda[45] and counter the criticisms of their enemies (such as Ibn al-Zubayr)[46] was common practice.[47]

More importantly, Qatāda's connection with the Umayyads surfaces in later commentaries on Q 46:17. For example, al-Samarqandī (d. 375/985) portrays Marwān b. al-Ḥakam (r. 64–65/684–85) as the mastermind behind the circulation of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative, but without explaining his motives.[48] The same report is found in the *tafsīr* works of Ibn ʿAṭiyya and Abū Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344),[49] who also provide more details about the dispute's background.[50] They relate that Marwān initiated the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative when he served as the governor of Medina and lobbied for the appointment of Yazīd as Muʿāwiya's successor. Both assert that Qatāda espoused Marwān's interpretation of Q 46:17. A detailed discussion of Marwān's involvement in the circulation of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān version follows later in this article.

---

39. Motzki, *Analysing Muslim Traditions*, 4–11.

40. Al-Salimi, *Early Islamic Law*, 5–7.

41. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, ed. ʿAṭā Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1994), 8:307.

42. Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), 7:171–73; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl*, ed. Bashshār Maʿrūf (Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1992), 23:498–517; Sezgin, *Geschichte*, 1:31–32; Al-Salimi, *Early Islamic Law*, 7–8. The Qadarites were a sect that endorsed the doctrine of free will based on the notion that all individuals are responsible before God for their actions. The sect was perceived as a threat by the Umayyad authorities. Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1991–97), 1:72–117.

43. Judd, *Religious Scholars*, 39–90.

44. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 4:85–86.

45. Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 42–49.

46. Wilferd Madelung, "ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr the *Mulḥid*," in Madelung, *Studies in Medieval Muslim Thought and History*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2013), no. 17.

47. Judd, *Religious Scholars*, 39–90.

48. Ibn ʿAṭiyya, *Muḥarrar*, 5:98–99.

49. Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, ed. ʿĀdil ʿAbd al-Mawjūd et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1993), 8:61–62.

50. Al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, ed. ʿAlī Muʿawwaḍ, ʿĀdil ʿAbd al-Mawjūd, and Aḥmad al-Nūtī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1993), 3:233.

The name of Muḥammad al-Kalbī makes infrequent but contradictory appearances in the transmission of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative. For example, al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078) traces the narrative back to al-Kalbī,[51] whereas Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1209–1210) uses al-Kalbī as an authority to deny that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān was the disobedient son in the verse.[52] The incorporation of al-Kalbī by some commentators stems from his prominence as an early scholar. Besides his expertise in genealogy, philology, Arab-Islamic history, and biblical materials, al-Kalbī also reportedly authored an early comprehensive *tafsīr* work. Although his reliability as both a Qurʾānic exegete and a *ḥadīth* transmitter was questioned by many Muslim scholars,[53] the attribution of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative to him seems to have been intended to strengthen the validity and the circulation of this view by connecting it to a well-known exegete. The same motivation appears in the affiliation of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative with other prominent *tafsīr* scholars, such as the Kufan al-Suddī (d. 128/745).

Al-Suddī, a *ḥadīth* scholar, played a major role in the evolution of the *tafsīr* tradition during the Umayyad caliphate. He was one of Ibn ʿAbbās's (d. 68/687) students and authored one of the earliest *tafsīr* works.[54] However, like other leading scholars active during the Umayyad caliphate, al-Suddī found his reliability as a *ḥadīth* transmitter subjected to criticism by some biographers. Some scholars even accused him of being a Shiʿite and of attacking the first two caliphs.[55] The attribution of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative to al-Suddī is presented without *isnād*s in the commentaries of Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938),[56] al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058),[57] and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).[58]

In some later commentaries on Q 46:17, al-Suddī figures as an authority on the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative alongside other early prominent Basran or Meccan *tafsīr* experts. For example, al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153) presents this view, though without a complete *isnād*, on the authority of al-Suddī, Ibn ʿAbbās, Abū al-ʿĀliya al-Riyāḥī (d. ca. 93/712),[59] and Mujāhid b. Jabr.[60] Both al-Suddī and Qatāda feature as the originators of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān

51. Al-Jurjānī, *Darj al-durar fī tafsīr al-āy wa-l-suwar*, ed. Ṭalʿat al-Farḥān and Muḥammad Shakkūr (Amman: Dār al-Fikr, 2009), 2:566.

52. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 18:23.

53. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, ed. ʿAlī Ṭawīl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), 152–53; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, 1:417; 9:178–79; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 25:250; Sezgin, *Geschichte*, 1:34–35.

54. Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6:318; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2008), 786–87; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:110; Sezgin, *Geschichte*, 1:32–33.

55. Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 3:132–38.

56. Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, ed. Asʿad al-Ṭayyib (Riyadh: Maktabat Nizār al-Bāz, 1997), 10:3295–96.

57. Al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn, tafsīr al-Māwardī*, ed. al-Sayyid b. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya and Muʾassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1992), 5:280.

58. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī (Cairo: Markaz Hajr li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabiyya wa-l-Islāmiyya, 2003), 13:329.

59. His name was Rufayʿ b. Mihrān and he was a prominent Basran expert on Qurʾānic exegesis and a student of Ibn ʿAbbās. Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 3:249–52.

60. Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), 9:109.

narrative in al-Qurṭubī's (d. 671/1273) *tafsīr*.[61] The prominent place that Ibn ʿAbbās occupies in the evolution of the Islamic *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* traditions is undeniable.[62] His inclusion in the discussion on the identity of the rebellious son in Q 46:17, therefore, should come as no surprise. The use of Ibn ʿAbbās as an authority reflects efforts to increase the probability of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative, seemingly in reaction to attempts to refute its authenticity.[63] Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 597/1201) *Zād al-masīr* presents a good example of this orientation: he cites Ibn ʿAbbās as originating the view that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān is the disobedient son, but he claims that the exchange described in the verse occurred before ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's conversion to Islam.[64] The attribution of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative to early prominent Basran and Ḥijāzī *tafsīr* authorities suggests that this view was the dominant interpretation in early commentaries on Q 46:17, which made refuting it more difficult.

3.2 Early Alternatives to the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Narrative

Early efforts to refute the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative are found in the commentaries of al-Farrāʾ, ʿAbd al-Razzāq, and al-Nasāʾī (d. 303/915). Al-Farrāʾ bases his refutation on the lexical interpretation of Q 46:18. He contends that the rebellious son in Q 46:17 is not ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, but rather his forefathers.[65] Later exegetes, such as al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923),[66] Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 437/1045),[67] al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1050),[68] and al-Samʿānī (d. 562/1167)[69] share this view, adding further details that will be discussed later.

In ʿAbd al-Razzāq's account, his father, Hammām, told him that Mīnāʾ b. Abī Mīnāʾ al-Zuhrī[70] heard ʿĀʾisha bt. Abī Bakr deny the association of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān with the disobedient son in Q 46:17. She claimed, adds ʿAbd al-Razzāq, that the verse concerned someone else (*fulān*) instead and mentioned a name, which is is not specified in this report.[71] No details, however, are given about the background against which ʿĀʾisha defended her brother. Notably, in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's version, ʿĀʾisha appears as the main authority for refuting the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative. Besides being the Prophet's wife and Abū Bakr's

61. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 2007), 15:169.

62. Al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 783-85; Gilliot, "Beginnings of Qurʾanic Exegesis," 7–13.

63. Al-Suyūṭī questions the reliability of many *tafsīr* reports traced back to Ibn ʿAbbās. *Al-Itqān*, 785-88.

64. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī ʿilm al-tafsīr*, ed. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 2010), 4:109.

65. Al-Farrāʾ, *Maʿānī*, 3:53–54.

66. Al-Zajjāj, *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Jalīl Shalabī (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1988), 4: 443–44.

67. Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib, *al-Hidāya ilā bulūgh al-nihāya* (Sharjah: Kulliyyat al-Sharīʿa wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya, Jāmiʿat al-Shāriqa, 2008), 11: 345.

68. Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ed. Aḥmad al-ʿĀmilī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 9:279.

69. Al-Samʿānī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ed. Ghunaym b. Ghunaym (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan, 1997), 5:155.

70. Mīnāʾ, who was the *mawlā* of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf (d. 32/653), was considered by many scholars to be an untrustworthy *ḥadīth* transmitter. See al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 29:245–48; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, 15:354.

71. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, 3:201.

daughter, she also played a major role in the religious and political life of the early Islamic community.[72] Her presence in the interpretations of Q 46:17 was crucial in clearing ʿAbd al-Raḥmān of the accusation. ʿAbd al-Razzāq's account also indicates that the attempts to disassociate ʿAbd al-Raḥmān from the rebellious son not only appeared later but also were widely circulated. This theory is supported by the fact that the man whom ʿĀʾisha identified as the disobedient son in Q 46:17 remained anonymous in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's work as in all later *tafsīr* works.

Al-Nasāʾī's interpretation is an abbreviated version of his treatment of this topic in the *Sunan*, discussed in the next section. He offers an account similar to that of ʿAbd al-Razzāq but adds important details about the political background of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative. He traces his report back to the Medinan Muḥammad b. Ziyād (d. 120/745), who transmitted *ḥadīth*s on the authority of ʿĀʾisha, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar (d. 73/692–693), and ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr (d. 73/692).[73] The *isnād* consists of the following Basran transmitters: ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Darhamī (d. 253/867) → Umayya b. Khālid (d. 200/816) → Shuʿba b. al-Hajjāj (d. 160/776). Al-Nasāʾī relates that Marwān was behind the circulation of this view after ʿAbd al-Raḥmān disputed Yazīd's appointment as Muʿāwiya's successor and accused the Umayyads of turning the caliphate into hereditary rule. Coming to her brother's defense, ʿĀʾisha appears here as a counterauthority to Marwān's claim, accusing him of fabrication.[74]

3.3 The Affiliation of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's Brothers with the Disobedient Son

Interpretations that identify the rebellious son in Q 46:17 with other sons of Abū Bakr come in two versions: one points to an unspecified brother of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, the other to ʿAbd Allāh b. Abī Bakr (d. 8/630). I believe that these interpretations reflect later efforts to deflect blame from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923) seems to have been the first exegete to suggest that the disobedient son in the verse is an unspecified son of Abū Bakr.[75] He transmits this report on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās with an *isnād* that includes Muḥammad b. Saʿd[76] and members of his family.[77] Absent from this account is any mention of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. Al-Ṭabarī's interpretation reappears in some later commentaries on

---

72. Being the Prophet's favorite wife and Abū Bakr's daughter, ʿĀʾisha played a major role in the transmission of prophetic knowledge and early Islamic political debates, particularly in the context of the first civil war. See Bruce Lawrence, *The Quran: A Biography* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), 50–61; Denise Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of ʿAʾisha bint Abi Bakr* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 101–32.

73. Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 25: 217-219.

74. Al-Nasāʾī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Sayyid al-Jalīmī and Ṣabrī al-Shāfiʿī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, 1990), 2:290.

75. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī (Cairo: Hajar, 2001), 21:144.

76. There is a debate about the identity of this person. Berg equates him with Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), the author of the *Ṭabaqāt*, whereas Motzki identifies him as Muḥammad b. Saʿd b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. ʿAṭiyya al-ʿAwfī (d. 276/889). See Berg, "Competing Paradigms," 272; Motzki, *Analysing Muslim Traditions*, 246.

77. Berg considers the family *isnād* "eclectic." See Berg, "Competing Paradigms," 272.

Q 46:17, such as those of Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib,[78] Ibn ʿAṭiyya,[79] al-Suyūṭī,[80] and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373).[81] Unlike al-Ṭabarī, however, these scholars also include the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative in their accounts. This significant divergence suggests that al-Ṭabarī omitted it intentionally because of its controversial nature or its lack of an *isnād*. An elaboration on this conjecture appears in the following subsection.

The interpretation that the disobedient son in Q 46:17 is ʿAbd Allāh b. Abī Bakr appears first in the *tafsīr* works of al-Thaʿlabī[82] (d. 427/1035) and al-Māwardī.[83] Al-Thaʿlabī traces this version back to Ibn ʿAbbās, Abū al-ʿĀliya al-Riyāḥī, al-Suddī, and Mujāhid b. Jabr, whereas al-Māwardī presents Mujāhid as the only authority. The association of Mujāhid with the circulation of this view is notable in later commentaries, such as those of al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122),[84] al-Qurṭubī,[85] Ibn al-Jawzī,[86] and Ibn Kathīr.[87] As student of Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid was a prominent Meccan *ḥadīth* expert who authored an early Qurʾānic commentary. His involvement in doctrinal discussions, such as those of the Qadarites of Mecca and the Murjiʾites of Kufa, seems to have soured his relationship with the Umayyads.[88]

This state of affairs begs the question of why other brothers of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān were incorporated into interpretations of Q 46:17. From the little information known about ʿAbd Allāh, we learn that he was a half-brother of ʿĀʾisha and a full brother of Asmāʾ, the mother of ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr.[89] Unlike ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, ʿAbd Allāh converted to Islam at an early stage and figured prominently in the story of the *hijra* to Medina. ʿAbd Allāh maintained good relations with his father to the extent that he became an example of an obedient (*bārr*) son. This is evident in ʿAbd Allāh's consent to divorce his wife, ʿĀtika bt. Zayd (d. 52/672), whom he passionately loved, at Abū Bakr's request because she was barren

---

78. Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib, *Hidāya*,11: 345.

79. Ibn ʿAṭiyya, *Muḥarrar*, 5:98–99.

80. Al-Suyūṭī, *Durr*, 13:329.

81. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, ed. Sāmī Salāma (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayba, 1999), 7:282.

82. Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, ed. Muhammad ʿĀshūr (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2002), 9:13.

83. Al-Māwardī, *Nukat*, 5:279–80.

84. Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī maʿālim al-tanzīl*, ed. Muḥammad al-Nimr, ʿUthmān Ḍamīriyya, and Sulaymān al-Ḥursh (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayyiba, 1989, 7:258.

85. Al-Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ*, 16:197.

86. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād*, 4:109.

87. Ibn Kathīr traces this view back to Mujāhid along with Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), who was a well-regarded Meccan *ḥadīth* scholar. See *Tafsīr*, 7:283.

88. Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 2:640–43; Claude Gilliot, "Mujāhid's Exegesis: Origins, Paths of Transmission and Development of a Meccan Exegetical Tradition in its Human, Spiritual and Theological Environment," in Görke and Pink, *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History*, 63–112, at 65–66.

89. Since ʿAbd Allāh was only a half-brother of ʿĀʾisha, the Islamic sources provide scarce biographical information about him. See al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, ed. ʿAbbās, 5:176–77; al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Mustradrak ʿalā al-ṣaḥīḥayn*, ed. Muṣṭafā ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2002), 3:542–44.

and deemed a source of distraction to ʿAbd Allāh.[90] He died at a young age, even before his father, without being involved in religious or political controversies.

This biographical portrait of ʿAbd Allāh suggests that there was little benefit to gain from associating him with the disobedient son in Q 46:17. At the same time, the absence of Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr from these commentaries is mystifying. Muḥammad grew up in the home of ʿAlī (r. 35–40/656–661) and maintained close personal and political relations with him. ʿAlī appointed him the governor of Egypt, and he sided with ʿAlī against Muʿāwiya in the first civil war. He even met a horrible death for espousing this position.[91] These biographical details suggest that the identification of the disobedient son with other sons of Abū Bakr beyond ʿAbd al-Raḥmān was *not* initiated by Abū Bakr's opponents. Rather, these reports represent further efforts to downgrade the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative and interrupt its circulation. Ibn ʿAbbās, Abū al-ʿĀliya al-Riyāḥī, al-Suddī, and Mujāhid are also cited as authorities in two contradictory accounts provided by al-Ṭabrisī (who names ʿAbd al-Raḥmān) and al-Thaʿlabī (who points to ʿAbd Allāh). One needs to remember that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān had an embarrassing pre-Islamic past that increased the difficulty of refuting his opponents' accusations.

3.4 The Rebellious Son as an Archetype

The commentaries of al-Zajjāj and al-Ṭabarī seem to be the earliest works to present the rebellious son in Q 46:17 as a broad concept, without identifying him as a particular person. We start with al-Zajjāj, whose interpretation of this verse represents one the earliest accounts to diverge from the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative. He acknowledges the ubiquity of this narrative in early Qurʾānic exegesis but dismisses it as erroneous, concluding that the most correct (*al-aṣaḥḥ*) interpretation is that the verse concerns any rebellious and unbelieving son (*walad ʿāqq kāfir*).[92] Al-Zajjāj's interpretative argument reverberates in many later *tafsīr* works, such as those of al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076),[93] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,[94] al-Qurṭubī,[95] and Ibn Kathīr.[96] But some of these later accounts also include elaborations on al-Zajjāj's interpretation. For example, al-Māturīdī argues that the verse refers to an unspecified man with two sons: one was rebellious (*ʿāqq*) and the other was obedient (*bārr*).[97]

---

90. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, ed. ʿAbbās, 5:177.

91. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, ed. Wilferd Madelung (Beirut: Klaus Schwartz, 2003), 2:349–57; Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 267–68.

92. Al-Zajjāj, *Maʿānī*, 4:443–44.

93. Al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-majīd*, ed. ʿĀdil ʿAbd al-Mawjūd et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995), 4:109.

94. Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 28:24.

95. Al-Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ*, 15:169.

96. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 7:283.

97. Al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, ed. Majdī Bassalūm (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2005), 248–49.

Al-Ṭabarī's characterization of the rebellious son in Q 46:17 as an unidentified figure takes two forms. The first resembles al-Zajjāj's interpretation and holds that the verse speaks of a licentious, unbelieving, disobedient son (al-fājir, al-kāfir, al-ʿāqq li-wālidayhi).[98] Unlike al-Zajjāj, al-Ṭabarī traces this interpretation back to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), with an isnād that includes the following Basran transmitters: Muḥammad b. Bashshār (d. 252/866) → Hawdha b. Khalīfa (d. 210/826) → ʿAwf al-Aʿrābī (d. 146/764). Al-Baṣrī appears in many commentaries on Q 46:17 as the main originator of the view that the disobedient son is an archetype rather than a particular individual, and some biographical information about him is thus in order.

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was a well-regarded Successor and an authority on ḥadīth literature and Qurʾānic exegesis.[99] He was born in Medina and later moved to Basra, where he established a large circle of pupils,[100] the most famous of whom was Qatāda. Al-Baṣrī's scholarly activities, therefore, explicate the transmission of knowledge from Medina to the other centers of Islamic learning. However, some scholars questioned his reliability as a ḥadīth transmitter.[101] When it comes to al-Baṣrī's involvement in Umayyad politics, he seems to have harbored anti-Umayyad sentiments but preferred not to express them openly.[102] This stance perhaps explains the association of his name in some traditions with the Qadarite movement.[103]

Al-Ṭabarī's account on the authority of al-Baṣrī echoes in many later tafsīr works, such as those of al-Ṭūsī,[104] al-Māwardī,[105] al-Baghawī,[106] al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1143–1144),[107] al-Ṭabrisī,[108] Ibn ʿAṭiyya,[109] Ibn al-Jawzī,[110] al-Nīsābūrī (d. 728/1328),[111] and al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310).[112] However, some of these later interpretations vary. For example, al-Māwardī argues that the verse is largely aimed at a group of infidels,[113] whereas Ibn al-Jawzī identifies

98. Al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ, 21:145.

99. Al-Suyūṭī, Itqān, 788; al-Dāwūdī, Ṭabaqāt, 1:150–51.

100. Ibn Saʿd, Ṭabaqāt, 7:115–22; al-Mizzī, Tahdhīb, 6:95–126.

101. Mourad, Early Islam, 47–51.

102. Ibid., 34–43.

103. Watt, The Formative Period of Islamic Thought (Oxford: Oneworld, 1988), 100–103; van Ess, Theologie und Gesellschaft, 2:45–50; Suleiman, Early Islam, 161–75.

104. Al-Ṭūsī, Tibyān, 9:279.

105. Al-Māwardī, Nukat, 5:280.

106. Al-Baghawī, Tafsīr, 7:258.

107. Al-Zamakhsharī, Tafsīr al-kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl wa-ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-taʾwīl, ed. Khalīl Shīḥā (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 2009), 1012.

108. Al-Ṭabrisī, Majmaʿ, 9:109.

109. Ibn ʿAṭiyya, Muḥarrar, 5:99.

110. Ibn al-Jawzī, Zād, IV, 109.

111. Al-Nīsābūrī, Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān wa-raghāʾib al-furqān, ed. Ibrāhīm ʿAwaḍ (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awlāduhu, 1962), 26:11–12.

112. Al-Nasafī, Tafsīr al-Nasafī: Madārik al-tanzīl wa-ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl, ed. Yusūf Bidīwī and Muḥyī al-Dīn Mistū (Beirut: Dār al-Kalam al-Ṭayyib, 1998), 3:313.

113. Al-Māwardī, Nukat, 5:280.

the concept of a rebellious son with an unspecified group of infidels from the Quraysh.[114] Al-Baghawī and al-Ṭabrisī name both al-Baṣrī and Qatāda as authorities for the view of the disobedient son as a generic concept.

Conspicuously absent in al-Ṭabarī's presentation is the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative. Most likely he left it out intentionally[115] because of its lack of *isnād* or its controversial nature. Comparing al-Ṭabarī's account on the authority of al-Baṣrī with those of later exegetes further substantiates this conjecture. Like al-Ṭabarī, these scholars emphasize that the report on the authority of al-Baṣrī is the correct interpretation. However, at the same time they use this view as a counterargument to the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative.

Al-Ṭabarī relates his second interpretation of the rebellious son verse on the authority of Qatāda with an *isnād* that includes the following Basran transmitters: Bishr al-Mufaḍḍal (d. 186/802) → Yazīd b. Zurayʿ (d. 182/798) → Saʿīd b. Abī ʿArūba (d. 156/773). This interpretation claims that the verse pertains to any wicked and debauched slave who is disobedient to his parents (*ʿabd sūʾ ʿāqq li-wālidayhi fājir*). This view appears in later *tafsīr* works, such as those of al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/949),[116] al-Thaʿlabī,[117] Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib,[118] and al-Qurṭubī.[119] However, some of these scholars, such as al-Thaʿlabī and al-Qurṭubī, also include al-Baṣrī as an authority for this version. The fact that al-Ṭabarī relates the first report from al-Baṣrī and the second from al-Baṣrī's student, Qatāda, indicates that both were probably added to the interpretations of Q 46:17 later to diminish the circulation of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative. As previously noted, Qatāda was seen as the main originator of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative, which explains the need to associate the counternarratives with a senior authority, such as Qatāda's teacher al-Baṣrī.

The identity of the rebellious son described in Q 46:17 was thus debated in Qurʾānic exegeses composed between the second half of the second/eighth century and the first half of the fourth/tenth. The ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative initially emerged in these commentaries as the predominant interpretation. Allusions to the Umayyads' circulation of this narrative to silence ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's opposition to themselves are apparent in some versions. Counterinterpretations that sought to exonerate ʿAbd al-Raḥmān by proposing a different identity for the disobedient son arose at a later stage. These efforts took different forms at different times. In the first phase, ʿĀʾisha, as the Prophet's wife and Abū Bakr's daughter, played a major role in undermining the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative. Explanations that associated the rebellious son with other sons of Abū Bakr or with a nonspecific concept constituted further attempts to challenge the dominance of this narrative.

---

114. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād*, 4:109.

115. For examples of alterations and omissions that al-Ṭabarī intentionally made to his sources, see Steven Judd, "Narratives and Character Development: Al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī on Late Umayyad History," in *Ideas, Concepts and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther, 209–26 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

116. Al-Naḥḥās, *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muḥammad al-Ṣābūnī (Mecca: Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurā, 1988), 6:450.

117. Al-Thaʿlabī, *Kashf*, 9:13.

118. Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib, *Hidāya,* 6846.

119. Al-Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ*, 15:169.

4. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's Image in *Ḥadīth*, *Ansāb*, and *Adab* Works

This section has two main objectives. First, it considers the extent to which the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative as presented in other literary genres provides perspectives different from that of *tafsīr* works. Second, it investigates how the information gleaned from non-*tafsīr* works affects our understanding of the evolution of the Ḥijāzī opposition to Umayyad hereditary succession.

4.1 The Ḥadīth Literature

Early references to the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative in the *ḥadīth* literature are found in the works of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870)[120] and al-Nasāʾī. The chains of transmission given by these authors consist of Ḥijāzī (particularly Medinan) and Basran scholars. These *isnād*s also illustrate the communication of knowledge from the Ḥijāz to Basra. Al-Bukhārī traces his report back to Yūsuf b. Māhak (d. ca. 113/731), a Meccan *ḥadīth* scholar and a transmitter of prophetic reports on the authority of ʿĀʾisha and other prominent Companions.[121] The *isnād* names the following Basran transmitters: Mūsā b. Ismāʿīl al-Tabūdhkī (d. 223/838) → Abū ʿUwāna al-Waḍḍāḥ (d. 176/792) → Abū Bishr Jaʿfar b. Iyās (d. 123–26/743–748). According to the report, when Muʿāwiya decided to appoint Yazīd his successor, he ordered his governor in the Ḥijāz, Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, to lobby for this idea in Medina. Marwān announced Muʿāwiya's decree in Medina's congregational mosque and requested the attendees to pledge allegiance (*bayʿa*) to Yazīd as the successor to his father. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr emerged as the foremost Medinan leader to oppose this move. Marwān commanded his guards to arrest ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, but they were unable to do so after he sought protection in ʿĀʾisha's house. It was at this juncture that Marwān declared that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān was the rebellious son mentioned in Q 46:17. Al-Bukhārī concludes his account by rebutting Marwān's accusation, noting that ʿĀʾisha had asserted that nothing had been revealed in the Qurʾān about Abū Bakr's family except for her exoneration from adultery.[122] Al-Bukhārī's report is reproduced in many later *tafsīr* works, such as those of Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib,[123] Ibn ʿAṭiyya,[124] al-Nasafī,[125] Ibn Kathīr,[126] and Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852/1449).[127] These authors are at pains

---

120. For a good discussion on the central role that al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* plays in the evolution of the *ḥadīth* commentary tradition, see Joel Blecher, *Said the Prophet of God: Hadith Commentary across a Millennium* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 4–13.

121. He was of Persian origin and was considered a reliable transmitter. Besides narrating from ʿĀʾisha, he narrated *ḥadīth*s on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, Abū Hurayra (d. 59/681), and Muʿāwiya. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, 12:421; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 32:451–52.

122. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 583 (no. 4827).

123. Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib, *Hidāya*, 6845–46.

124. Ibn ʿAṭiyya, *Muḥarrar*, 5:99.

125. Al-Nasafī, *Madārik*, 3:313.

126. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 7:283.

127. Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. ʿĀdil ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and ʿAlī Muʿawwaḍ (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995), 4:275.

to clear ʿAbd al-Raḥmān of the accusation of disobedience and to present him as a devout Muslim.

Al-Nasāʾī's account is basically a detailed version of the interpretation of Q 46:17 that he provides in his *tafsīr.* Although his report resembles that of al-Bukhārī, it includes additional details and has a different *isnād.* As in his Qurʾānic exegesis, al-Nasāʾī traces his report back to the Medinan Muḥammad b. Ziyād with an *isnād* that includes Basran transmitters. What is new in al-Nasāʾī's report is his description of the dispute between Marwān and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān over the appointment of Yazīd as Muʿāwiya's successor. First, according to al-Nasāʾī, Marwān argued that Muʿāwiya's order was consistent with the early traditions of caliphal succession inaugurated by the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. Second, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, opposing Marwān's announcement, accused the Umayyads of turning the caliphate into a temporal kingship modeled after the Byzantine (*hirqiliyya*) and Persian (*qaysariyya*) systems of hereditary kingship. In al-Nasāʾī's account, too, the dispute culminated in Marwān's suggestion that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān was the rebellious son in Q 46:17. Al-Nasāʾī emphasizes ʿĀʾisha's role as a vehement defender of her brother, accusing Marwān's of having fabricated the allegation (i.e., ʿĀʾisha claimed it was a fabrication). ʿĀʾisha ended her argument by asserting that God's curse was upon Marwān because the Prophet had cursed his father, al-Ḥakam.[128] The anonymity of the person that she associated with the verse is also preserved in al-Nasāʾī's account.[129]

Al-Nasāʾī's details illuminate the circumstances that led to the emergence of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative. As in the case of al-Bukhārī's description of the events, the Umayyads' involvement in the initiation and circulation of the narrative is evident. The report also illustrates the Umayyads' use of Qurʾānic exegesis to defend themselves against the criticism of their opponents. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's opposition to the Umayyads' idea of monarchic succession generated his association with the rebellious son in Q 46:17. Furthermore, the reference to the model of rightful caliphal transition inaugurated by Abū Bakr and ʿUmar reflects the rupture represented by the Umayyads' proposed move from the previous tradition of caliphal succession. Hence, Muʿāwiya's decision was deviant as well as illegitimate. It is worth noting that Islamic sources teem with references to the ideal precedent of caliphal succession instituted by the first two caliphs.[130] More importantly, the reference to Roman and Persian patterns of hereditary succession seems to reflect Muslim opposition to Muʿāwiya's introduction of non-Arab and non-Islamic accession rituals.[131]

---

128. Al-Ḥakam converted to Islam unwillingly after the Prophet entered Mecca, and even the Prophet cursed him for his hypocrisy and treachery. See al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, ed. ʿAbbās, 4:255–56, 260–61.

129. Al-Nasāʾī, *Kitāb al-Sunan al-kubrā*, ed. Ḥasan Shalabī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2001), 10:257 (no. 11427).

130. Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Usāma b. Muḥammad (Cairo: al-Farūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Ṭibāʿa, 2008), 10:449–56; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, ed. ʿAbbās, 5:126–27; al-Khallāl, *al-Sunna*, ed. ʿAṭiyya al-Zahrānī (Riyadh: Dār al-Rāya, 1989), 2:301–8, 372–73.

131. Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, 90–92.

Al-Nasāʾī's report enjoys wide circulation in many later *tafsīr* works, such as those of al-Zamakhsharī,[132] al-Thaʿlabī,[133] al-Qurṭubī,[134] and Ibn Kathīr.[135] However, some of these scholars use different *isnād*s. For example, Ibn Kathīr associates the report with the following Medinan and Basran scholars: ʿAbd al-Razzāq → Maʿmar b. Rāshid → al-Zuhrī → Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib (d. 94/715).[136] Al-Suyūṭī provides the same report without an *isnād* on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar.[137] Attributions to these transmitters demonstrate that the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān version originated in Medina and was then circulated to other centers, particularly Basra. The conspicuous presence of Medinan authorities in these *isnād*s indicates that the Umayyads were mindful of the opposition of the Medinan elite, particularly ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, to the proposed hereditary succession. This orientation is evident in the works of Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1175) and Ibn Ḥajar, who trace it via al-Zuhrī to Ibn al-Musayyib. They claim that Muʿāwiya sent money to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān to bribe him, but the latter refused to accept the money.[138]

4.2 Ansāb *and* Adab *Writings*

This section assesses the presence of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative in al-Balādhurī's (d. 279/892) *Ansāb* and al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 356/967) *Kitāb al-Aghānī* as representatives of the genres of *ansāb* and *adab*, respectively.[139] Al-Balādhurī alludes to the narrative uncharacteristically without an *isnād*, as part of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's biographical portrait. In fact, he opens his account by dismissing the narrative as an erroneous interpretation. To substantiate his argument, al-Balādhurī cites ʿĀʾisha, alleging that the verse concerns someone other than ʿAbd al-Raḥmān but again without naming that person.[140] He then refers to two mortifying events in ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's pre-Islamic past. The first was ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's participation in the Battle of Badr against the Muslims and his attempt to meet his father in a duel. The second was his ardent love for Laylā the Ghassānid, whom he later married after Syria came under Islamic rule.[141] To salvage ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's image, al-Balādhurī declares, "When ʿAbd al-Raḥmān converted to Islam he became a decent Muslim and nothing of [his pagan life] remained attached to him."[142] However, al-Balādhurī

---

132. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, 1012–13.

133. Al-Thaʿlabī, *Kashf*, 9:13.

134. Al-Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ*, 16:197–98.

135. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 7:283–84.

136. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī (Giza: Dār Hajr, 1999), 11:330.

137. Al-Suyūṭī, *Durr*, 13:328.

138. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. ʿUmar al-ʿĀmrawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1996), 35:35; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, 4:276.

139. On the *Aghānī*'s sources, see Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Les fondations de l'islam : Entre écriture et histoire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 345–46.

140. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, ed. ʿAbbās, 5:169–70.

141. Ibid., 5:171–72.

142. *Wa-lammā aslama ḥasuna islāmuhu fa-lam yutaʿallaq ʿalayhi bi-shayʾ*. Ibid., 5:172.

offers no comment on the possible motives behind the circulation of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative.

Al-Iṣfahānī's[143] discussion of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān consists of four parts, with the main one addressing his passionate love of Laylā. He begins with genealogical information about ʿAbd al-Raḥmān.[144] The second part concerns the date of his conversion to Islam, which al-Iṣfahānī places before the Muslims' entrance in Mecca in 10/630. Al-Iṣfahānī adds that the conversions of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān and Muʿāwiya occurred at the same time.[145] Discussion about the association of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān with the disobedient son of Q 46:17 constitutes the third part of al-Iṣfahānī's presentation,[146] and in its contents it resembles al-Nasāʾī's treatment. What is different in al-Iṣfahānī's version is primarily the *isnād*, which includes the following names: Aḥmad b. Zuhayr b. Khaythama (d. 279/893) → his father, Zuhayr b. Ḥarb (d. 234/849) → Wahb b. Jarīr (d. 206/821)[147] → Juwayriyya b. Asmāʾ (d. 173/789).[148] These scholars were transmitters of both *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* who played an important role in the evolution of early Islamic historiography. Wahb b. Jarīr is of great importance here. His reports are considered a good example of the transition from *ḥadīth*- to *akhbār*-oriented narratives.[149] We will come back to Ibn Jarīr's role in reports regarding the Medinan opposition to Muʿāwiya's hereditary succession in the next section.

The last part of al-Iṣfahānī's account[150] recounts ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's amorous relations with Laylā. Al-Iṣfahānī's use of the verb *ustuhyima* (to be madly in love) indicates the damaging effect of this story on ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's image. Unlike al-Balādhurī, he provides two *isnād*s, both of which go through the Medinan historian ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr (d. 94/712). The first even includes his aunt, ʿĀʾisha. ʿUrwa, who played a significant role in the emergence of Islamic historiography, is reported to have been recruited by the Umayyads to confirm their legitimacy.[151]

An analysis of the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative in *ḥadīth*, *ansāb*, and *adab* writings yields a number of important observations. First, the analysis shows that the Umayyads, particularly Marwān, initiated the circulation of this view after ʿAbd al-Raḥmān emerged as the primary Medinan leader to oppose Muʿāwiya's plan of hereditary succession. Second, the reports that convey the narrative indicate that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's reprehensible *jāhilī*

---

143. On his life and works, see Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs: Compilation and the Author's Craft in Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's "Kitāb al-Aghānī"* (London: Routledge, 2003), 14–30.

144. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAmīr ʿAlī Muhannā and Samīr Jābir (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2002), 17:356.

145. Ibid., 357.

146. Ibid., 357–58.

147. Wahb b. Jarīr was a famous Basran *ḥadīth* scholar. See Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 7:298; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 31:121–24.

148. Juwayriyya transmitted reports on the authority of Nāfiʿ and al-Zuhrī.

149. Tobias Andersson, *Early Sunnī Historiography: A study of the the Tārīkh of Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ* (Leiden: Brill, 2018)111–12.

150. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, 17:358–61.

151. Chase Robinson, *Islamic Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 23–24; de Prémare, *Les Fondations*, 15–16.

past damaged his reputation and was effectively used by the Umayyads as a weapon to criticize him. That he was Abū Bakr's oldest son was also significant for the Umayyad justification of dynastic succession, which was based on tribal patrimonial considerations. Third, the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative attests to the significant role played by the Ḥijāzī elite, in general, and the Medinan dignitaries, in particular, in challenging the Umayyads' initiation of hereditary succession. Fourth, most of the relevant accounts make evident efforts to clear ʿAbd al-Raḥmān of identification with the rebellious son, typically invoking ʿĀʾisha to do so. Fifth, the *isnād*s that accompany these reports testify to the transmission of knowledge from Medina to Basra. Finally, the appearance of historians, such as ʿUrwa, Ibn Jarīr, Juwayriyya b. Asmāʾ, and Ibn Khaythama, in their transmission lines indicates a transition in the presentation of the Medinan confrontation with the Umayyads from provincial Arabian politics into a broader imperial context.

5. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān as an Opposition Leader in *Taʾrīkh* Narratives

This section attempts to assess the extent to which the portrayals of the Ḥijāzī opposition to Muʿāwiya's dynastic succession in *taʾrīkh* narratives are different from those found in previous literary genres. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's role as an opposition leader serves here as a yardstick for evaluating these distinctions. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ's (d. 240/854) *Taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ*[152] is our point of departure. Scholars consider this one of the earliest extant *taʾrīkh* works to reflect on Muʿāwiya's designation of Yazīd as his successor. Khalīfa, a Basran *ḥadīth* scholar and a historian, established a large circle of well-known students, such as al-Bukhārī.[153] His presentation of Muʿāwiya's shift to dynastic rule includes three reports, all of which go through the Basran Wahb b. Jarīr back to Medinan authorities.[154]

The *isnād* of the first report consists of Wahb b. Jarīr → Jarīr b. Ḥāzim (d. 175/791–792)[155] → al-Nuʿmān b. Rāshid (d. unknown)[156] → al-Zuhrī → Dhakwān (d.63/683).[157] The presence of al-Zuhrī, a prominent *ḥadīth* scholar who contributed considerably to the evolution of Islamic historiography, is important.[158] He also maintained close relations with some Umayyad caliphs. In fact, he was reported to have been forced by the Umayyads to alter certain prophetic reports to serve their political interests.[159]

---

152. For modern scholarship on this work, see Andersson, *Early Sunni Historiography*, 10–13.

153. Ibid., 46–58.

154. According to Andersson, Basran *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* transmitters occupy a place of prominence in Khalīfa's *Taʾrīkh*. See ibid., 105–38.

155. A famous Basran *ḥadīth* scholar.

156. Al-Nuʿmān was a *mawlā* of the Umayyads. His reliability as a *ḥadīth* transmitter is questionable. Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 29:445–48.

157. Dhakwān was ʿĀʾisha's *mawlā* and is considered a reliable *ḥadīth* transmitter. Ibid., 8:517–18.

158. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 25–26; ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dūrī, *Baḥth fī nashʾat ʿilm al-tārīkh ʿind al-ʿarab* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1993), 78–102.

159. In modern scholarship there is a debate about the extent to which the Umayyads influenced al-Zuhrī's circulation of certain reports that carried political significance. See Borrut, "The Future of the Past," 278;

In the first report,[160] Khalīfa says that when Muʿāwiya decided to appoint Yazīd his successor he traveled to Mecca for the lesser pilgrimage,[161] and from there he went to Medina with an army of one thousand Syrians. As he was about to enter Medina, three prominent leaders, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr, and ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, left the city in protest. Muʿāwiya announced in the congregational mosque that no one was more suited than his son to the position of the caliph. He received the oath of allegiance to Yazīd from the attendees without any opposition. Back in Mecca, he summoned individually each of the three Medinan leaders who had absented themselves. Meeting first with Ibn ʿUmar, Muʿāwiya accused him of sowing discord among Muslims by refusing to pledge allegiance to Yazīd. Ibn ʿUmar denied this charge, arguing that previous caliphs had also had sons and that Yazīd was not better than these sons had been. Nevertheless, the previous caliphs had eschewed the appointment of their sons as successors in the interest of the Islamic community. In addition, Ibn ʿUmar suggested that Muʿāwiya pursue the consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of the Muslim community in the weighty matter of the succession.

Muʿāwiya then summoned ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, who also refused to comply with Muʿāwiya's request for allegiance to Yazīd and advised him to refer the matter to a council of Muslims (*shūrā*) to avoid opposition. Finally, Muʿāwiya met Ibn al-Zubayr, whom he described as an insidious fox.[162] He accused Ibn al-Zubayr of inciting Ibn ʿUmar and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān against his decision. Ibn al-Zubayr, too, rejected Muʿāwiya's demands on the pretext that he could not pledge allegiance concurrently to two caliphs. After the meetings, Muʿāwiya falsely announced that the three men supported Yazīd's succession but dismissed the request of his Syrian (*ahl al-Shām*) supporters to make the three proclaim their allegiance in public. This turn of events, Khalīfa concludes, caused confusion among the Muslims regarding whether the three men had really promised their allegiance to Yazīd.[163]

The report emphasizes the themes of legitimate leadership and rightful caliphal succession established by the first two caliphs. The appearance of Ibn ʿUmar next to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān helps make the point that if hereditary succession were accepted, either of the two, as the oldest son of a caliph, could have been the caliph. Ibn al-Zubayr's appearance, meanwhile reflects the serious future political challenge he posed to the Umayyads. The report also shows that the Umayyads assigned great importance to the Medinan religio-political elite when it came to crucial matters of state. The reference to the Syrian supporters, who played an important role in upholding Muʿāwiya's designation of Yazīd as his successor, reflects the dynamics of a tribal polity.[164] Khalīfa's account appears

---

Judd, *Religious Scholars*, 53–59; Michael Lecker, "Some Biographical Notes on Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 41, no. 1 (1996): 22–31; de Prémare, *Les Fondations,* 321–23.

160. Keshk terms this report "the Ḥijāz vs. Syrocentric version." See *Historians' Muʿāwiya*, 157–69.

161. According to Marsham, the *bayʿa* in the Ḥijāz was associated with the *ḥajj* or the *ʿumra.* See *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, 90.

162. In Arabic discourse fox signifies negative characteristics, such as treachery, cunning deceitfulness, betrayal, and lack of trust. Fox is also associated politically with the word *dāhiya,* such is the case with ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 43/663) who is known as *dāhiyat al-ʿarab.* See Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt,* 4: 191—95.

163. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ*, ed. Akram al-ʿUmarī (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayba, 1985), 213–14.

164. For the structure of the Syrian troops, see Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, 89–91.

in later sources, such as those of Ibn Aʿtham al-Kufī[165] (d. 314/926),[166] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi (d. 328/940),[167] and al-Suyūṭī.[168] However, unlike Ibn Khayyāṭ, these scholars also make reference to interpretations of Q 46:17, particularly the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative involving the confrontation between Marwān and ʿĀʾisha. Interestingly, Ibn Aʿtham, who was a Shiʿite sympathizer,[169] includes al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī (d. 61/680) in the story and presents him as the first leader with whom Muʿāwiya met. He also includes a conversation between ʿĀʾisha and Muʿāwiya in which she reprimands him for threatening her brother and the three other leaders.[170] These distinctions show that Khalīfa, as a historian, refrained from dealing with regional narratives in favor of a broader imperial context.

The *isnād* of Khalīfa's second report includes Wahb b. Jarīr → Jarīr b. Ḥāzim → Ayyūb al-Sikhtyānī (d. 131/749) → Nāfiʿ (d. 117/726).[171] Except for Nāfiʿ,[172] who was a Medinan and ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar's *mawlā*, the other transmitters were Basran. According to this report, Muʿāwiya threatened to kill Ibn ʿUmar if he refused to pledge allegiance to Yazīd. However, Muʿāwiya denied having made the threat when confronted by ʿAbd Allāh b. Ṣafwān (d. 73/692),[173] who came to Ibn ʿUmar's aid.[174] The emphasis on Ibn ʿUmar, the oldest son of the second caliph, reflects the view that Muʿāwiya's decision to embrace hereditary succession broke with the model of rightful caliphal transition established by the first two caliphs.

Khalīfa's third report[175] is transmitted on the authority of Wahb b. Jarīr and Juwayriyya b. Asmāʾ, who heard it from the elders of Medina. In this report, Muʿāwiya, seeking the support of Medinan leaders for the appointment of Yazīd, first employed conciliatory means to win their hearts. As he was approaching Mecca, he allowed al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr, Ibn ʿUmar, and Ibn al-Zubayr to accompany him. Muʿāwiya first pretended to be very respectful of these leaders, praising their virtues and the prominent place they occupied within the Quraysh and the Islamic community. When they arrived in Mecca, he requested that they pledge allegiance to Yazīd. In this report as in the first one, Ibn al-Zubayr emerges as the principal opposition leader, speaking on behalf of the

---

165. For discussions about the date of his death, see Lawrence Conrad, "Ibn Aʿtham and His History," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 23 (2015): 92–96.

166. Ibn Aʿtham, *Futūḥ*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Muʿīd Khān et al. (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1388–95/1968–75), 4:232–44.

167. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi transmits this report on the authority of al-Madāʾinī (d. 225/840). See *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, ed. Mufīd Qumayḥa (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983), 5:119–20.

168. Al-Suyūṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ*, ed. Jamāl Muṣṭafā (Cairo: Dār al-Fajr li-l-Turāth, 1999), 156–57.

169. Conrad, "Ibn Aʿtham," 112–14.

170. Ibn Aʿtham, *Futūḥ*, 4:237–38.

171. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, 4:210–11.

172. For discussion about Nāfiʿ's role in the transmission of reports and about whether he was a historical figure, see Motzki, *Analysing Muslim Traditions*, 61–124.

173. Ibn Ṣafwān, who was a prominent Umayyad figure, supported Ibn al-Zubayr's claim to the caliphate and was killed along with Ibn al-Zubayr at the end of the siege that the Umayyads imposed on Mecca. Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:125–27.

174. Khalīfa, *Taʾrīkh*, 214.

175. Keshk labels this report "the Ḥijazī centric version." See *Historians' Muʿāwiya*, 147–54.

other dignitaries. He argued that the Muslims would support Muʿāwiya only if he were to follow the model of succession established by the Prophet, Abū Bakr, and ʿUmar. Clarifying this statement, Ibn al-Zubayr specified three principles of succession: the consensus of the community, avoidance of hereditary succession, and the *shūrā*. Muʿāwiya not only refused to accept these traditions but, claims Khalīfa, threatened to kill all four dignitaries if they did not support his son. According to Khalīfa, the circumstances gave rise to the impression that the four leaders had acquiesced to Muʿāwiya's request, and the people of Medina consequently followed suit.[176] This report, like the other two cited by Khalīfa, centers on the theme of legitimate caliphal succession and depicts the appointment of Yazīd as undermining previous models of accession. New in this report is the appearance of al-Ḥusayn, which seems to reflect a later modification, perhaps by Shiʿite sympathizers aiming to connect him with the question of legitimate caliphal succession. The works of Ibn Aʿtham[177] and al-Maqdisī,[178] who likewise emphasize Ḥusayn's role in the debate, also display this orientation.

Khalīfa's third report appears in al-ʿAskarī's (d. 395/1005) *Kitāb al-Awāʾil*. The main difference between these accounts is that al-ʿAskarī combines this report with a description of the confrontation between Marwān and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān presented in the interpretation of Q 46:17.[179] Again, Khalīfa's omission of this material demonstrates that he was interested primarily in presenting significant junctures in caliphal history that had far-reaching implications. This orientation is evident in Khalīfa's eschewing of discussions regarding the interpretation of Q 46:17, in general, and the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative, in particular. At the same time, he presents Ibn al-Zubayr as the main opponent of Yazīd's succession, allocating a secondary role to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān.

Khalīfa's placement of Muʿāwiya's hereditary rule within broader caliphal history is repeated in later *taʾrīkh* works, particularly in early universal histories such as that of al-Yaʿqūbī (d. ca. 284/897), who was interested in situating the Islamic caliphate within the larger frame of universal history. He mentions Muʿāwiya's appointment of Yazīd as his successor only in passing, and without an *isnād*. Like Khalīfa, he refers to four Ḥijāzī leaders who opposed this move: al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, and ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr. However, al-Yaʿqūbī assigns the leading role in the opposition to ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar and Ibn al-Zubayr, claiming that they considered Yazīd immoral and unfit to be the caliph.[180] Ibn ʿUmar, the oldest son of the caliph ʿUmar, was known for his piety, while Ibn al-Zubayr would later pose a major political challenge to the Umayyads.

---

176. Khalīfa, *Taʾrīkh*, 215–17.

177. Ibn Aʿtham, *Futūḥ*, 4:241–44; cited in Keshk, *Historians' Muʿāwiya*, 147–50.

178. Al-Maqdisī incorporates the first and second reports into one narrative. He also mentions only three Medinan leaders: al-Ḥusayn, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, and Ibn al-Zubayr. See *Badʾ*, 6:6–7.

179. Al-ʿAskarī, *Kitāb al-Awāʾil*, ed. Muḥammad al-Wakīl (Cairo: Dār al-Bashīr li-l-Thaqāfa, 1987), 235–36.

180. Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1960), 2:228. For the English translation, see *The Works of Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī: An English Translation*, trans. Matthew Gordon, Chase Robinson, Everett Rowson, and Michael Fishbein (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 3:904.

A detailed presentation of the Ḥijāzī opposition to Muʿāwiya's hereditary succession appears in al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh*. Like Khalīfa, al-Ṭabarī locates his discussion of hereditary succession within a broader representation of caliphal history, where the opposition of the Medinan leadership to Muʿāwiya's questionable move occupies an important place in al-Ṭabarī's account. What is new in al-Ṭabarī's narrative arrangement is his reliance on predominantly Iraqi authorities. Citing al-Ḥārith b. Muḥammad (d. 282/895) and al-Madāʾinī (d. 225/840),[181] he reports that after the death of Ziyād b. Abīh (d. 53/673), Muʿāwiya declared publicly that in the event of his own death Yazīd would be his successor. All Muslim leaders but five supported this decision.[182]

A further report[183] on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAwn (d. 151/768), who heard it from a man from Nakhla,[184] discloses the identity of these leaders:[185] they were al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, Ibn ʿUmar, Ibn al-Zubayr, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, and Ibn ʿAbbās. Muʿāwiya met separately with the first four and silenced their opposition by persuasion and force.[186] Al-Ṭabarī's inclusion of Ibn ʿAbbās here seems to reflect a later redaction influenced by an Abbasid political agenda.[187]

Al-Ṭabarī concludes his discussion of Muʿāwiya's inauguration of hereditary succession by providing two additional reports, which take the form of political advice that Muʿāwiya issued to Yazīd on his deathbed, cautioning him about future political challenges. The *isnād* of the first report includes the Kufan scholars Hishām al-Kalbī (d. 204/819) → Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/774) → ʿAbd al-Malik b. Nawfal b. Musāḥiq (d. unknown). In this account we see Muʿāwiya warning his son about four Qurayshite dignitaries: al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, Ibn ʿUmar, and Ibn al-Zubayr. Yet Muʿāwiya singled out Ibn al-Zubayr as the most serious threat to the Umayyad caliphate. The same report appears in later works, such as those of Ibn al-Jawzī,[188] Ibn Kathīr,[189] and Ibn al-Athīr.[190] However, these authors question the inclusion of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, claiming that he died two years before the event. This

---

181. On al-Madāʾinī's contributions to early Islamic historiography, see Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, 28–29.

182. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960), 5:303.

183. Julius Wellhausen presents these two reports on the authority of al-Madāʾinī. See *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall*, trans. Margaret Weir (London: Curzon Press, 1973), 144.

184. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAwn was a reliable *ḥadīth* scholar and Qurʾān reciter who maintained close relations with the Umayyad rulers and hence held anti-Qadarite views. See Andersson, *Early Sunni Historiography*, 129; Judd, *Religious Scholars*, 62–70.

185. The *isnād* includes Yaʿqūb b. Ibrāhīm al-Dawraqī (d. 252/866) → Ismāʿīl b. Ibrāhīm (d. 169/785) → ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAwn → a man from Nakhla.

186. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 5:303–4.

187. Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy*, 91–92.

188. Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995), 5:321–22.

189. Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, 11:391.

190. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-taʾrīkh*, ed. ʿUmar Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 2012), 3:120.

discrepancy between al-Ṭabarī and later historians gives insight into the process by which later reports were redacted.

Al-Ṭabarī's second report is transmitted on the authority of the Kufan Hishām al-Kalbī and ʿAwāna b. al-Ḥakam (d. 147/764). According to this report, after Muʿāwiya instructed Yazīd on how to deal with the people of the Ḥijāz, Iraq, and Syria, he warned him specifically of the Qurayshite leaders mentioned in the previous report, but excluding ʿAbd al-Raḥmān.[191] Al-Ṭabarī's reliance on Abū Mikhnaf[192] and ʿAwāna, who were important Kufan authorities on the history of the early Umayyad caliphs,[193] represents a transition from Medinan authorities to Iraqi historical traditions. The new orientation is evident in al-Masʿūdī's (d. 345/954) *Murūj*, which emphasizes the central role of Iraqi leaders, particularly al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Qays al-Fihrī (d. 64/685), in supporting Muʿāwiya's appointment of Yazīd as his successor.[194]

In sum, the portrayals of Muʿāwiya's shift to hereditary succession in early *taʾrīkh* works differ from those found in other literary genres in terms of the narrative placement and protagonists. Instead of presenting the Ḥijāzī opposition to Muʿāwiya's decision as a regional conflict, the historians place the dispute within the broader setting of major events and transformations in caliphal history. This is evident in the gradual shift from the use of Medinan authorities to reliance on predominantly Iraqi sources. Another difference lies in the depiction of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. In *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *ansāb*, and *adab* works he appears as the central Medinan opposition leader. However, in *taʾrīkh* narratives his role is secondary, eclipsed by the central role of Ibn al-Zubayr.

6. Conclusions

Various literary genres treating the Ḥijāzī opposition to Muʿāwiya's initiation of dynastic succession offer constructive perspectives on the provenance and evolution of representations of this event. Narrative placement, relevance of materials, and political agenda constitute significant variables in the construction of historical narratives. Early allusions to the Ḥijāzī-Umayyad dispute took the form of debates over the identity of the rebellious son in early commentaries on Q 46:17. The predominant view that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr was the disobedient son originated in Umayyad political arguments. Early *ḥadīth* and *adab* narratives portray Marwān b. al-Ḥakam as the initiator of the interpretation that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān was the rebellious son in this verse to discredit him after the latter opposed Yazīd's appointment as Muʿāwiya's successor. An examination of the competing interpretations of the verse suggests two major conclusions. First, the Umayyads recruited prominent *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* scholars, such as Qatāda, to disseminate the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān narrative effectively. Second, the construction of counterreports to clear ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's name—a difficult task—entailed the affiliation of these countervailing views with prominent authorities such as ʿĀʾisha and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

---

191. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 5:322–23.

192. De Prémare, *Les Fondations*, 364.

193. Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 58; Donner, *Narratives*, 183, 195; al-Dūrī, *Baḥth*, 35–37.

194. Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar*, ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmiʿa al-Lubnāniyya, 1965), 3:217–19.

Consequently, references to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān as the leader of the opposition to Umayyad dynastic succession provide a yardstick by which to assess the origin and evolution of the Ḥijāzī opposition. In *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *ansāb*, and *adab* sources ʿAbd al-Raḥmān is presented as the central Medinan leader to dispute the Umayyad rule of succession. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's disagreeable *jāhilī* past made him an easy target for Umayyad criticism, especially since he was the oldest son of the first caliph. The dispute between the Umayyads and the Medinan leadership is presented in these genres as regional conflict, with the Ḥijāz, particularly Medina, serving as the central setting. The significance of Medina as the origin of these reports can also be seen in the geographical affiliations of their transmitters.

Representations of the Ḥijāzī-Umayyad dispute over hereditary succession in *taʾrīkh* narratives offer a different perspective compared with those of the abovementioned literary genres. Instead of situating the dispute in a provincial setting, these historians placed it within a broader imperial framework that carried far more consequential political meanings. By doing so, they sought to draw attention to important junctures in caliphal history that impacted the construction of historical memory. This distinction is also evident in the gradual shift from reliance on Medinan transmitters to an emphasis on Iraqi authorities, as well as in the changing identification of the event's protagonists. The central role that the *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* literature grants to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān in the Ḥijāzī opposition to the Umayyads is reduced to a secondary role in the *taʾrīkh* works, which instead elevate the influence of other Ḥijāzī leaders, particularly Ibn al-Zubayr. It comes as no surprise that discussions about the identity of the rebellious son in Q 46:17 are absent in the historical narratives. Common to the presentations of the conflict in all genres is Muʿāwiya's mindfulness of the Ḥijāzī leadership's reactions to Umayyad institutional innovations.

Bibliography

Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī. *Al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr.* Edited by ʿĀdil ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and ʿAlī Muʿawwaḍ. 8 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1993.

Ahmed, Asad. *The Religious Elite of the Early Islamic Hijaz: Five Prosopographical Case Studies.* Oxford, 2011.

Andersson, Tobias. *Early Sunnī Historiography: A Study of the* Tārīkh *of Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ* Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Al-ʿAskarī. *Kitāb al-Awāʾil.* Edited by Muḥammad al-Wakīl. Cairo: Dār al-Bashīr li-l-Thaqāfa wa-l-ʿUlūm al-Islāmiyya, 1987.

Al-Baghawī. *Tafsīr al-Baghawī maʿālim al-tanzīl.* Edited by Muḥammad al-Nimr, ʿUthmān Ḍamīriyya, and Sulaymān al-Ḥursh. 8 vols. Riyadh: Dār Ṭayba, 1989.

Al-Baghdādī, al-Khaṭīb. *Taʾrīkh madīnat al-salām.* Edited by Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf. 17 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001.

Al-Balādhurī. *Ansāb al-ashrāf.* Edited by Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Vols. 4-5. Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1996.

———. *Ansāb al-ashrāf.* Edited by Wilferd Madelung. Vol. 2. Beirut: Klaus Schwarz, 2003.

Berg, Herbert. *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period.* Richmond: Curzon, 2003.

Blecher, Joel. *Said the Prophet of God: Hadith Commentary across a Millennium.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2018.

Boekhoff-van der Voort, Nicolet. "The *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī: Searching for Earlier Source-Material." In *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki*, edited by Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers, 27–48. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Borrut, Antoine. *Entre mémoire et pouvoir: L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides (v. 72–193/692–909).* Leiden: Brill, 2011.

———. "The Future of the Past: Historical Writing in Early Islamic Syria and the Umayyad Memory." In *Power, Patronage, and Memory in Early Islam*, edited by Alain George and Andrew Marsham, 275–300. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

———. "La memoria omeyyade: Les omeyyades entre souvenir et oubli dans les sources narratives islamiques." In *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, edited by Antoine Borrut and Paul Cobb, 25–61. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Al-Bukhārī. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.* Edited by Aḥmad Shākir and Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Bāqī. Cairo: Dār Ibn al-Haytham, 2004.

Cheddadi, Abdesselam. *Les Arabes et l'appropriation de l'histoire: Émergences et premiers développements de l'historiographie jusqu'au II/VIII siècle.* Paris: Sindbad-Actes Sud, 2004.

Conrad, Lawrence. "Ibn Aʿtham and His History." *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 23 (2015): 92–96.

Crone, Patricia, and Martin Hinds. *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

al-Dāwūdī. *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn.* 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983.

Donner, Fred. *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing.* Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1998.

———. "Umayyad Efforts at Legitimization: the Umayyads' Silent Heritage." in *Umayyad Legacies: Medieval Memories from Syria to Spain*, edited by Antoine Borrut and Paul Cobb, 187–211. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Al-Dūrī, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz. *Baḥth fī nashʾat ʿilm al-tārīkh ʿind al-ʿarab.* Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1993.

El-Hibri, Tayeb. "The Redemption of Umayyad Memory by the ʿAbbāsids." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 61, no. 4 (2002): 241–65.

Al-Farrāʾ. *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān.* Edited by Muḥammad al-Najjār and Aḥmad Najātī. 3 vols. Beirut: Dār ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1983.

Gilliot, Claude. "The Beginnings of Qurʾanic Exegesis." in *The Qurʾan: Formative Interpretation*, edited by Andrew Rippin, 1–27. Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1999.

———. "Mujāhid's Exegesis: Origins, Paths of Transmission and Development of a Meccan Exegetical Tradition in Its Human, Spiritual and Theological Environment." In *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, edited by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink, 63–112. London: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Goldfeld, Yeshayahu. "The Development of Theory on Qurʾānic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship." *Studia Islamica* 67 (1988): 5–27.

Gordon, Matthew. *The Rise of Islam.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005.

Haider, Najam. "Muʿāwiya in Ḥijāz: The Study of a Tradition." In *Law and Tradition in Classical Islamic Thought: Studies in Honor of Professor Hossein Modarressi*, edited by Michael Cook et al., 43–64. New York: Palgrave, 2013.

Hawting, Gerald. *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate, AD 661–750.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1987.

Al-Hawwārī, Hūd b. Muḥakkam. *Tafsīr kitāb Allāh al-ʿazīz.* Edited by Balḥāj Sharīfī. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990.

Humphreys, Stephen. *Muʿawiya ibn Abi Sufyan: From Arabia to Empire.* Oxford: Oneworld, 2006.

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi. *Al-ʿIqd al-farīd.* Edited by Mufīd Qumayḥa. 8 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2006.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm.* Edited by Asʿad al-Ṭayyib. 10 vols. Riyadh: Maktabat Nizār al-Bāz, 1997.

Ibn Abī Khaythama. *Al-Taʾrīkh al-kabīr.* Edited by Ṣalāḥ Hilāl. 2 vols. Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Nashr, 2006.

Ibn Abī Shayba. *Al-Muṣannaf.* Edited by Usāma b. Muḥammad. 15 vols. Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Ṭibāʿa, 2008.

Ibn Abī Zamanīn. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz.* Edited by Ḥusayn ʿUkāsha and Muḥammad al-Kanz. 5 vols. Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 2002.

Ibn ʿAsākir. *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq.* Edited by ʿAmr al-ʿĀmrawī. 80 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995.

Ibn Aʿtham. *Futūḥ.* Edited by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Muʿīd Khān et al. 8 vols. Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1388–95/1968–75.

Ibn al-Athīr. *Al-Kāmil fī al-taʾrīkh.* Edited by ʿUmar Tadmurī. 11 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 2012.

Ibn ʿAṭiyya al-Andalusī. *Muḥarrar al-wajīz fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz.* Edited by ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad. 6 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2001.

Ibn Ḥajar. *Al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba.* Edited by ʿĀdil ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and ʿAlī Muʿawwaḍ. 8 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995.

———. *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb.* Edited by ʿAṭā ʿAbd al-Qādir. 10 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1994.

Ibn al-Jawzī. *Al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk.* Edited by Muḥammad ʿAṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿAṭā. 16 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995.

———. *Tadhkirat al-arīb fī tafsīr al-gharīb.* Edited by Ṭāriq al-Sayyid. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004.

———. *Zād al-masīr fī ʿilm al-tafsīr.* Edited by ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 2010.

Ibn Kathīr. *Al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya.* Edited by ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī. 21 vols. Giza: Dār Hajr, 1999.

———. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm.* Edited by Sāmī Salāma. 8 vols. Riyadh: Dār Ṭayba, 1999.

Ibn Khallikān. *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbā ʾabnāʾ al-zamān.* Edited by Iḥsān ʿAbbās. 8 vols. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2005.

Ibn al-Nadīm. *Fihrist.* Edited by ʿAlī Ṭawīl. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996.

Ibn Saʿd. *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā.* Edited by Muḥammad ʿAṭā. 9 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997.

Al-Iṣfahānī. *Kitāb al-Aghānī.* Edited by ʿAbd al-ʿAmīr ʿAlī Muhannā and Samīr Jābir. 20 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2002.

Judd, Steven. "Narratives and Character Development: Al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī on Late Umayyad History." In *Ideas, Concepts and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Arabic Literature and Islam*, edited by Sebastian Günther, 209–26. Leiden: Brill, 2005.

———. *Religious Scholars and the Umayyads: Piety-Minded Supporters of the Marwānid Caliphate.* London: Routledge, 2014.

Al-Jurjānī. *Darj al-durar fī tafsīr al-āy wa-l-suwar.* Edited by Ṭalʿat al-Farḥān and Muḥammad Shakkūr. 2 vols. Amman: Dār al-Fikr, 2009.

Kennedy, Hugh. *Caliphate: A History of an Idea.* New York: Basic Books, 2016.

Keshk, Khaled. *The Historians' Muʿāwiya: The Depiction of Muʿāwiya in the Early Islamic Sources.* Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008.

Al-Khallāl. *Al-Sunna.* Edited by ʿAṭiyya al-Zahrānī. 7 vols. Riyadh: Dār al-Rāya, 1989.

Kilpatrick, Hilary. *Making the Great Book of Songs: Compilation and the Author's Craft in Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's "Kitāb al-Aghānī."* London: Routledge Curzon, 2003.

Lecker, Michael. "Some Biographical Notes on Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 41, no. 1 (1996): 22–31.

Leemhuis, Fred. "Discussion and Debate in Early Commentaries of the Qurʾān." In *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, edited by Jane McAuliffe et al., 320–28. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

———. "Origins and Early Development of the *Tafsīr* Tradition." In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, edited by Andrew Rippin, 13–30. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013.

Lucas, Scott. *Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam: The Legacy of the Generation of Ibn Saʿd, Ibn Maʿīn, and Ibn Ḥanbal.* Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Madelung, Wilferd. "ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr the *Mulḥid.*" In Wilferd Madelung, *Studies in Medieval Muslim Thought and History*, edited by Sabine Schmidtke, no. 17. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2013.

———. *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib. *Al-Hidāya ilā bulūgh al-nihāya.* Sharjah: Kulliyyat al-Sharīʿa wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya, Jāmiʿat al-Shāriqa, 2008.

Al-Maqdisī. *Kitāb al-Badʾ wa-l-taʾrīkh.* 6 vols. Beirut: Maktabat Khayyāṭ, n.d.

Marsham, Andrew. *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

Al-Masʿūdī. *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar*. Edited by Charles Pellat. 7 vols. Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmiʿa al-Lubnāniyya, 1965–79.

Al-Māturīdī. *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna.* Edited by Majdī Bassalūm. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2005.

Al-Māwardī. *Al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn, tafsīr al-Māwardī.* Edited by al-Sayyid b. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm. 6 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya and Muʾassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1992.

Al-Mizzī. *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl.* Edited by Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf. 35 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1983–92.

Motzki, Harald. *Analysing Muslim Traditions: Studies in Legal, Exegetical and Maghāzī Ḥadīth.* Leiden: Brill, 2010.

———. *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools.* Translated by Marion Katz. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

———. "The Question of the Authenticity of Muslim Traditions Reconsidered: A Review Article." In *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, edited by Herbert Berg, 211–57. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Mourad, Suleiman. *Early Islam between Myth and History: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110H/728 CE) and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship.* Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Munt, Harry. "Caliphal Imperialism and Hijazi Elites in the Second/Eighth Century." *Al-Masāq* 28 (2016): 6–21.

Al-Naḥḥās. *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān.* Edited by Muḥammad al-Ṣābūnī. 6 vols. Mecca: Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurā, 1988.

Al-Nasafī. *Tafsīr al-Nasafī: Madārik al-tanzīl wa-ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl.* Edited by Yusūf Bidīwī and Muḥyī al-Dīn Mistū. 3 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kalam al-Ṭayyib, 1998.

Al-Nasāʾī. *Kitāb al-Sunan al-kubrā.* Edited by Ḥasan Shalabī. 12 vols. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2001.

———. *Tafsīr.* Edited by Sayyid al-Jilyamī and Ṣabrī al-Shāfiʿī. 2 vols. Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, 1990.

Al-Nīsābūrī, al-Ḥākim. *Al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-ṣaḥīḥayn.* Edited by Muṣṭafā ʿAṭā. 5 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2002.

Al-Nīsābūrī, Ḥasan. *Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān wa-raghāʾib al-furqān.* Edited by Ibrāhīm ʿAwaḍ. 30 vols. Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awlāduhu, 1962.

Neuwirth, Angelika. "Qurʾan and History: A Disputed Relationship; Some Reflections on Qurʾanic History and History of the Qurʾan." *Journal of Qurʾānic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2003): 1–18.

Noth, Albrecht, and Lawrence Conrad. *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study.* Translated by Michael Bonner. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1994.

Polat, Mizrap. *Der Umwandlungsprozess vom Kalifat zur Dynastie: Regierungspolitik und Religion beim ersten Umayyadenherrscher Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999.

Prémare, Alfred-Louis de. *Les fondations de l'islam : Entre écriture et histoire.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002.

Al-Qadi, Wadad. "The Religious Foundation of the Late Umayyad Ideology." In *The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures*, ed. Fred Donner, 37–79. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012.

Al-Qurṭubī. *Al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān.* Edited by ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī. 20 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 2007.

Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn. *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb.* 32 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981.

Robinson, Chase. *Islamic Historiography.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Rubin, Uri. "Prophets and Caliphs: The Biblical Foundation of the Umayyad Authority." In *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, edited by Herbert Berg, 87–99. Leiden: Brill, 2003.

Al-Sadūsī, *Kitāb Ḥadhf man nasaba Quraysh.* Edited by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid. 2 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd, 1976.

Al-Salimi, Abdulrahman. *Early Islamic Law in Basra in the 2nd/8th Century: Aqwāl Qatāda b. Diʿāma al-Sadūsī* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

Al-Samʿānī. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* Edited by Ghunaym b. Ghunaym. 8 vols. Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan, 1997.

Al-Samarqandī. *Baḥr al-ʿulūm.* Edited by ʿAlī Muʿawwaḍ, ʿĀdil ʿAbd al-Mawjūd, and Ahmad al-Nūtī. 3 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1993.

Al-Ṣanʿānī, ʿAbd al-Razzāq. *Al-Muṣannaf.* Edited by Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī. 12 vols. Beirut: al-Majlis al-ʿIlmī, 1983.

———. *Tafsīr.* Edited by Maḥmūd ʿAbdū. 3 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1999.

Sezgin, Fuat. *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums.* 9 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1967–.

Sinai, Nicolai. "The Qurʾanic Commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān and the Evolution of Early *Tafsīr* Literature." In *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, edited by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink, 113–43. London: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Spellberg, Denise. *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of ʿAʾisha bint Abi Bakr.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Al-Suyūṭī. *Al-Durr al-manthūr fī al-tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr.* Edited by ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī. 17 vols. Cairo: Markaz Hajr li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabiyya wa-l-Islāmiyya, 2003.

———. *Al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān.* Edited by Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2008.

———. *Taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ.* Edited by Jamāl Muṣṭafā. Cairo: Dār al-Fajr li-l-Turāth, 1999.

Al-Ṭabarī. *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān.* Edited by ʿAbd Allāh al-Turkī. 25 vols. Cairo: Hajar, 2001.

———. *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk.* Edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. 11 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960.

Al-Ṭabrisī. *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* Edited by Ibrāhīm Shams al-Dīn. 10 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997.

Al-Thaʿālibī. *Al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* Edited by ʿAlī Muʿawwaḍ and ʿĀdil ʿAbd al-Mawjūd. 5 vols. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī and Muʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 1997.

Al-Thaʿlabī. *Al-Kashf wa-l-bayān.* Edited by Muhammad ʿĀshūr. 10 vols. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2002.

Al-Ṭūsī. *Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* Edited by Aḥmad al-ʿĀmilī. 10 vols. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.

Van Ess, Josef. *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam.* 6 vols. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1991–97.

Versteegh, Cornelius. *Arabic Grammar and Qurʾānic Exegesis in Early Islam.* Leiden: Brill, 1993.

Versteegh, Kees. "Grammar and Exegesis: The Origins of Kufan Grammar and the *Tafsīr Muqātil.*" *Der Islam* 67 (1990): 206–42.

Al-Wāḥidī. *Al-Wasīṭ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-majīd.* Edited by ʿĀdil ʿAbd al-Mawjūd et al. 4 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1995.

Al-Wāqidī. *Kitāb al-Maghāzī.* Edited by M. Jones. 3 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Watt, W. Montgomery. *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought.* Oxford: Oneworld, 1988.

Wellhausen, Julius. *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall.* Translated by Margaret Weir. London: Curzon Press, 1973.

Al-Yaʿqūbī. *Taʾrīkh.* 2 vols. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1960.

Al-Yaʿqūbī. *The Works of Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī.* Translated by Matthew Gordon, Chase Robinson, Everett Rowson, and Michael Fishbein. 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Al-Zajjāj. *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān.* Edited by ʿAbd al-Jalīl Shalabī. 5 vols. Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1988.

Al-Zamakhsharī. *Tafsīr al-kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl wa-ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-taʾwīl.* Edited by Khalīl Shīḥāta. Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 2009.

Al-Zubayrī, Muṣʿab. *Kitāb Nasab Quraysh.* Edited by Evariste Lévi-Provençal. 2 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1976.

A Brief History of Islamic Civilization
from Its Genesis in the Late Nineteenth Century
to Its Institutional Entrenchment*

Kevin van Bladel

Yale University

(kevin.vanbladel@yale.edu)

Abstract

This article sketches the early history of Islamic civilization from its genesis in the late nineteenth century to its institutionalization in the twentieth. Key moments include its enshrinement in journals and a monumental encyclopedia and the flight of European Semitists to the United States. Its institutionalization in the undergraduate curriculum at the University of Chicago in 1956 created a successful model for the subsequent dissemination of Islamic civilization. Working in a committee on general education (the core curriculum) in the social sciences at the University of Chicago, Marshall Hodgson inaugurated Islamic civilization as a subject of university study that was not just for specialists but available to American college students as fulfilling a basic requirement in a liberal arts education. Many other universities followed this practice. Since then, Islamic civilization has come to be shared by the educated public. Today it is an internationally accepted and well-funded entity that confers contested social power but still lacks analytical power.

The purpose of this article is briefly to trace the development of Islamic civilization from its beginning in the nineteenth century, in the intellectual context of its formation, to the middle of the twentieth century, when it became a part of institutions that ensured its reproduction. After that, Islamic civilization becomes too widespread and too various for me to capture in short compass. Others may wish to pursue that difficult task. Nevertheless, I do reflect in conclusion on the ramifications of Islamic civilization for university curricula.

"Islamic civilization" is common currency in English, as are its equivalents in other languages. It appears in the titles of books, in the names of university courses and wealthy foundations, and in the programs of policy think tanks. It is a widely accepted framework for explaining a large part of human history. Historians of Islamic civilization understand that it is a problematic concept, but they have normally been satisfied to leave it undefined or to deploy ad hoc definitions. Specialists often use the term merely out of convention or convenience.[1] Recent efforts to analyze it are either tangential to a larger concern to define Islam itself, a different project,[2] or part of Muslims' efforts to develop a transnational Muslim community for coordinated social and political action. Neither of these aspects of the problem is discussed here. I do not address debates about the nature or definition of Islam or of religion itself. Although the religion of Islam and Islamic civilization are frequently equated or used interchangeably, only the latter is discussed here. I will, however, inadvertently shed some light on their conflation.

Where, then, did Islamic civilization come from, and how did it become entrenched? Islamic civilization has a history. Its own myth of its origin posits a beginning in the seventh century, but it did not originate with Muḥammad or with any caliph. No early Muslims ever even mentioned "Islamic civilization." Some early Muslims did eventually come to talk about events that happened "in Islam" (*fī al-islām*), using the term to refer to an ongoing period contrasting with what came before, and Muslim jurisconsults did develop a concept

---

1. For example, J. W. Meri writes in the editorial introduction to *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1:xi, "Such fundamental questions as to what Islamic civilization is . . . remain largely unanswered." Neither the introduction nor any article in this reference work on Islamic civilization defines its subject. Another recent example is C. Robinson's *Islamic Civilization in Thirty Lives: The First 1,000 Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016). Robinson says in the introduction that he means by Islamic civilization "the distinctive yield, in lived experience and especially high culture, of the religious and political project undertaken by Muslims over the near millennium that spans from the seventh to the sixteenth centuries." It seems to be a term of convenience to put thirty interesting biographies of Muslims into one book. The idea that Islamic civilization is defined by its "high culture" is owed especially to von Grunebaum and Hodgson, whose impact is discussed below.

2. See, e.g., A. Karamustafa, who relies on the Islamic civilization concept to define Islam in "Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress," in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, ed. O. Safi, 98–110 (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003). Similarly, S. Ahmed directly criticizes the Islamic civilization model in defining Islam (along with most other major models for the study of Islam), but then substitutes his own expression for a 500-year period of it, dubbing it the "Balkans-to-Bengal complex" of 1350–1850. The "Muslims (and others)" inhabiting this broad region in this period, he maintains, participated in "a common paradigm of Islamic life and thought" that admitted of internal contradiction. Despite the different terms and emphases, this is, practically speaking, the same as Hodgson's Islamic civilization bound by an elite culture of letters, which I discuss below. See S. Ahmed, *What Is Islam?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 73–85 and 153–75. Ahmed's explicit goal is "to provide a new language for the conceptualization of Islam," so the new terminology is not surprising. Whatever the results of their investigations, neither Karamustafa nor Ahmed are searching for the reasons we talk about Islamic civilization; rather, they are attempting to define Islam as Islamic civilization or by means of a closely similar stand-in concept. Of the many reviews of Ahmed's book, see especially F. Griffel, "Contradictions and Lots of Ambiguity: Two New Perspectives on Premodern (and Postclassical) Islamic Societies," *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review* 8, no. 1 (2017): 1–21.

of the Domain of Islam (*dār al-islām*) for rulings about residence and warfare.[3] These terms, like the Qurʾānic concept of *umma*, or religious community, deserve historical studies to elucidate their development, but they were not intended to define a discrete and ideally uniform transnational *civilization* and its contents to serve as one subject of a world history in contrast or comparison with distinct, non-Islamic civilizations.

The story told here involves very few Muslims. That, in itself, reveals something about the origins of Islamic civilization. Some have suggested to me that the identification of individual Muslim intellectuals who used similar (but different) concepts here and there might bequeath analytical validity to the present use of the term and increase its utility. But even if one were to discover a premodern "insider" concept of Islamic civilization—perhaps an Arabic word that once served a purpose like that of the English expression—it would not explain the modern use of Islamic civilization, which arose in historical circumstances peculiar to Europe, which I shall outline. Islamic civilization came into existence without recourse to parallel "native" concepts. Otherwise we might have used those terms instead.[4] Attempts to validate the use of Islamic civilization for analysis on the basis of Arabic terms are afterthoughts. Islamic civilization first appeared among non-Muslim Europeans. To understand it, the concept, its institutionalization, and its reiteration in the outlook of individuals, one must begin with its component parts.

Civilization

The term "civilization" appeared in English in the sixteenth century, but it became current in the eighteenth, when it referred at first to the progress of the Civil Law as followed in Catholic Scotland and on the Continent against other kinds of law, such as English Common Law. In these early English uses, it meant the subjugation of the Scottish Highlanders, who had their own customary clan laws, and the imposition on them, as barbarian savages, of the Civil Law of the Scottish Lowlanders. That is what the English word civilization meant when Samuel Johnson debated its use as a neologism for his *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). Thus, already in its earliest uses in English, the new word civilization implied the contrast of regulated and refined city-dwellers with anarchic savages. By the 1820s, the term civilization referred to the development of manners and improvement with

---

3. S. Albrecht, "Dār al-Islām and Dār al-Ḥarb," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas, and E. Rowson (Leiden: Brill Online), http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_25867.

4. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), the Andalusī scholar and courtier of the Ḥafṣids in North Africa, is sometimes mentioned as discussing Islamic civilization. He wrote about *al-ʿumrān al-basharī*, "human cultivation," which Rosenthal and others have translated as "civilization"—not incorrectly, in one sense of the English word. See Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, ed. M. Quatremère (Paris: Benjamin Duprat, 1858), 1:68; F. Rosenthal, trans., *The Muqaddimah*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 1:89. But Ibn Khaldūn distinguished varieties of human cultivation merely as divided into the sedentary and pastoral types (*ḥaḍarī* and *badawī*), not as supernatural entities in world history, nor as founded on religions such as his own (Islam). Ibn Khaldūn also distinguished between different types of government and between Arabs and non-Arabs, and identified other interesting factors in large-scale history, but he never once referred to Islamic civilization. His discussion of the nature of the caliphate is likewise not about a transnational unit of human society with a common "high culture" unique to it. His interest was in patterns of human society.

arts and sciences.[5] In France, the term *civilisation* developed almost simultaneously with the English word. It had, in French, especially the connotation of manners, civility, and refined and prestigious forms of conduct. The German word *Zivilisation* was borrowed from French in the eighteenth century.

Civilizations

In these derived senses, civilization was a matter of degree. Society could be more or less civilized, and successful civilization meant *progress* toward less savage qualities. It was apparent to Europeans in the late nineteenth century, however, that different peoples of the world had developed differently from them. Therefore, authors began to identify distinctly different "civilizations," turning the concept into one that also admitted of plurality. In this way, during the nineteenth century, the word civilization gradually developed the capacity to a serve as a vague stand-in for the word nation, especially when a collective term for societies before the modern nation-state was needed. By the end of the nineteenth century, books were being published in English with titles such as *Primitive Civilizations* (London, 1894)—this one, by Edith Jemima Simcox, describing the economies of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and China in antiquity. This use of the term is intact today.

With these terminological developments in place, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the term civilization was adopted by thinkers seeking to account for all the major patterns of human history. A model for discussing world history had been set by G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), whose spiritual interpretation of history was expressed in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* (1837). In this work, Hegel sought meaningful mystical patterns in supranational historical movements. For him, however, civilization was still a matter of degree, though distinct, individual nations carried the torch in each consecutive stage of his fanciful master narrative of enlightenment.[6]

Race, nation, and civilization competed as subjects of different master narratives of history in the late nineteenth century, but civilization became especially widespread in the early twentieth century between the World Wars. Two historians stand out as most responsible for applying and popularizing the term as the key to global history in this period. In highly influential works, Oswald Spengler (1880–1936)[7] and Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975)[8] both concocted what were in effect their own complete lists of the distinct civilizations of the world. These entities had their life cycles: birth, adolescence, maturity, and senescence. Spengler counted eight civilizations that were the outcome of progress to "high cultures." Toynbee counted nineteen civilizations in the world, not to mention the "abortive" and

---

5. For the preceding, see G. C. Caffentzis, "On the Scottish Origins of 'Civilization,'" in *Enduring Western Civilization*, ed. S. Federici, 13–36 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995). Johnson's dictionary uses "uncivilized" as a gloss for "brute."

6. A concise summary of Hegel's view on the role of Islam in history can be found in A. Hourani, "Islam and the Philosophers of History," *Middle East Studies* 3, no. 3 (1967): 206–68, at 245–46.

7. O. Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 2 vols. (Vienna: W. Braumüller, 1918–22); English translation *The Decline of the West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926–28).

8. A. J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 12 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1934–61).

"arrested" civilizations that might have entered maturity but did not. The history of the world could be told in terms of the vigor of the spirit and special characteristics of these distinct civilizations and the factors at play in that vigor. Civilizations, once understood as separate entities, needed to be compared to understand what made the peoples of the world irreducibly different. Spengler and Toynbee did not invent this way of thinking, and their use of "civilization" was controversial,[9] but they did make civilizations a vernacular framework for twentieth-century talk about the peoples of the world and their histories. By distinguishing separate civilizations, historians committed themselves to an attempt to determine their essential characteristics, which applied generally to each of their respective human participants.

For some historians, the use of "civilization" was anti-nationalist and therefore anti-fascist. Thus Werner Jaeger (1888–1961), the influential classical scholar, wrote in 1936 of "the disruption of Western civilization which we are witnessing, with the rise of the doctrine that culture and knowledge are nationalistic possessions, dividing group from group, rather than expressions of kinship binding the heirs of a common heritage into closer union."[10] For Jaeger, who had just emigrated to the United States to leave the National Socialist regime behind, the Greek texts he taught were the educational key to a united "West," meaning Europe and its colonies of people of European descent. Other examples could be produced, but this suffices to indicate that the well-intentioned goal of transcending nationalism was one early motivation in the development of the study of a putative Western civilization. Today, that has backfired badly, as Western civilization has become a rallying cry for racism and bigotry similar to those that the idea of Western civilization was developed to oppose.

The assumption that such distinct, different civilizations existed was taken for granted by innumerable intelligent people who nevertheless have never succeeded in defining the term in a way that would bear convincing analytical utility. To this day, the term civilization has no sound analytical basis. It has been conveniently redeployed in incommensurate ways on ever smaller scales to dignify important subjects for those unfamiliar with them. For example, one encounters talk of the civilization of the Hittites (a people), or of Mesopotamia (a region), or of Islam (a religion). Civilizations are designated not by thoroughgoing argument, but for the convenience of the historian in defining an area of expertise to bear the weight of a master narrative.

---

9. See, for example, the reaction of P. A. Sorokin, "Toynbee's Philosophy of History," *Journal of Modern History* 12 (1940): 374–87, at 381: "His 'civilizations' are not united systems but mere conglomerations of various civilizational objects and phenomena (congeries of systems and singular cultural traits) united only by special adjacency but not by causal or meaningful bonds." Walter Kaufman was similarly skeptical about Toynbee. In "Toynbee and Super-History," *Partisan Review* 22, no. 4 (1955): 531–41, at 536–37, he wrote, "The question of how many civilizations there are is like asking how many sciences there are, and the question when a particular civilization originated is on a level with the query when art began. Worse still, the conceit that civilizations are not only individual entities but the only units which can be studied historically one at a time, without referring beyond them, is the height of naiveté." These kinds of criticisms of the category have seldom been heard in the study of Islamic civilization, which begins by taking it for granted.

10. W. Jaeger, "Classical Philology and Humanism," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 67 (1936): 363–74, at 363.

The Study of Civilizations as the Historical Counterpart of Philology

The alleged founders of the putative Western civilization, ancient Greek authors, never wrote of such a thing as Western civilization. The expression in this sense occurs in English only as early as the 1850s, growing widespread only in the late nineteenth century. Its spread coincided with changes in the curriculum of universities. As technological subjects and professional skills gradually displaced classical learning in higher education, German philologists of Greek and Latin led a new approach to the study of their texts: *Alterthumswissenschaft*, the science of antiquity. This approach required the rich contextualization of ancient texts with *Realien*, all the materials of ancient life known through archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, ethnography, and any other possible method. The broadened scope of traditional Greek and Latin scholarship is exemplified by the monumental *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (first edition 1837–52, expanded version 1894–1980). Scholars of Greek and Latin were now poised to become teachers of general courses on "classical civilization" for students who were facing too many demands to learn Greek and Latin for themselves and for whom learning Greek and Latin alone were inadequate to understand "classical antiquity" in the awesome complexity now revealed through enormous scholarly labors.[11] This was a highly successful approach that professionalized scholars of Greek and Latin. It was soon emulated by the Semitists, who invented "Islamic civilization" for the purpose.

From Semitic Philology to Islamic Civilization

Islamic civilization was likewise conceived as distinct and internally coherent before any analysis. The term itself, with the qualifier "Islamic," implies at least one other (Western) civilization, the assumption of which was the precondition of its existence. From its first conception, therefore, and still today, one of the central debates about Islamic civilization has been its definition and boundaries. As its frontiers were never adequately defined, an overriding early concern has been the determination of what Muslims received or adopted from other allegedly distinct civilizations, and what that says about the character of this alleged Islamic civilization and the mentality of its inhabitants. The early European pioneers of Islamic civilization addressed not just texts but the *Realien* of their contexts, following the approach of *Altertumswissenschaft*. Soon they shifted, however, from studying the historical transmission of cultural goods and ideas between supposed separate civilizations, and especially into Islamic civilization from prior civilizations, to making claims about such concepts as "the Muslim mind" or "the conscience of Islam." In doing so, they almost always ignored economic conditions and other material factors in the lives of the persons participating in these exchanges. Such transactions are, indeed, "exchanges" and "encounters" only when they are conceived as crossing the boundaries of civilizations, which historians have preconceived in the first place. In this respect, the concept of distinct civilizations is an impediment to critical historical thinking.

---

11. C. Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

The concept of Islamic civilization, also long designated as "Muhammadan civilization," evolved gradually in the wake of classical civilization. In the early nineteenth century, historians did not write about a Muhammadan civilization. Gustav Weil (1808–1889), for example, wrote a *Geschichte der Chaliphen* in five volumes (1846–1862), which was, true to its title, a history of the caliphs from Abū Bakr onward, based closely on the Arabic sources available to him. His *Geschichte der islamitischen Völker von Mohammed bis zur Zeit des Sultans Selim* (1866), dealing with the religion, culture, and politics of specific peoples, was aimed at a learned public but likewise was not intended to provide broad generalizations about the character of an Islamic civilization. Nineteenth-century Semitists, perhaps not surprisingly, relied rather on "Semitic" as their category, making race—a false concept made worse through instinctively drawn but spurious ties to the genealogy of language families— the subject of their master narratives. For the prodigious philologist and historian Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930), for example, Islam (the religion) and the caliphs (its chiefs) formed the subject of a historical narrative, but not a topic about which he could generalize on the broadest scale. For him, the latter entity was "the Semitic race," which he addressed in a work for a popular audience; in this work he contradicted some of the negative assessments of the Semites current in his day.[12] Gustave Le Bon (1841–1931) wrote his *La civilisation des Arabes (1884)* in a similarly racial vein: the book begins with an essay on the racial and psychological characteristics of the Arabs.

The Austrian ambassador and historian Alfred von Kremer (1828–1889) may have been the first real expert in Arabic texts to plant the seeds of the idea of a Muhammadan (Islamic) civilization rather than a national, Arab civilization. For scholars of his generation, race and civilization were blurred as categories. He generalized about the Muhammadan world in works such as *Geschichte der herrschenden Ideen des Islams (1868) and Culturgeschichte des Orients unter den Chaliphen (1875–1877)*, conceiving of a Muhammadan civilization that had already experienced its decline after racial mixture diluted its vigor. In the latter work, von Kremer dedicated a chapter to the *Volkscharacter* of his object, which he begins by observing that Arab civilization had brought some of the highest cultural goods that the Semitic race had ever produced. These Semites were guided by lofty ideal characteristics that enabled them to do relatively great things, though the same ideals also made for their shortcomings. In this way, putative civilizations were evaluated for their contributions to humanity. This way of thinking remains common today, as one regularly reads arguments about the "contributions" of Islamic civilization. Such arguments remain entangled in the concept of the efflorescence and decline of distinct civilizations.

The earliest use of "Muhammadan civilization" that I can find in English is from 1877, by the Hungarian Orientalist Edward Rehatsek, who spent most of his life in Bombay, where he catalogued Persian and other manuscripts, administered state language examinations, and taught Latin and mathematics at the University of Bombay.[13] His use of the term makes

12. Compare his popular essay on "Some Characteristics of the Semitic Race" with his historical sketch, "Islam," from Muḥammad to his own colonial time, both in Th. Nöldeke, *Sketches from Eastern History* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 1–20 and 60–106, respectively.

13. E. Rehatsek, *Catalogue Raisonné of the Arabic, Hindoostani, Persian and Turkish MSS. in the Mulla Firuz Library* (Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1873).

for a revealing anecdote. He began his essay "The Reciprocal Influence of European and Muhammadan Civilization" by explaining that "nations" have "various phases" of existence, "their first developments, their vigour, and their decay," "compared with the three principal stages of human life, namely, youth, virility, and decrepitude."[14] For Rehatsek, nation and civilization were nearly interchangeable, and civilization admitted of degrees—nations are more or less civilized. He listed as other examples of civilizations "Ancient India, Persia, Assyria, Babylonia, Rome, and Greece." Writing in colonial British India, he devoted his essay to the idea that "power, dominion, civilization, the sciences and the arts, have left the East and have migrated to the West, whence their powerful rays are again beginning to fecundate and to revive the lands of their birth."

However, the argument of Rehatsek's essay was preconceived by educated persons in the British imperial government of India. He originally wrote it in 1863 or 1864 in the hope of a monetary reward in response to a public announcement by the government that a cash prize would be given to the best essay on this very thesis:

> Compare the influence of Greek learning on the Arabs, under the Abbaside Caliphs of Bagdad and the Ommyade [*sic*] Caliphs of Cordova, with the subsequent influence of Arabian learning on the reviving European mind after the Dark Ages; and from the comparison infer the probable influence which the mature intellect of Europe should exercise in its turn, now that it is once more brought into contact with the Muhammadan mind in India.

The essay was supposed to be written in the Urdu "of common conversation," indicating its purpose—to indoctrinate Indian Muslims about the cultural benefits of British rule, not many years after the great Indian Rebellion of 1857–1859. Rehatsek's essay merely elaborated and illustrated some arguments for the thesis already set by the prize offer, but it did so with "civilization," a term not found in the essay prompt. Although he wrote his piece in English and then translated it into Persian, not Urdu, for submission, a government committee led by William Muir (1819–1905), the Scottish historian of the caliphate, nevertheless awarded the prize to Rehatsek's essay, leading to its eventual publication. It was, after all, only one of two submissions for the prize received in Calcutta. One of the judges, a certain Muhammad Wajih, wrote in assessment, "I agree with this Report [namely, the approval of the essay by Muir], but some portions of the Essay are contrary to the tenets of Islam, are irrelevant to the question, and are not true." Hilariously, but in all fairness, this statement accompanied Rehatsek's essay in the printed version. The essay seems to have had little influence, but it demonstrates, along with von Kremer's publications, that "Muhammadan civilization" was an idea in its infancy in the 1860s. Soon scholars like Ernest Renan (1823–1892) would write essays on the character of this civilization, understood in such terms.[15]

---

14. E. Rehatsek, *Prize Essay on the Reciprocal Influence of European and Muhammadan Civilization during the Period of the Khalifs and the Present Time* (Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1877), 1.

15. E. Renan, *L'islamisme et la science* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1883).

Collaborating Semitists, familiar with works such as those of von Kremer, conceived of an Oriental encyclopaedia that could be the eastern counterpart to the *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, discussing the project in 1892 at the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists in London. Its prospective range was immediately delimited in that meeting as "Arabic-Muhammadan."[16] This is one of the clearest early instances of the collocation of the two topics in the still-living designation "Arabic and Islamic studies." After much planning and effort, the outcome was *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (first edition 1913–1938). Ultimately, Islamic civilization became widespread through the attempt by Arabic specialists, who were Semitic philologists by training, to imitate for their materials what classical scholars had done for their own. Whereas classical scholars had a "classical civilization" to frame their investigations combining Greek and Roman antiquities, Semitists used "Muhammadan civilization" to give historical meaning to Arabic philology. It also facilitated their inclusion of Persian and Turkish along with Arabic, dividing Semitic studies henceforth into two trajectories, ancient and Islamic.[17] The mastery of the three "Islamic" languages became an ideal very rarely attained, for practical reasons. In any case, Arabic and Islamic studies became an entity as tightly bound as Greek, Latin, and Classical studies. Islam specialists gradually ceased to study comparative Semitic linguistics.

As preparation was underway for *The Encyclopædia of Islam*, scholars continued to broaden the conceptual *Kulturkreis* of Islam.[18] Around the turn of the century, it became normal for scholars to write about Muhammadan civilization. The concept was adopted in Arab countries now, too: von Kremer's and Le Bon's work informed the Lebanese scholar Jurji Zaydan (1861–1914), who used the term "Islamic" rather than "Arab" in his *Tārīkh al-tamaddun al-islāmī* (*History of Islamic Civilization*, 1901–1906) while he worked at the Egyptian University.

In 1910, Carl Heinrich Becker (1876–1933), a German scholar and politician, founded the journal *Der Islam* and wrote the first article of its inaugural issue, "Der Islam als Problem," a kind of manifesto for Islamic studies. He argued, in the vein of von Kremer, that Islam was not just a religion but also an empire and a political theory. These factors, combined, made Islam into a unitary civilization (*Einheitszivilisation*) that, despite local variations, bore a uniform imprint in every place of its existence.[19] This clearly articulated view is still being repeated today. No matter the country, the century, the ecology, the economy, the customs, or the language, Islamic civilization is supposed to taste the same wherever one finds it. The next year, 1911, saw the first issue of *The Moslem World*, published by the Hartford Seminary. In the opening editorial of the journal, Rev. S. M. Zwemer noted the new periodical *Der Islam* and the forthcoming *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and insisted that there

---

16. P. Bearman, *A History of the "Encyclopaedia of Islam"* (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2018), 1.

17. This was just the kind of change called for by the fiery Martin Hartmann in 1898, in favor of a new field of Islamic studies: "Die Arabistik: Reformvorschläge," *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 1 (1898): 333–42. Cf. M. Kramer, "Arabistik and Arabism: The Passions of Martin Hartmann," *Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 3 (1989): 283–300, at 286.

18. The Austrian ethnologist Leo Frobenius published the concept of "cultural area" in 1898.

19. C. H. Becker, "Der Islam als Problem," *Der Islam* 1 (1910): 1–21.

should be a journal that contextualizes matters Islamic "as they affect the Church of Christ and its missionary programme."[20]

The first edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*: *A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples*, published in English, French, and German versions, corralled the world's leading scholars of Arabic and Islamic studies into an enterprise in which the basis of collaboration was Islamic civilization. The monumental outcome remains an extremely useful tool of scholarship and a compendium of vast learning. Scholars' shared participation in this effort made the expression "Islamic civilization" common currency internationally. The ideas expressed by Becker were now adopted widely. For example, Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926), Sir Thomas Adams's Professor of Arabic, in his 1921 monograph *Arabian Medicine*, explicitly prefers "Muhammadan" civilization to "Arabian" ("more correctly," he says), though Arabic was the chief language of learning in this civilization and bound it together.[21] He was on the steering committee for *EI* at the time.

With at least two journals and an encyclopedia of its own, Islamic civilization had become, by the onset of the First World War, a framework common to formerly separate strands of scholarship. It was, however, still a domain of discussion for specialist philologists, not for social scientist generalists.

Islamic Civilization Migrates to the United States

In the wake of the Second World War, Arabic scholars in the United States began to write in earnest about the general essential characteristics of an Islamic civilization. Two events promoted this turn. One was the emigration of Semitists specializing in Arabic to the United States, as the National Socialist regime endangered their prospects for life in Europe. They brought with them the framework of Arabic and Islamic studies, in which the two terms represented the philological study of the main source language and the historical approach to the corresponding "civilization," respectively. The other event was the rapid growth of the American university and the development of new curricula to meet the new educational demands of postwar American society. In this setting, the General Education movement sought to reorganize liberal arts and sciences education to avoid both exclusive specialization and the transformation of universities into technical colleges.

The roots of the General Education movement were closely tied to efforts by the US State Department to equip Americans, and especially military personnel, with knowledge of the European nations among which and for which Americans would fight. Understanding a common civilizational heritage was explicitly meant to build morale. Columbia University's mandatory "Contemporary Civilization" course—originally entitled "War Issues"—was developed specifically in response to a request from the State Department in 1917 to train future soldiers. Though it was first offered only in 1919, after the war's end, it became a model in American higher education. "Western civilization" thereafter became not just a concept for organizing and integrating classical studies and the history of European

---

20. S. W. Zwemer, "Editorial," *The Moslem World* 1, no. 1 (1911): 1–4, at 2.

21. E. G. Browne, *Arabian Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 4 and 6.

culture but an *institution* of formally organized courses required for certain university degrees at various universities.[22] Once enshrined in an authoritative educational institution, iterated annually, the Western civilization concept more easily took on the character of a widespread, socially shared belief.

The General Education movement became pervasive in the United States in the 1940s during the next great war. In 1943, the president of Harvard University created a committee that produced, two years later, a book-length thesis, *The Objectives of General Education in a Free Society* (Harvard University Committee, 1945), published "with the compliments of the Department of State of the United States of America." This document became standard reading and remains an underlying template for American higher education in the liberal arts and sciences. The model explicitly offered an educational prescription for freedom and democracy against totalitarianism. The ideological charge of the plan reflects its preparation in a time of devastating global war. It is underpinned by the belief that Western civilization needed to be defended against antitraditional forces, which emerged into focus as fascism and communism. Western civilization was also used beyond higher education as a rationale for US patronage of countries seeking to "develop" with US aid and anti-communist intervention.

Although "Western Civilization" courses first took root at Columbia, "Islamic Civilization" survey courses were launched at the University of Chicago. General education was the motive; a European Semitist was the initiator; and a dean who had studied at Columbia during the onset of the Contemporary Civilization curriculum was one of the main instigators. The outcome of this new trend was to create an educated nonspecialist public that believed in the existence of an Islamic civilization.

One of the leaders of the General Education movement was Richard McKeon (1900–1985), professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago from 1934 and dean of humanities there from 1940 until 1952. McKeon finished his bachelor's in 1920 at Columbia University, a year after the inception of the Contemporary Civilization model. He wrote in 1949 in the new *Journal of General Education* (which had been launched in 1946), at the time published by the University of Chicago Press, that the postwar "present age" required an education imparting a global outlook and promoting cultural understanding to reduce conflicts everywhere. "The Western Tradition or the Civilization of Western Europe has taken its place in a context of world civilization and world cultures. . . . Oriental cultures, which influenced the West in past periods, are now not influence but part of the contexture of world civilization."[23] These cultures required, therefore, special courses of study available to the generality of university students. The plan was carried out over the next few years.

At that time, McKeon was a supervising dean of the Austrian scholar Gustave von Grunebaum (1909–1972). Von Grunebaum had emigrated to the United States in 1938 upon the annexation of Austria by Germany and in 1943 had joined the faculty of the University

---

22. S. Federici, "The God That Never Failed: The Origins and Crises of Western Civilization," in Federici, *Enduring Western Civilization*, 63–89.

23. R. McKeon, "The Nature and Teaching of the Humanities," *Journal of General Education* 3, no. 4 (1949): 290–303, at 292–93.

of Chicago, where he became professor of Arabic in 1949. He would go on to be a major organizer of European-style "Arabic and Islamic studies" in the United States. In the issue of the *Journal of General Education* immediately following that in which his dean, McKeon, made the case for fostering the study of Oriental civilizations in the general requirements of every college student, von Grunebaum published an article on the role of "Islam in a Humanistic Education."[24] Though meandering and diffuse, this article responded to McKeon's call.

Von Grunebaum's *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation*, which was based on public lectures delivered at Chicago in 1945, had been issued by the University of Chicago Press in 1946. It was probably used in instruction there; in any case, it sold enough copies that the first edition was printed again in 1947. The book treats Islamic civilization as an entity long past its prime—hence the qualification "medieval" in the title—and debates the contrast between the apparent "picturesque uniformity of Islamic civilization" and its "inexhaustible diversity behind the colorful veil."[25] Muslim civilization, for von Grunebaum, was both composite and uniform as well as self-contained. Believing he understood the synthesis arising from its ingredients, he could declare that "the strength of Islam is in the roundedness of personality which at its best it is able to produce,"[26] along with other similarly dubious generalizations. Von Grunebaum, whose early specialty was Arabic poetry, believed that "Muslim civilization's contributions to man's spiritual life were offered on the verbal level," or, in other words, appeared in the texts that he himself happened to know.[27] The conviction that Islamic civilization had peculiar, pervasive, general characteristics wherever it took root, out of which sense could be made, was fundamental to von Grunebaum's role in promoting this subject.

Not everybody was happy with the way Islamic civilization was developing as a topic. Franz Rosenthal was another Semitist emigrant from Germany to the United States. As a Jew, he had escaped death at the hands of the National Socialist regime. In the introduction to his source-based monograph of 1947, *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship*, written when he was on the faculty of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, he referred to "the highly debated subject of the general character of Muslim civilization." He confronted the views of scholars from Hegel to von Kremer and found them mutually inconsistent. By adhering to the method of recovery and analysis of primary resources, Rosenthal held, "(i)t might then be possible to avoid distortions of the picture of Muslim civilization such as result from ill-advised generalizations." Here he explicitly had Hegel in mind.[28] It is not clear whether he had read von Grunebaum's *Medieval Islam* at this time, but decades later, in his obituary of von Grunebaum, with whom he had often had lunch in the summer

---

24. G. von Grunebaum, "Islam in a Humanistic Education," *Journal of General Education* 4, no. 1 (1949): 12–31.

25. G. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 320.

26. Ibid., 346.

27. Ibid., 258.

28. F. Rosenthal, *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1947), 4.

of 1942[29] and whom he certainly knew from other occasions, Rosenthal would briefly pay compliment to the book as a "standard work of synthesis of the cultural history of Islam."[30] Rosenthal's own major publications were likewise based on the assumption that a distinct Muslim civilization existed, fundamentally different from the Western civilization though closely intertwined with it. His approach was historical, based on primary sources, and more cautious, but he, too, offered generalizations from time to time about Islamic topics with monographs such as *The Muslim Concept of Freedom* (1960) and *Das Fortleben der Antike im Islam* (1960). Yet in his 1947 *Technique and Approach* he wrote, "General statements about civilizations which are as complex and far-flung as Islam usually turn out to be little satisfactory, especially after some time has elapsed and scholarly trends have changed."[31] These words have turned out to be true still today.

A more revealing and pointed reaction to the model of Islamic civilization, which had no echo, was offered by the orientalist Vladimir Minorsky (1877–1966). Von Grunebaum, his junior by more than three decades, had invited Minorsky to deliver a presentation at a 1953 conference entitled "Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization" at the University of Liège, Belgium, cosponsored by the University of Chicago. Many leading European scholars participated. The title itself reveals the dilemma in accepting a category such as Islamic civilization, even as it insists that the topic is real. Von Grunebaum presented the keynote address and edited the proceedings, published by the University of Chicago Press (1955). In his address he insisted that Islamized peoples are essentially changed into a uniform Islamic type.[32] Minorsky, however, stated at the outset of his contribution that he found the very theme of the conference problematic. He remarked that this is because "the present tendency is rather to treat separately the history of the Arab, Iranian, and Turkish lands and peoples, as we treat the history of the European peoples regardless of the fact that in the Middle Ages they recognized the same authority of the church, and used the same Latin and the same canon law." (He should have said "the earlier tendency was.") The answer he offered to the dilemma was to take a historical approach to the study of Islam in Persia and tacitly to avoid generalizations about discrete civilizations. At the end of the paper, he directly criticized the approach of von Grunebaum, the editor of the volume, for his judgmental stance on the personality and character of Persians occurring in his book *Medieval Islam*. Minorsky insisted that the characteristics von Grunebaum attributed to them, such as duplicity and emotionalism, had to be understood as products of historical events—specifically, the experience of repeated subjugation by foreign invaders. "One must not speak," he wrote, "of Islâm and its subdivisions as if these were logical and absolute categories." Minorsky's attitude reflects an earlier phase of Oriental research, in which the

29. H. H. Biesterfeldt, ed., "Franz Rosenthal's *Half an Autobiography*," *Die Welt des Islams* 54 (2014): 34–105, at 71 and 75.

30. F. Rosenthal, "In Memoriam: Gustave E. von Grunebaum," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 3 (1973): 355–58, at 357.

31. Rosenthal, *Technique*, 4.

32. G. E. von Grunebaum, "The Problem: Unity in Diversity," in *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, ed. G. E. von Grunebaum, 17–37 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

subjects of history were not supranational, internally uniform "civilizations" but nations (an older conceptual unit) and the individuals in them and the works they wrote. Minorsky's explicit discomfort with Islamic civilization shows that addressing it was still novel to many, even though Minorsky had contributed amply to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. He was certainly willing to condone character generalizations regarding nations, but he demanded an explanation for them in terms of changing historical conditions.[33]

It is impossible to know whether other European historians of Islam, such as Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921), refrained from using the concept of Islamic civilization because they objected to it or because they were simply uninterested in it, but many historians readily and increasingly accepted Islamic civilization as a valid concept without opposition. The historian Philip Hitti (1886–1978), for example, could casually endorse the idea in 1956 in his review of the conference proceedings volume just mentioned, stating that Islamic civilization was "one of the five or six major civilizations of the world."[34] Earlier in his career, while a professor at Princeton, he had written his *History of the Arabs* (1937), which was essentially a history from Muḥammad to the present, covering what is generally known today as the history of Islamic civilization but focusing on "the Arabs." The work was widely read. By 1970, when that earlier book was entering its tenth edition, he published a new work entitled *Islam: A Way of Life*. It argues that "Islam" is not just a religion but simultaneously a state and a culture. The subject of the master narrative had changed from the Arabs to Islam, and the latter was more than merely a religion. Already sixty years earlier, Becker had articulated the same idea, and before Becker, von Kremer.

Chicago was, of course, not the only site at which scholars offered unfounded generalizations about the alleged Islamic civilization. Civilizations became a major topic in the early to mid-twentieth century. In the 1930s, Reuben Levy, professor of Persian at the University of Cambridge, expressed in the preface to his two-volume *The Sociology of Islam* (1931–1933, reprinted in 1955, as the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss became current, with the title *The Social Structure of Islam*), that "the Muhammadan communities of the world, possessing certain common characteristics traceable to the religion, are suited for treatment as a unity."[35] Though von Grunebaum and others used and cited this work of Levy's, it was von Grunebaum's student and successor who made Islamic civilization into a general educational institution of practice.

Hodgson and the First General Education Undergraduate Islamic Civilization Course

The issues sketched above were central in the field in which Marshal Hodgson (1922–1968) received his education. Hodgson was von Grunebaum's doctoral advisee at the University of Chicago, where he received the PhD in 1951 as part of the first graduating

---

33. V. Minorsky, "Iran: Opposition, Martyrdom, and Revolt," in von Grunebaum, *Unity and Variety*, 183–206; reprinted (with the title that Minorsky originally chose) as "Persia: Religion and History," in V. Minorsky, *Iranica: Twenty Articles*, 242–57 (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1964).

34. P. K. Hitti, review of von Grunebaum, *Unity and Variety*, in *American Historical Review* 61, no. 4 (1956): 931–32.

35. R. Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 1:v.

class of the doctoral program of the transdisciplinary Committee on Social Thought. He shared his teacher's preoccupation with the problem of unity and diversity in Muslim civilization. It may be true, as a recent *New York Times Magazine* article states of him with a whiff of hagiography, that "Hodgson devoted his professional life to correcting the errors of the Orientalists,"[36] but he also accepted the frame of reference in which they worked—Islamic civilization—and many of the assumptions that a such a premise confers. Von Grunebaum must have been involved in hiring Hodgson to the Chicago faculty in 1953, soon after his completion of the doctorate. The same year saw the appearance of the second edition of von Grunebaum's *Medieval Islam* from the University of Chicago Press. When von Grunebaum left the University of Chicago in 1957 to join UCLA and play a founding role in the Center for Near Eastern Studies there, Hodgson filled von Grunebaum's part in teaching Islamic civilization at Chicago. But whereas von Grunebaum was teaching Islamic civilization as a part of the humanities, Hodgson's task was to make it part of the general education curriculum of social sciences at Chicago.

The University of Chicago inaugurated the first required "non-Western civilization" courses in 1956, after two years of committee meetings and discussions about their advisability and feasibility. As a quartet of articles published in the *Journal of General Education*—still issued by the University of Chicago Press—in 1959 explains, three non-Western civilization courses were created, rather than a single yearlong "Oriental civilizations" course such as existed already experimentally at Columbia University. China, India, and Islam were the three "civilizations" chosen. The rationale for this new curricular development was explained by Milton Singer, who had been one of the organizers of von Grunebaum's conference in Liège. He summarized the recommendation of the faculty committee at the University of Chicago:

> The committee believed that such study [of non-Western civilizations] would not only "familiarize the student with a civilized tradition other than his own, and thus permit him to glimpse the world and his own civilization as others see them," but would also "enable him to understand better his own cultural heritage by comparing it with another." Such study, it hoped, would "offset the almost exclusive emphasis upon study of the society and culture of Europe and the United States which currently prevails in the College and most Divisional courses."[37]

Marshall Hodgson, still an assistant professor, contributed one of the accompanying journal articles to explain the rationale of a yearlong Islamic civilization course that would satisfy the new non-Western civilization requirement in the social sciences.[38] His explanation is

---

36. L. Kiesling, "Letter of Recommendation: The Life of Marshall Hodgson," *New York Times Magazine*, October 6, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/09/magazine/letter-of-recommendation-the-life-of-marshall-hodgson.html.

37. M. Singer, "Chicago's Non-Western Civilizations Program," *Journal of General Education* 12, no. 1 (1959): 22–23.

38. M. Hodgson, "A Non-Western Civilization Course in a Liberal Education with Special Attention to the Case of Islâm," *Journal of General Education* 12, no. 1 (1959): 39–49.

clear and rational, and it expresses the hope for high enough enrollment to justify hiring more faculty to teach it.

Hodgson offered the first such course, beginning in the autumn academic quarter of 1956. This is the first instance in which Islamic civilization was offered as a course fulfilling a general requirement (rather than as a special elective topic) for an undergraduate degree, at least in the United States, and it may fairly be regarded as the beginning of Islamic civilization as a regular institution. It would henceforth recur annually. To this day, the yearlong Islamic History and Society course sequence can fulfill the Civilization Studies component of the Core general education requirements in the College of the University of Chicago (though there are now many other such civilization courses in competition with it). Chicago was only the first of many sites at which Islamic civilization took root in a robust institution. Many other universities have followed the practice. "Non-Western civilization" requirements have become and remain common in American universities and colleges. Islamic civilization has spread as a feature of institutions of higher education.

The three volumes of Hodgson's posthumously published *The Venture of Islam* correspond to the three quarter terms of the regular academic year in which he taught this survey at the University of Chicago. His article of 1959 ends with an outline of the yearlong course's topics. These topics were reflected in the prototype of his *Venture of Islam*, issued by the University of Chicago Press for his course in 1958–1959 under the title *Introduction to Islamic Civilization: Course Syllabus and Selected Readings*, likewise in three volumes. The problem that confronted Hodgson was how to organize the narrative of an entire alleged civilization to yield the greater, moral lessons demanded by a general education. Hodgson believed that Islamic civilization should not be the domain of specialists alone, and he saw that instruction of undergraduate students in the history of Islamic civilization was a way to promote the project of history in general and world history in particular.

Islamicate Civilization

In *The Venture of Islam*, Hodgson was explicit that his interest was in "civilization studies," which he glossed as "the study of the great cultural heritages." Unlike most of his predecessors, he attempted to define clearly what a civilization is, and he did so with great earnestness. In the face of the incommensurability of the civilizations already accepted at large ("Islam," "the West," and others), he concluded that "the reason for distinguishing a civilization cannot be a single, universal one"; rather, "it must almost be special to each case." This is to say that each civilization must be defined by its own criteria—which, logically, should mean that civilization is not a category of analysis but the vague product of subjective judgment. Nevertheless, Hodgson wanted a civilization to refer to "any wider grouping of cultures in so far as they share consciously in interdependent cumulative traditions." By this he meant "major lettered traditions."[39] In this concession one hears echoes of von Grunebaum.

In his teaching and research, Hodgson wrestled with the problem articulated as long ago as by Edward Rehatsek in 1877, when Muhammadan civilization was a new idea. How

---

39. M. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1:22.

can the religion of Islam alone characterize innumerable societies that differ in every way and that contain many non-Muslim people and many things not concerned with religion at all, not to mention the many varieties of Islam? How can scholars insist on a single Islamic civilization when there is infinite variation among Muslim peoples in every human dimension? What distinguishes Islamic civilization from other civilizations when there is a constant exchange evident between them and the boundaries are always blurry? "Islamicate" was the term Hodgson proposed to rectify the problem. The neologism is formed by analogy with English words derived from Latin passive participles to signify that which is made to be or construed as Islamic rather than being so essentially. That is, Islamicate was supposed to refer only to the quality of belonging to Islamic *civilization* without claiming that the thing to which it applies is essentially a feature of *Islam*. It was a term, therefore, intended to be intellectually honest about the explanatory limits in calling something Islamic within the context of Islamic civilization. Yet the problem inherent in Islamic civilization remained even after the adjective was changed because it remained an undefined civilization. Moreover, in hindsight it is clear that Hodgson was already trained and bound to teach Islamic civilization by his career at the University of Chicago. It was a professional responsibility that he had inherited. It was a framework that he made highly effective for teaching the history of the "medieval" and "early modern" Middle East in a way that was meaningful for twentieth-century college students. He recognized that Islamic civilization as a category was not sufficient, but instead of throwing out the category on which his place in the curriculum was based, he concluded that new terminology was required for blurrier distinctions.[40] "Islamicate" offered a way to continue teaching an ill-defined subject while acknowledging that ultimately it made little sense unless one ignored a vast amount of meaningful complexity. Certainly, Hodgson understood the degree of complexity involved, but he wanted not to abandon Islamic civilization. We can only assume he believed his own argument about the unity of Islamic civilization, which he had heard from von Grunebaum and read from Becker and many others. The term "Islamicate" was therefore an awkward compromise as it is an awkward neologism, albeit one that is now, in the twenty-first century, widely employed as a term of art.

Painting the Field into a Corner

The palatable model of an Islamic civilization course in the framework of non-Western civilization curricula, widely emulated, seems to have generated a demand for university instruction about life and history in a broad region of the earth hitherto neglected by the European and American academy. It helped to create a thriving field of scholarship. Islamic civilization became a popular subject. At the same time, Islamic civilization, being conceived as a unitary object of investigation, Becker's *Einheitszivilisation*, also set a tight limit on the institutional growth of the field. Islamic civilization was an economical model for university administrations: history departments or religious studies departments at colleges and universities that developed "non-Western" or "global" general requirements for their students could apparently satisfy the need to cover all of Islamic civilization,

---

40. Hodgson, *Venture*, 1:57–60.

across continents and over fourteen centuries, by hiring one specialist in that unitary field. These prospects were a vast improvement over the situation in 1955, when the Asia Society found only seven American institutions offering regular undergraduate instruction on Asian civilizations.[41] Now every self-respecting university required one such expert—just one, who could teach Islamic civilization for undergraduates. Graduate programs that trained Near Eastern language specialists responded to the new market in "Non-Western Civ" courses by granting more PhDs to individuals taught to use Arabic sources who could survey this unitary civilization in courses for undergraduates. The claim to be able to explain all this material to college students was a professional requirement: positions were created specifically for instruction in Islamic civilization. Arabs, Iranians, Turks, and other subjects of the past and present had to crowd into a single classroom under the umbrella of a grand narrative unified by a single religion to the exclusion of other salient factors. Those called to teach Islamic civilization by job description understandably provided the requisite master narrative that explained the area of expertise for which they were employed. Again, the wider availability of instruction on Islam and Middle Eastern societies was an enormous gain for higher education. At the same time, the encompassing moral vision of a unitary Islamic civilization has stunted the potential for increased numbers of professional scholars making sense of the complex history of cultures bearing distinct differences. While the most powerful nations of Europe and America can, as fields of study, demand specialist professors devoted to them individually at a large institution of higher education—sometimes multiple professors for one country—the entirety of Islamic civilization, from the seventh to the twenty-first century and from the Atlantic to the Pacific, usually gets one, or often at best one per relevant disciplinary department.

The master narrative of Islamic civilization thus first entrenched but then restricted the intellectual and professional interests of the scholars hired to promote it with limited resources. Their development of the vision of a whole essentially religious civilization, in turn, has granted authoritative scholarly legitimation to those seeking ideological and political power in the world around them in terms of Islam. Some of these individuals used the European scholar's concept of Islamic civilization as a platform for social influence in the name of the religion of Islam, thanks to the supranational and essentially religious "civilization" it has been granted by putatively neutral outsider experts. Apologists and those using the religion of Islam as a vehicle of social power adopted the Orientalists' fundamental concept and cherry-picked the latter's research for elements that suited their personal and anti-historical political agenda, rejecting the rest as "Orientalism" (in the negative sense promoted after Said's 1978 book *Orientalism*).[42] Others wished to detract from and stigmatize a generalized Islamic civilization in the name of political policies or even furtive racial and national bigotry of different varieties. Bernard Lewis

---

41. W. Morehouse, "Asian Studies in Undergraduate Education," *Journal of General Education* 11, no. 3 (1958): 125–40.

42. On this book and its impact, see Z. Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

(1916–2018) famously invoked the notion of a "clash of civilizations" (1990),[43] which became the title of a book (1996) by political scientist Samuel Huntington (1927–2008). Huntington's book developed a neo-Spenglerian concept of inter-civilizational struggle, imagining nine distinct civilizations in the world at the end of the twentieth century, each basically rooted in a religion, such as Islam. Social scientists affirm or deny Islamic civilization, sometimes with pseudoscience.[44] Islamic civilization forms a unitary target for polemicists as much as it does a unitary platform for apologists. Donors participate, too, with various intentions, by creating endowments and academic positions for the study of Islamic civilization. The well-meaning goal of dignifying present people resorts to myths of a glorious past, even though respect for humans living in the present, in my view at least, should never depend on their cultural, ancestral, or genetic lineage. Government entities devote funds to Islamic civilization, generating events that prolong its existence and give it a shared social reality, however nebulous and debated its definition. Now Islamic civilization exists well beyond the writing of Arabic specialists. It has more money behind it than ever before. Historians no longer create it; they serve it.

Beyond Islamic Civilization?

Most scholars who employ Islamic civilization and teach courses about it are sincerely attempting to create knowledge and foster understanding about an important part of human history. Among them there have been a few who have reflected critically on Islamic civilization. As long ago as 1973, Roger Owen (1935–2018) called for a reexamination of

> the assumption that the basic unit of study remains something called "Islamic civilization." Until this is done, the subject will continue to be handicapped. . . . [One way in which this occurs is through] the imposition of an artificial unity upon a world spreading from Morocco to Indonesia, thus making what it is that the societies of this area have in common far outweigh that which divides them. . . . The assumption that [Islam] provides the essential ingredient in a complex chain of societies stretching across Africa and Asia may now be acting to encourage the writing of bad history and to prevent the emergence of something more worthwhile.

Owen added that "even such a limited program of reexamination will surely be resisted."[45] The expectation of resistance conveys the extent to which Islamic civilization had become entrenched by the 1970s. But the program of reexamination was not resisted because it never arrived. Islamic civilization has continued to grow through the annual reiteration of college courses, journals, and events, as well as book series and other material manifestations of Islamic civilization. In short, Islamic civilization acquired institutions when it was a preeminent model, in the mid-twentieth century, becoming embedded in curricula connected with specific faculty positions. Institutions are resistant to change.

---

43. B. Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *Atlantic*, September 1990.

44. E.g., Y. Esmer, "Is There an Islamic Civilization?," *Comparative Sociology* 1 (2002): 265–98. (The answer offered, based on absurd criteria and numbers derived from personal surveys, is "yes.")

45. R. Owen, "Studying Islamic History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no. 2 (1973): 287–98.

Despite occasional conferences revisiting the topic and questioning the relevance of Islamic civilization, like the one at which I first presented part of this paper, its institutional existence and its common currency have made it into a convenient default for both instruction and discussion. Moreover, humanistic scholars, social scientists, proponents of Islam, and antagonists of Islam share a common interest in promoting Islamic civilization. A unitary Islamic civilization facilitates a master narrative intended to persuade and greatly simplifies analysis and argument through generalization without evidence. Islamic civilization makes it easy for all these participants to justify what they were already doing, and so it is not likely to disappear.

All the objects of Islamic civilization deserve scholarly research and understanding. But is there an alternative to Islamic civilization for these objects? Is it possible to move beyond Islamic civilization's ill-posed inherent question about unity and diversity? The analytical utility of this civilization remains doubtful now as it was before. Recognizing this, specialists continue to posit modified, hybrid, and rationalized Islamic civilizations, sometimes using different terminology for the same effect.[46] Even if Islamic civilization foundations and journals keep their names, can historians abandon Islamic civilization and enhance their analysis? Some years ago, I expressed these ideas to an eminent senior colleague in Near Eastern studies, whose specialty was Islamic history. She nodded and seemed to agree but then asked, "So if there is no Islamic civilization, what do you call it?" My answer was that there is no "it." The matter is rather as Hodgson himself explicitly stated: "There are many ways of grouping into 'civilizations' what is in fact an endless chain of interrelated cultural life. We must know why we make the selection we do."[47] Yet his selection was determined by the academic position he held and the curricular opportunity he saw to promote knowledge and human understanding on a wide scale—a laudable goal. Any criterion may have sufficed because Islamic civilization was already assumed. It is like the essay prompt answered by Rehatsek for cash in the 1860s. Today's scholars usually do not know why they still make this selection. It is just how we were taught. The myth of its origins in the seventh century promotes the sense that Islamic civilization existed before analysis.

Hodgson's assumption that we need to group the endless chain of interrelated cultural life into civilizational categories—a convenient way to explain all history in broad brushstrokes—still has its most important manifestation in the curricula we teach today. Sometimes broad brushstrokes are useful and necessary. But we must ask whether our histories of the Middle East and other regions will make sense without Islamic civilization. If our histories do make sense without Islamic civilization, why do we continue to use it? But if they do not make sense without Islamic civilization, then how valid can our histories be when Islamic civilization has no accepted definition, having become pervasive solely as an accident of recent European colonial history and postwar developments in American university curricula? Can professional historians of Muslims or Middle Eastern peoples find

---

46. E.g., R. Bulliet's *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), a response to the World Trade Center attacks in 2001. S. Ahmed, in *What Is Islam?*, rejects Hodgson's Islamicate civilization but defines Islam itself in very nearly the same terms, connecting it with *adab* and literary culture.

47. Hodgson, *Venture*, 1:91.

other ways to make sense for an educated public and to convey relevant educational lessons for college students out of the humans of the past and present whose lives they study? Or is Islamic civilization still adequate for what it was supposed to do in the classroom, even now when its existence is widely interpreted to mean that Muslims are irreducibly incompatible with others?

One might suppose from this essay that I think that Islamic civilization courses should come to an end. To me, this does not precisely follow. We often use artificial terms of wide currency for the sake of convenience. "The Middle East" is one such term;[48] "medieval" is another.[49] Such expressions have peculiar histories. There are scholars of "the medieval Middle East" and "medieval Islamic civilization." Whatever terms one uses, the religion of Islam and the peoples of the Middle East and other regions in which Muslims predominate require study and understanding. Yet we should know why we use the terms we do use, what they were devised to address, what they assume, and who benefits from them, lest we rely on them to the point that they misguide us. There are other ways to organize knowledge about Muslims and the countries Muslims have ruled. Islamic civilization is only one possibility. Its use conditions the questions one asks and the answers one gives while deferring questions never considered, but both the questions and the answers are symptoms of our time and our society, not of most other times and places.

---

48. R. Adelson, "British and U.S. Use and Misuse of the Term 'Middle East,'" in *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept*, ed. M. E. Bonine, A. Amanat, and M. E. Gasper, 36–55 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

49. N. F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages* (New York: William and Morrow, 1991).

Bibliography

Adelson, Roger. "British and U.S. Use and Misuse of the Term 'Middle East.'" In *Is There a Middle East? The Evolution of a Geopolitical Concept*, edited by M. E. Bonine, A. Amanat, and M. E. Gasper, 36–55. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.

Ahmed, S. *What Is Islam?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Albrecht, S. "Dār al-Islām and Dār al-Ḥarb." In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., edited by K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas, and E. Rowson. Leiden: Brill Online. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_25867.

Bearman, P. *A History of the "Encyclopaedia of Islam."* Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2018.

Becker, C. H. "Der Islam als Problem." *Der Islam* 1 (1910): 1–21.

Biesterfeldt, H. H., ed. "Franz Rosenthal's *Half an Autobiography*." *Die Welt des Islams* 54 (2014): 34–105.

Browne, E. G. *Arabian Medicine.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921.

Bulliet, R. *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Caffentzis, G. C. "On the Scottish Origins of 'Civilization.'" In *Enduring Western Civilization*, edited by S. Federici, 13–36. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995.

Cantor, N. F. *Inventing the Middle Ages.* New York: William and Morrow, 1991.

Esmer, Y. "Is There an Islamic Civilization?" *Comparative Sociology* 1 (2002): 265–98.

Federici, S. "The God That Never Failed: The Origins and Crises of Western Civilization." In *Enduring Western Civilization*, edited by S. Federici, 63–89. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995.

Griffel, F. "Contradictions and Lots of Ambiguity: Two New Perspectives on Premodern (and Postclassical) Islamic Societies." *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review* 8, no. 1 (2017): 1–21.

Hartmann, M. "Die Arabistik: Reformvorschläge." *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 1 (1898): 333–42.

Hitti, P. K. Review of *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, edited by G. E. von Grunebaum. *American Historical Review* 61, no. 4 (1956): 931–32.

Hodgson, M. "A Non-Western Civilization Course in a Liberal Education with Special Attention to the Case of Islâm." *Journal of General Education* 12, no. 1 (1959): 39–49.

———. *The Venture of Islam.* 3 volumes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

Hourani, A. "Islam and the Philosophers of History." *Middle East Studies* 3, no. 3 (1967): 206–68.

Ibn Khaldūn. *Al-Muqaddima.* Edited by M. Quatremère. 3 volumes. Paris: Benjamin Duprat, 1858.

Jaeger, W. "Classical Philology and Humanism." *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 67 (1936): 363–74.

Karamustafa, A. "Islam: A Civilizational Project in Progress." In *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, edited by O. Safi, 98–110. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003.

Kaufman, W. "Toynbee and Super-History." *Partisan Review* 22, no. 4 (1955): 531–41.

Kiesling, L. "Letter of Recommendation: The Life of Marshall Hodgson." *New York Times Magazine*, October 6, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/09/magazine/letter-of-recommendation-the-life-of-marshall-hodgson.html.

Kramer, M. "Arabistik and Arabism: The Passions of Martin Hartmann." *Middle Eastern Studies* 24, no. 3 (1989): 283–300.

Levy, R. *The Social Structure of Islam.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957.

Lewis, B. "The Roots of Muslim Rage." *Atlantic*, September 1990.

Lockman, Z. *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism.* 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

McKeon, R. "The Nature and Teaching of the Humanities." *Journal of General Education* 3, no. 4 (1949): 290–303.

Meri, J., ed. *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia.* 2 volumes. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Minorsky, V. "Iran: Opposition, Martyrdom, and Revolt." In *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, edited by G. E. von Grunebaum, 183–206. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Reprinted as "Persia: Religion and History," in V. Minorsky, *Iranica: Twenty Articles*, 242–57. Tehran: University of Tehran, 1964.

Morehouse, W. "Asian Studies in Undergraduate Education." *The Journal of General Education* 11, no. 3 (1958): 125–40.

Nöldeke, Th. *Sketches from Eastern History.* London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892.

Owen, R. "Studying Islamic History." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no. 2 (1973): 287–98.

Rehatsek, E. *Catalogue Raisonné of the Arabic, Hindoostani, Persian and Turkish MSS. in the Mulla Firuz Library.* Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1873.

———. *Prize Essay on the Reciprocal Influence of European and Muhammadan Civilization during the Period of the Khalifs and the Present Time.* Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1877.

Renan, E. *L'islamisme et la science.* Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1883.

Robinson, C. *Islamic Civilization in Thirty Lives: The First 1,000 Years.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016.

Rosenthal, F. "In Memoriam: Gustave E. von Grunebaum." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 3 (1973): 355–58.

———, trans. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History.* 2nd ed. 3 volumes. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967.

———. *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship.* Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1947.

Singer, M. "Chicago's Non-Western Civilizations Program." *Journal of General Education* 12, no. 1 (1959): 22–23.

Sorokin, P. A. "Toynbee's Philosophy of History." *Journal of Modern History* 12 (1940): 374–87.

Spengler, O. *Der Untergang des Abendlandes.* 2 volumes. Vienna: W. Braumüller, 1918–22. Translated into English as *The Decline of the West.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926–28.

Toynbee, A. J. *A Study of History.* 12 volumes. London: Oxford University Press, 1934–61.

Von Grunebaum, G. E. "Islam in a Humanistic Education." *Journal of General Education* 4, no. 1 (1949): 12–31.

———. *Medieval Islam.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946.

———. "The Problem: Unity in Diversity." In *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*, edited by G. E. von Grunebaum, 17–37. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955.

Winterer, C. *The Culture of Classicism.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

Zwemer, S. M. "Editorial." *The Moslem World*, 1, no. 1 (1911): 1–4.

Le stylite (*esṭūnōrō*) et sa ṣawmaʿa
face aux milieux cléricaux islamiques et miaphysites
(Iᵉʳ–IIᵉ/VIIᵉ–VIIIᵉ siècles)*

Sᴵᴹᴼᴺ Pᴵᴱᴿᴿᴱ
Sorbonne Université

(sim.pierre85@gmail.com)

Abstract

*Stylites (*esṭūnōrē*) represented a major form of eremitism in late antique and early Islamic Syria and Mesopotamia. As archetypes of the Holy Man described by Peter Brown, they were in close contact with rural populations (*pagani*) and therefore promoted the Christianization of such marginal, non-civic spaces. In doing so, they quickly became authorities competing with urban bishoprics. Many Syriac sources (such as synodical canons) attest to preaching, teaching, arbitration, judgments, and even administrative sentences carried out by these ascetics on columns for faithful crowds (*ʿamē*) in villages. Consequently, the churches, and especially the Syrian Orthodox Church, tried to use them for local anchorage during the seventh and eighth centuries while, at the same time, seeking to integrate them into stable and enclosed monastic structures. These solitary monks also fascinated Arab populations since St. Simeon both invented this asceticism and converted local Bedouins. Indeed, the Muslim tradition contains important evidence of the influence exerted by the so-called* ahl al-ṣawāmiʿ *on Muslims. In this article I demonstrate that during the first two centuries of the* hijra, *the concept of* ṣawmaʿ(a) *exactly matches the Syriac understanding of* esṭūnō *as a retreat on top of a high construction, whether a square tower or a proper column. I rely on poetry, early lexicography, bilingual hagiography and historiography, and especially the Syriac and Arabic versions of Abū Bakr's* waṣiyya, *which expressly refers to these monks. I then show how the developing Islamic authorities tried to divert Arab Muslims from these initially privileged and valued figures. To this end, they used the same kinds of arguments as did the canonical anathemas against stylites, who were also often seen as competitors and threats by the official ecclesiastical authorities. Scholars of* ḥadīṯ, fiqh, *and* tafsīr *developed their own rhetoric, distinguishing, for instance, between good stylites and bad "tonsured" ones, while jurists gradually restricted their initial tax privileges. Finally, the latter, at the end of the second/eighth century, they required Muslims to completely avoid them, completing the process of excommunicating both Christianity and its most revered figure.*

© 2020 Simon Pierre. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, which allows users to copy and distribute the material in any medium or format in unadapted form only, for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the original authors and source.

1. Introduction : saints hommes syro-orthodoxes et communautés rurales et pastorales

L'hagiographie syriaque conserve le souvenir d'une forme de voisinage et de coexistence entre les tentes des Arabes et les « cahutes des solitaires » (*kūrḥē d-iḥīdāyē*). C'est ce dont témoigne par exemple l'*Histoire de Bēt Qōqā* en Adiabène[1] à l'époque des abbés Jean (r. 55–72/675–92) et Šūbḥ al-Māran (r. 72–111/693–729)[2]. Les relations entre ce type de religieux chrétiens et les populations arabo-musulmanes ne furent pas rares et favorisèrent sans doute un prolongement, voire une consolidation du processus de christianisation après la conquête médinoise. Les contacts que nouèrent, au milieu du vie siècle, les phylarques jafnides de *Palaestina* III, d'*Arabia* et de *Phoenicia* II et les missionnaires et partisans de Sévère d'Antioche (r. 512–18) ont été bien étudiés ces dernières années[3]. Pourtant, ce ne fut pas avant l'époque islamique que l'Église miaphysite syriaque accorda des évêchés spécifiques à des populations que nous définirions comme des Arabes (*ʿAmmē* ou *Ṭayyōyē*), parfois même circonscrits à une expression tribale (*Namirōye, Tanūkōyē, Taglibōyē, Maʿaddōyē*)[4].

Ces éléments suggèrent que les populations pastorales et bédouines continuèrent d'entretenir, après l'hégire, des liens très étroits avec certaines institutions chrétiennes, notamment auprès des miaphysites du *jund* de Qinnasrīn-Jazīra. John Trimingham, dans

---

1. Province ecclésiastique (Ḥadyab en syriaque, Ḥazzā en arabe) qui correspond au Nōd-Ardashiragan sassanide, centré autour de la métropole d'Arbelā (Erbil), entre la rive gauche du Tigre au niveau de Mossoul et la crête du Zagros.

2. « Histoire du monastère de Bēth Qōqā », dans *Sources Syriaques* 1, éd. A. Mingana (Leipzig : O. Harrassowitz, 1908), 171–220, ici 199–202. À plusieurs reprises, ces moines parviennent à inspirer le respect à ces voisins imprévus.

3. À ce sujet, on se reportera utilement à H. Lammens, « Le chantre des Omiades. Notes bibliographiques et littéraires sur le poète arabe chrétien Akhṭal », *Journal asiatique*, 9e sér., 4 (1894) : 94–242 et 381–459, ici 121 ; J. Segal, « Arabs in Syriac Literature before the Rise of Islam », *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984) : 89–124, ici 121 ; I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* (Washington, DC : Dumbarton Oaks, 1995) et G. Fisher et P. Wood, "Arabs and Christianity," dans *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, éd. G. Fisher, 276–372 (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2015) ; et les longues descriptions des auteurs médiévaux Michel le Syrien, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche, 1166–1199*, éd. J.-B. Chabot (Paris : Pierre Leroux, 1910), 374 et *Chronicon anonymum ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, éd. J.-B. Chabot (Paris : CSCO 14, 1916), 213.

4. À propos des *ʿammē* et de leurs composantes ethniques, qui occupaient un échelon différent de la nomenclature ecclésiastique, que de celui des « cités, couvents, villages » (etc.) on se reportera à S. Pierre, « Les *ʿAmmē* en "Ğazīra et en Occident". Genèse et fixation d'un ethnonyme standardisé pour les tribus arabes chrétiennes. Les Tanukōyē, Ṭūʿōyē, ʿAqūlōyē à l'âge marwānide », *Annales islamologiques* 52 (2018) : 11–44, ici 16 and 18–31. Sur les *Taglibōyē* voir mon article à paraître : S. Pierre, « The Subjugation and Taxation of the Banū Taghlib in Jazīra and Mosul (ca. 153–193 H/770–809 CE) », dans *The Reach of Empire*, éd. S. Heidemann et K. Mewes (Berlin : De Gruyter, 2021). Aucune source syro-orthodoxe ne fait allusion à de tels évêchés associés à une unité tribale comme les Banū Taġlib, ou à un ensemble lignager comme Maʿadd avant la liste d'ordinations en annexe de Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, 753, 754, 755, 756, 758 et 759 qui débute en 793. Antérieurement, il existe une mention, dans la lettre d'Athanase, d'un évêque « de Pērōz Šāpur inférieure et le peuple des *Ṭayyōyē Namirōyē* (al-Namir) » en 8/629, préservée dans la même chronique, sans pouvoir être reliée à aucune attestation postérieure (*ibid.*, 413). Il existe une mention d'un Joseph des *Taglibōyē*, sous Julien II le Romain (r. 66–88/687–708), mais dans un récit très remanié par le même Michel le Syrien ou sa source où Joseph est aussi appelé *d-Ṭayyōyē* de manière plus vague (*ibid.*, 448).

sa synthèse sur le christianisme arabe, a suggéré qu'une « forme spécifique d'ascétisme syrien qui attira les Arabes bédouins était le stylitisme[5] ». Il fut particulièrement influencé par le concept de « l'homme saint » (*holy man*) défini par Peter Brown en 1971[6]. Ce dernier considérait que l'*oikoumènè* civique était, dans l'environnement climatique syrien et dans l'implantation anthropique qui en découlait, constamment entremêlé avec l'*erèmos* rural, steppique et désertique[7]. Selon lui, « l'homme saint » serait devenu le principal évangélisateur des communautés rurales qui subsistaient à la marge de la civilité chrétienne tardo-antique. Hors de la hiérarchie officielle, les *holy men* formèrent aux yeux des populations rurales superficiellement christianisées, les *pagani*, des référents et des arbitres alternatifs, à la fois proches et charismatiques. Selon Brown, ils répondirent à une « crise de la liberté » qui aurait caractérisé un monde tardo-antique où les institutions étaient remplacées par des relations interpersonnelles[8]. Brown a essentiellement fondé son modèle sur des récits hagiographiques grecs et syriaques des vᵉ et vıᵉ siècle où les « hommes saints » adoptaient fréquemment un mode paradoxal de retraite au milieu du monde qui avait été inventé par Siméon le Stylite (m. 459)[9]. De fait il s'est appuyé sur les *Vies* de ce saint et sur celles de plusieurs des reclus de la période antéislamique qui s'inspirèrent de son ascèse spectaculaire et sa stature d'arbitre des communautés.

Cet article a pour objectif d'aborder la figure du stylite dans les littératures arabo-musulmanes et syriaques d'époque hégirienne. Nous nous interrogerons sur son impact à l'égard des communautés chrétiennes après la conquête et sur les contestations qu'ils provoquèrent. Nous envisagerons également la perception de ces anachorètes aux colonnes chez les auteurs arabo-musulmans et le développement progressif d'une forme parallèle d'opposition à ces pratiques, alors que l'islam se consolidait en tant que religion. Nous montrerons que la figure du stylite constitue un point de fixation central de la civilisation

---

5. J. Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (Londres : Longman, 1979), 233 : « A peculiar form of Syrian asceticism that attracted bedouin Arabs was Stylitism. »

6. P. Brown, « The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity », *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971) : 80–101. Le présent travail s'inscrit dans le prolongement d'une communication pour la journée d'étude doctorale de l'École Doctorale 1 (ED 22) de Sorbonne Université le 15/12/2018 : « Confusions et délimitations confessionnelles au premier siècle de l'hégire. Les Arabes face au christianisme. » Nous y avons pris pour point de départ l'intuition de Peter Brown et de John Trimingham. La mise au contact des Arabes avec le phénomène du stylitisme syro-mésopotamien, en particulier miaphysite, depuis l'époque de Saint Siméon jusqu'au début de l'époque hégirienne, et la réalité sous-tendue par ce *topos* littéraire et historiographique est partiellement abordé dans un article séparé : S. Pierre, « Le développement du stylitisme et l'enjeu de la christianisation des Arabes en Syrie-Mésopotamie tardo-antique (vᵉ–vıııᵉ siècles) », *Camenulae*, à paraître.

7. Brown, « Holy Man », 87–93.

8. *Ibid.*, 99. Sur la question du développement de l'ascétisme, la référence incontournable reste A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient. A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East* (Louvain : CSCO, 1958).

9. Brown, « Holy Man », 83, 88, 90, 92 et 96. À propos du culte chalcédonien de Siméon le Stylite en Syrie du nord, on se reportera à J. Nasrallah, « Le couvent de Saint Siméon l'Alépin. Témoignages littéraires et jalons sur l'histoire », *Parole de l'Orient* 1 (1970) : 327–56 et J. Nasrallah, « Couvents de la Syrie du nord portant le nom de Siméon », *Syria* 49, nᵒ 1/2 (1972) : 127–59 ; il utilise beaucoup la vie de Daniel le Stylite (m. 493) qui officia ensuite surtout à Constantinople.

tardo-antique des débuts de l'Islam. Elle semble avoir constitué, autant pour les autorités arabo-musulmanes que syro-orthodoxes, un modèle de piété et une figure à respecter, et en même temps, un rival et un danger pour le bon ordre du troupeau. Cette position médiane laisse supposer que leur influence de *holy man* auprès des communautés rurales n'est pas qu'un *topos*, ou un simple motif canonique répétitif, mais qu'ils constituèrent bel et bien des agents essentiels de la christianisation des agriculteurs (*pagani*) et des pasteurs (*aʿrāb*). Les dirigeants de ces communautés exercèrent diverses pressions afin de sauvegarder leur autorité politique et religieuse. Plus largement, nous mettrons en évidence un exemple d'échanges interculturels entre les littératures chrétiennes et musulmanes à l'égard d'une figure commune.

Avant Trimingham, Brown avait aussi eu l'intuition, sans vraiment l'approfondir, que « les bédouins furent parmi [les] premiers clients[10] » de ces hommes saints. Les récits hagiographiques qui leurs sont consacrés accordent en effet une place non négligeable aux arabophones pastoraux (*sarakènoi* en grec et *ṭayyāyē* en syriaque), et même, dans une certaine mesure, à l'aristocratie arabe. La question de l'influence des stylites dans ce processus a été abordée successivement par Henri Lammens[11] et François Nau[12], puis John Trimingham[13] et Juda Segal[14] et plus récemment par Elizabeth Fowden[15], Theresia Hainthaler[16] et Greg Fisher[17]. Cependant, ils ont pour l'essentiel évité les sources arabo-musulmanes et syro-orthodoxes traitant du phénomène à l'époque hégirienne[18].

Siméon et Daniel les Anciens, ainsi que leurs disciples homonymes de la fin du VIᵉ siècle, semblent avoir été des partisans du concile de Chalcédoine qui, en 451, avait établi le dyophysisme officiel romain[19]. Pourtant, leur patronage fut tout autant revendiqué

---

10. Brown, « Holy Man », 83.

11. H. Lammens, « Un poète royal à la cour des Omeyyades », *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 8 (1903) : 325–87 et 9 (1904) : 32–64, ici 34 and 36–37. Il a mis l'accent sur la symbolique de la lampe et eu l'intuition que la *ṣawmaʿa* y avait quelque chose en rapport, voir *infra*.

12. F. Nau, *Les Arabes chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie du VIIᵉ au VIIIᵉ siècle* (Paris : Cahiers de la Société asiatique, 1933), 37–38 et 104.

13. Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 143, 158, 189 et 229.

14. Segal, « Arabs in Syriac Literature », 104–5 et 116–17 ; sur la particularité syrienne du stylitisme, voir F. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization, c. 370–529* (Leyde : Brill, 1993) et D. T. M. Frankfurter, « Stylites and Phallobates. Pillar Religions in Late Antique Syria », *Vigiliae Christianae* 44, nᵒ 2 (1990) : 168–98.

15. E. K. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain. Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1999), 40 ; E. K. Fowden, « Des églises pour les arabes, pour les nomades ? », dans *Les églises en monde syriaque*, éd. F. Briquel-Chatonnet, 391–412 (Paris : Geuthner, 2013), 401.

16. T. Hainthaler, « Christian Arabs before Islam. A Short Overview », dans *People from the Desert. Pre-Islamic Arabs in History and Culture. Selected Essays*, éd. N. Al-Jallad, 29–44 (Wiesbaden : Reichert, 2012), 40.

17. G. Fisher, *Between Empires. Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011), 36–37 et 44.

18. Voir le bilan historiographique de la question dans Pierre, « Stylitisme et christianisation des Arabes ».

19. Sur cet enjeu, voir l'approche de P. Peeters, *Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine* (Bruxelles : Société des Bollandistes, 1950), 93–136, ici 97–101 il considère que le saint homme était bel et bien dyophysite et 134–36 que ce ne fut que tardivement que son sanctuaire passa aux mains des miaphysites. Nous retrouvons dans J. Nasrallah, « L'orthodoxie de Siméon Stylite l'Alépin et sa survie dans l'Église Melchite », *Parole de l'Orient* 2,

par les miaphysites. Emmanuel Soler propose que les adeptes de cette ascèse se fussent refusés à prendre une position christologique tranchée[20], et que cet exercice aurait été plus tard représentatif d'une position médiane. Selon lui, aucun point de vue, miaphysite ou chalcédonien n'est réellement plus « authentique » que l'autre[21]. En outre, le complexe architectural de Qalᶜat Simᶜān ne peut être spécifié comme typiquement chalcédonien sur des fondements architecturaux[22] et, à l'inverse, il serait erroné ou excessif de considérer qu'il aurait été complètement privatisé par les anti-chalcédoniens à la fin du vɪe siècle[23]. Les clercs et les ermites chrétiens étaient partagés en courants et n'avaient pas encore établi d'Églises hermétiquement distinctes dans le Diocèse d'Orient romain tandis que l'organisation de l'Église sassanide ne se définit comme une « Église de l'Orient » qu'à la toute fin du vɪe siècle au plus tôt[24]. Dès lors, tout en maintenant des formes de cohabitations, les religieux se disputaient âprement les sites cultuels, les monastères, ainsi que les lieux de mémoire des martyrs et des saints hommes et les grands sanctuaires à festival ; mais aussi les colonnes pour stationner[25].

En revanche, cette forme d'ascèse est complètement inconnue dans l'Église de Perse/de l'Orient, y compris, autant que nous puissions le savoir, parmi les communautés miaphysites. Il s'agit donc d'une spécificité syrienne, qui constitua un pilier de la politique monastique des différents courants opposés. Les sources syro-orthodoxes confirment l'importance du stylitisme parmi les partisans de Sévère dès le début du vɪe siècle et ensuite à l'époque de Jacques Baradée (m. 578), en particulier après leur disgrâce consécutive à la mort de Justinien (r. 527–65)[26]. Jean d'Éphèse (m. v. 580) souligne en effet l'importance de cette figure dans sa formation chrétienne et celle de sa communauté rurale. Ainsi, il existait dans son village natal une colonne occupée par un certain Abraham, dont les habitants

---

nᵒ 2 (1971) : 345–65, à 345–48 des arguments en faveur d'un Siméon « hérétique » du point de vue chalcédonien, et la prise de position de l'auteur qui rejoint celle de Paul Peeters. Plus récemment, la mise au point à propos de la tradition hagiographique par B. Caseau, « Syméon Stylite l'Ancien entre puanteur et parfum », *Revue des études byzantines 63 (*2005) : 71–96, ici 73–83 et au sujet de sa confession éventuelle : E. Soler, « La figure de Syméon Stylite l'Ancien et les controverses christologiques des vᵉ–vɪᵉ siècles en Orient », dans *Dieu(x) et hommes. Histoire et iconographie des sociétés païennes et chrétiennes de l'antiquité à nos jours. Mélanges en l'honneur de Françoise Thelamon*, éd. S. Crogiez-Pétrequin, 187–210 (Caen : Publications des universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2005), 196–99.

20. Soler, « La figure de Syméon Stylite », 196–99.

21. *Ibid.*, 209–10.

22. *Ibid.*, 205–6.

23. *Ibid.*, 208–9.

24. Dans une formule encore ambiguë chez le catholicos Ezechiel (r. 570–81), *Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens*, éd. J.-B. Chabot (Paris : Imprimerie nationale, 1902), 111 puis explicitement sous Sabr-Išōᶜ (r. 596–604) (*ibid.*, 206) ; voir aussi l'avis de S. Brelaud, « Présences chrétiennes en Mésopotamie durant l'époque sassanide (ɪɪɪᵉ–vɪɪᵉ siècles). Géographie et société » (PhD diss., Sorbonne Université, 2018), 220, n. 1235, qui reporte l'émergence d'une telle Église régionale au vɪɪɪᵉ siècle.

25. I. Peña, P. Castellana et R. Fernandez, *Les stylites syriens* (Milan : Franciscan Printing Press, 1975), 65.

26. Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, 281 ; Peña, Castellana et Fernandez, *Stylites syriens*, 62 ; A. Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier. The Early History of Tur 'Abdin* (Londres : Cambridge University Press, 1990), 79 et 113–14.

auraient exigé que Mārūn, son frère, prenne à sa mort la succession[27]. Andrew Palmer a notamment étudié le développement du stylitisme dans le Ṭūr ʿAbdīn[28] constatant qu'il était délibérément inspiré du modèle du saint antiochien Siméon l'Ancien. Il a démontré que les stylites, appelés *esṭūnōrē* (ceux de la colonne : *esṭūnō*), occupèrent une place prééminente dans l'imaginaire syro-orthodoxe des deux premiers siècles de l'Islam[29]. En tant que *holy men*, ils passèrent du statut de marginaux charismatiques à celui d'étape nécessaire du *cursus* spirituel des « solitaires » (*iḥīdōyē*).

Paradoxalement, ils continuèrent à occuper une position de rivaux potentiels de la hiérarchie officielle[30]. Ils furent ciblés par une politique délibérée de domestication du monachisme à partir de la fin du VIᵉ siècle, aussi bien dans l'espace syriaque occidental que dans le monde sassanide, où, il faut le répéter, la mode stylitisme ne fit pas recette. Dans le monde romain et post-romain du Šām et de Jazīra, en revanche, l'expression *esṭūnōrō* finit, au tournant de l'hégire, par désigner un grand nombre de genres de réclusion. Pour la plupart, ils habitaient des tours plutôt que des « colonnes » de récupération romaines (ou construites pour l'occasion)[31]. Souvent, ces édifices occupaient le voisinage de l'enclos du monastère, voire en était le cœur battant, l'*axis mundi*. À l'époque islamique, cette institution était devenue centrale, ainsi qu'en atteste le « pilier » (*esṭūnō*) qui donne son nom au principal monastère occupé par le patriarcat miaphysite jazīrien à l'époque abbasside[32]. Plusieurs autres autorités importantes de l'Église syro-orthodoxe, destinées à

---

27. Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 106 ; Jean d'Éphèse, « Lives of the Eastern Saints. IV: Next the Fourth History, of the Saints Abraham and Maro the Brothers », éd. E. W. Brooks, *Patrologia Orientalis* 17 (1923) : 56–84, ici 56–57, 59–60, 69–70, 78 et 82–84 ; cet exemple est détaillé dans Pierre, « Stylitisme et christianisation des Arabes ».

28. Massif de collines arides situées entre Nisibe, Mārdīn et Amid.

29. Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 106.

30. Bar Hébraeus, *Nomocanon Gregorii Barhebraei*, éd. P. Bedjan (Leipzig : O. Harrassowitz, 1898), 113 ; traduction dans F. Nau, *Les canons et les résolutions canoniques* (Paris : P. Lethielleux, 1906), 94 ; Dad-Išōʿ Qaṭrāyā, *Traité sur la solitude et la prière* (*Sept semaines de solitude*) [*Livre des degrés*], éd. A. Mingana (Toronto : Woodbrooke Studies, 1934), 201–47, ici 202 ; voir aussi C. Fauchon, « Les formes de vie ascétique et monastique en milieu syriaque, Vᵉ–VIIᵉ siècles », dans *Le monachisme syriaque*, éd. F. Jullien, 37–63 (Paris : Geuthner, 2010), ici 37, n. 4.

31. Fauchon, « Vie ascétique », 49. Voir les exemples étudiés par Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 102, 105, 188 et 217 et la lecture de A. Desreumaux, « L'épigraphie syriaque du monachisme », dans Jullien, *Le monachisme syriaque*, 261–90, ici 287 ; I. Peña, P. Castellana et R. Fernandez, *Les reclus syriens. Recherches sur les anciennes formes de vie solitaire en Syrie* (Milan : Franciscan Printing Press, 1980), 300–301 ; sur les colonnes se reporter à O. Callot et P.-L. Gatier, « Les stylites de l'Antiochène », dans *Antioche de Syrie. Histoire, images et traces de la ville antique, Lyon, 4–6 octobre* 2001, éd. B. Cabouret, P.-L. Gatier et C. Saliou, 573–96 (Lyon : Société des amis de la Bibliothèque Salomon-Reinach, 2004).

32. Selon Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, 414, il fut édifié pour les réfugiés du couvent de Qdar détruit par les envahisseurs « Ṭayyōyē » dans les années 630, thème principal de la notice du « prêtre Thomas » dans le « Chronicon miscellaneum ad annum Domini 724 pertinens », éd. E. W. Brooks, dans *Chronica Minora* 1, 77–155 (Paris : CSCO, 1903), 148, au sujet de cette chronique lire M. Debié, *L'écriture de l'histoire en syriaque. Transmissions interculturelles et constructions identitaires entre hellénisme et islam* (Louvain : Peeters, 2015), 545 ; autres mentions dans Michel le Syrien, *Chronique,* 492 et 753.

Il existait également un « couvent de […] Speqlūs » (Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, 469) dans la région de Raʾs al-ʿAyn. Très actif entre les années 64/684 et 108/726, son nom dériverait probablement du latin *specula* : « la

une postérité littéraire et/ou à de hautes fonctions épiscopales, s'avèrent avoir été, à un moment ou à un autre de leur carrière, des stylites. Un grand nombre de ces personnalités furent alors, directement ou non, en contact avec des Arabo-bédouins, voire responsables d'entreprises plus ou moins explicitement destinées à leur évangélisation[33]. Ce faisant, les stylites devinrent de véritables arbitres, éducateurs et, souvent, des chefs de communautés rurales, comme l'ont observé Uriel Simonsohn et Mathieu Tillier[34].

2. *Esṭūnō* et *ṣawmaʿa* dans les débuts de l'Islam

2.1. *Les reclus, les stylites et « ceux des* ṣawmaʿa-s *» dans le testament (*waṣiyya*) d'Abū Bakr (r. 11–13/632–34)*

Les sources syriaques rapportent plusieurs témoignages explicites de rencontres d'Arabes avec des stylites à l'époque post-hégirienne. La *Chronique anonyme jusqu'en 1234* qui préserve une partie de la chronique civile perdue du patriarche Denys de Tell Maḥrē (r. 203–30/818–45) contient une mention particulièrement suggestive. Elle attribue au premier calife Abū Bakr (r. 11–13/632–34) un discours destiné aux troupes en partance pour la Syrie :

> Alors que les forces des Arabes (*Ṭayyōyē*) se pressaient à sortir de « la cité » (*Mdī(n)tō* = Médine), Abū Bakr sortit avec eux et [. . .] leur déclara :

> « Lorsque vous entrerez en ce pays (1) ne tuez ni vieillard, ni enfant, ni bébé, ni femmes (2) ne faites point descendre les stylites de leur place (*lō thattūn ēsṭūnōrē men dūkōtō*) (3) ne nuisez point aux solitaires (*iḥīdōyē*) parce qu'ils se sont dévoués eux-mêmes (*prašū nafš-hūn*) à servir (*npallḥūn*) Dieu (4) n'abattez pas les arbres et ne détruisez point les plantations (5) n'éviscérez point les bêtes, les bœufs et les moutons[35]. »

---

tour de garde » (H. Takahashi and L Van Rompay, "Reshʿayna, Theodosiopolis". Dans *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, édité par S. Brock et al., Piscataway : Gorgias, 2011, p. 351) ».

33. Selon Bar Hébraeus, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum quod e codice Musei Britannici descriptum* [. . .], éd. J.-B. Abbeloos et T. Lamy (Paris : Maisonneuve/Louvain : Peeters, 1874), 2. col. 151, Jean le Chionite fut lui-même élu métropolite dans le monastère du *Knūšyō* de Sinjār, à la succession de Paul qui y résidait également. Ce lieu est lié aux tribus arabes chrétiennes comme le suggère la mention explicite dans la Vie d'Aḥūdemmeh ; *Histoires d'Ahoudemmeh et de Marouta, métropolitains jacobites de Tagrit et de l'Orient (vɪᵉ et vɪɪᵉ siècles)*, éd. F. Nau, *Patrologia Orientalis* 3 (1909) : 27–28 et comme lieu de formation de deux évêques de tribus arabes, Ḥabīb des Banū Taḡlib sous Denys de Tell Maḥrē (r. 203–30/818–45) et Salomon des Maʿadd sous son successeur Jean III ; Marūtā est célèbre pour avoir fondé le monastère de ʿAyn Gagā non loin du Ṯarṯār pour ses habitants et ses voyageurs, Vie de Marūtā, 88 ; quant à Théodote d'Amid, il est fameux pour avoir réuni des foules de « chrétiens et de Ṭayyōyē » (et guéri un Arabe) : *Vie de Théodote*, ms. Mārdīn, Église des quarante martyrs, nᵒ 275, fᵒˢ 237r–296v, ici 270/548–49 ; 271/550–51 : publication de l'édition de sa Vie garšūnī et traduction à venir, par J. Tannous, A. Palmer et R. Hoyland.

34. U. Simonsohn, « Seeking Justice among the "Outsiders". Christian Recourse to Non-ecclesiastical Judicial Systems under Early Islam », *Church History and Religious Culture* 89, nᵒ 1–3 (2009) : 191–216, voir 198–99 ; U. Simonsohn, *A Common Justice. The Legal Allegiances of Christians and Jews under Early Islam* (Philadelphie : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 36–37 ; M. Tillier, *L'invention du cadi. La justice des musulmans, des juifs et des chrétiens aux premiers siècles de l'Islam* (Paris : Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2017), 469.

35. *Chronicon 1234*, 240.

Naturellement, ce sont les deuxième et troisième clauses qui nous intéressent ici. Ajoutons que la chronique du patriarche Michel le Syrien (r. 561–95/1166–99), qui suit généralement de près celle de son lointain prédécesseur Denys[36], ne conserva pas non plus cet épisode. Dès lors, il est impossible de certifier que ce passage fut rédigé en syriaque au VIIIe ou au IXe siècle. Néanmoins, l'anonyme de la *Chronique jusqu'en 1234* l'introduisit après avoir fait état de la répartition des terres à conquérir entre « quatre généraux », dont l'un aurait été chargé de soumettre les tribus arabes chrétiennes[37].

Le discours du premier calife est bien connu dans l'historiographie arabo-musulmane sous le nom de « recommandation (*waṣiyya*) d'Abū Bakr ». Dans la version des *Généalogies des notables* (*Ansāb al-ašrāf*) de l'historien al-Balāḏurī (m. 280/893), le « successeur » du Prophète aurait adressé à Yazīd b. Abī Sufyān (m. 18/639) un discours très semblable à celui reproduit par Denys : « Vous trouverez un groupe (*qawm*) : ils se sont enfermés eux-mêmes (*ḥabasū anfusahum*) dans des *ṣawmaʿa*-s, laissez-les (*daʿūhum*) ainsi que ce où ils se sont enfermés[38]. » Yazīd était le frère aîné de Muʿāwiya, futur gouverneur de Syrie puis commandeur des croyants (r. 23–40/644–60 puis r. 41–60/661–80). Il correspond vraisemblablement à l'un des « quatre généraux » qu'Abū Bakr, selon une source chrétienne commune du VIIIe siècle, expédia en Palestine et en Balqāʾ (Transjordanie). Selon toute vraisemblance, la source de Denys de Tell Maḥrē abrégea et traduisit simplement une information tirée de la tradition historiographique arabo-musulmane, à l'instar des traditions sur la conquête de Chypre ou la mort de Yazdgard (r. 11–30/632–51)[39]. De son côté, al-Balāḏurī affirme avoir obtenu cette information (*ḫabar*) à la lecture d'Ibn Saʿd (m. 230/845), lequel l'avait entendue de son maître, le fameux al-Wāqidī (m. v. 205/820) sans que ce dernier n'eusse nullement recouru à une quelconque chaine de transmission (*isnād*). Son contemporain Sayf b. ʿUmar (m. v. 180/796), à en croire al-Ṭabarī, aurait appris une sentence similaire du savant irakien al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (m. 110/728) : « Vous passerez par des groupes (*aqwām*) qui se sont affairés eux-mêmes (*faraġū anfusahum*) dans des *ṣawmaʿa*, laissez-les à ce à quoi ils s'affairent[40]. »

Tandis que le texte syriaque distinguait les « stylites (*esṭūnōrē*) » des « solitaires (*īḥīdōyē*) » qui « se sont dévoués <u>eux-mêmes</u> (*nafš-hūn*) », les deux variantes arabes abbassides fusionnaient en une seule catégorie : ceux « qui se sont enfermés/affairés <u>eux-mêmes</u> (*anfusahum*) dans des *ṣawmaʿa*-s ». Par conséquent, ce dernier terme traduisait les demeures des deux types de reclus de la version syriaque. En second lieu, l'ordre du calife consistait à « abandonner/laisser » ces moines à leurs affaires. Si la version syriaque

---

36. Si l'on en croit l'introduction de A. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 1993), 85–103.

37. *Arbʿō dēn rīšay-ḥaylūtō d-eštadr(ū) men Abū Bakr* [. . .] *w-aḥrōnō lūqbal Ṭayyōyē krisṭyōnē d-taḥīt pūqdōnō d-Rūmōyē.*

38. Al-Balāḏurī, *Jumal ansāb al-ašrāf*, éd. S. Zakkār et R. Ziriklī, 13 vol. (Beyrouth : Dār al-Fikr, 1996–2005), 10 : 113.

39. M. Debié, « What Can We Learn from Syriac Historiography ? », dans *Studies in Theophanes*, vol. 19, éd. F. Montinaro et M. Jankowiak, 365–82 (Paris : Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2015), 379.

40. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīḫ al-rusul wa-l-mulūk,* éd. M. de Goeje, 3 séries (Leyde : Brill, 1879), sér. 1, 1850.

était explicitement en faveur des reclus, la « recommandation » (*waṣiyya*) arabe préservait retenue et ambiguïté[41]. Néanmoins, ce passage reprenait le *topos*, bien ancré à l'époque d'Ibn Saʿd et de Denys, du respect dû aux moines et aux reclus de la part de conquérants non-chrétiens de la Syrie. En effet, selon une source arabe contemporaine, Ḫosrō Iᵉʳ (r. 531–79), archétype du despote éclairé, à la fois païen et juste, aurait lui aussi demandé à ses troupes en partance vers la Syrie « qu'on laisse la ṣawmaʿa et qu'on sorte du couvent (*dayr*)[42]. »

ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (m. 211/827) rapporta aussi une version qui ressemble plus encore à celle de la *Chronique jusqu'en 1234*. Il l'imputait à une tradition de Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd (m. 145/762), à travers deux de ses maîtres du milieu du IIᵉ siècle de l'hégire, Sufyān al-Ṯawrī (m. 161/778) et Ibn Jurayj (m. 150/767). Ceci suggère que cette tradition était encore tout juste émergeante au cours du IIᵉ/VIIIᵉ siècle. Le *muḥaddiṯ* inséra sa version dans la liste des règles du *ius in bello* en pays conquis. Comme dans le texte syriaque, après avoir affirmé : « Ne déracinez aucun dattier, ne les brûlez pas », Abū Bakr aurait ainsi poursuivi : « Ne dévastez ni ne dépouillez (*lā tajbunū wa-lā taġlulū*) [. . .] ceux qui se sont <u>enfermés eux-mêmes</u>, ceux qui sont <u>dans les ṣawmaʿa-s</u>[43]. »

Contrairement aux versions d'al-Balāḏurī et d'al-Ṭabarī, le discours (*ḥadīṯ*) copié par ʿAbd al-Razzāq distinguait deux propositions, à l'instar de la notice de la *Chronique jusqu'en 1234* : (1) ceux qui se sont « reclus (ḤBS) eux-mêmes (*anfusahum*) » et (2) « ceux qui sont dans des ṣawmaʿa-s ». Le lecteur moderne pourrait le comprendre comme un accolement à effet de redondance, classique en langue sémitique. Pourtant, la comparaison avec la version syriaque qui sépare également les « stylites (esṭūnōrē) » des « solitaires (īḥīdōyē) » laisse supposer que l'auteur arabe du *ḥadīṯ* souhaita d'abord mentionner les reclus (*ḥabīs*-s) au sens large, puis aussi ceux qui résidaient dans les ṣawmaʿa-s. L'auteur syriaque avait rapporté une version détaillée de la *waṣiyya* d'Abū Bakr qui réservait aux stylites (esṭūnōrē) une position particulière, qui, à notre sens, équivaut à la partie ṣawmaʿa de la version arabe. Il semble donc que les informateurs d'al-Balāḏurī et d'al-Ṭabarī fusionnèrent dans un second temps les deux catégories d'ascètes comme « ceux qui (1) se sont reclus (ḤBS) eux-mêmes (*anfusahum*) (2) dans des ṣawmaʿa-s ». Ainsi, chez les auteurs arabes d'époque abbasside, une partie, puis la totalité des reclus étaient supposés résider dans ces structures. Dès lors, ce vocable équivalait-il au lieu de retraite qui, en syriaque, caractérisait les stylites : la colonne (esṭūnō) ?

2.2. L'intuition de Lammens : la ṣawmaʿa *comme tour de stylite*

Si la *waṣiyya* date véritablement d'Abū Bakr, il est nécessaire de comparer le sens de ṣawmaʿa dans la langue du compagnon du Prophète avec le seul texte contemporain de ce dernier : le Coran lui-même. Malheureusement, le terme n'apparaît qu'une seule fois dans la vulgate othmanienne préservée, au nombre d'une liste de vocables fléchis au pluriel et se

---

41. Il est intéressant d'observer que les versions syriaques comme arabes insistent sur *anfusahum/nafš-hūn*.

42. Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī, *al-Aḫbār al-ṭiwāl*, éd. ʿA. ʿĀmir (Le Caire : Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabī, 1960), 88.

43. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, éd. Ḥ.. R. al-Aʿẓamī, 11 vol. (Beyrouth : al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983), 5 : 199.

référant à des lieux de culte : « Si Dieu ne repoussait pas les hommes les uns des autres, alors auraient été démolis : ṣawmaʿa-s, églises/synagogues (biyaʿ), [lieux de] prières (ṣalawāt) et "prosternatoires" (masājid) où est rappelé le nom de Dieu ![44] »

Ce verset quelque peu sibyllin fut accolé à d'autres sentences sur le culte mekkois. Dès lors, il ne nous éclaire pas vraiment sur la signification précise des quatre termes. Tous désignaient un type de lieu de culte monothéiste sans qu'il soit possible de discriminer l'orientation confessionnelle de chacun, non plus que le rapport de la umma primitive à l'égard de leurs occupants[45]. Toutefois, une seconde occurrence du premier siècle de l'hégire apporte un éclairage précieux. Il s'agit d'un distique du poète chrétien al-Aḫṭal al-Taġlibī (m. v. 101/720)[46], un des plus fameux aèdes de la période omeyyade, qui peut se traduire approximativement comme suit :

> Quant à moi, au [nom du] Seigneur des chrétiens en leurs célébrations (ʿīd)
> et des musulmans lorsque les réunit l'assemblée (= le vendredi ? : jumaʿ).
> . . .Et au [nom du] Seigneur de tout reclus (ḥabīs) en haut (fawq) de sa ṣawmaʿa
> Il marche, peu lui importe le monde (dunyā) ou l'envie (ṭamʿ)[47] !

Lammens, prêtre arabisant et historien orientaliste, avait déjà traduit ces vers en 1894 dans l'une de ses premières publications consacrées au Chantre des Omeyyades. Il avait assez naturellement restitué la troisième strophe « par le Dieu des anachorètes, du haut de leurs ermitages[48] ». Toutefois, dix ans plus tard, il avait repris l'étude du célèbre poète de la cour marwānide[49] et, avec une intuition de dialectisant, s'était exclamé :

> Nous nous étonnons que nous ayons pu nous y méprendre jadis, ou que personne parmi les orientalistes n'ait relevé notre erreur. Car c'en était une quand, à la suite de certains

---

44. Qurʾān 22 : 40 : Law lā dafʿu Llāh al-nāsa baʿḍahum bi-baʿḍin la-huddimat ṣawāmiʿu wa-biyaʿun wa-ṣalawātun wa-masājidu yuḏkaru fīhā ismu Llāhi kaṯīran.

45. M. Azaiez, « Sourate 22 : Al-Ḥajj (Le Pèlerinage) », dans Le Coran des Historiens, sous la direction de M. A. Amir-Moezzi et G. Dye, 3 vols. (Paris : Le Cerf, 2019), 2/1 : 833 traduit « monastères, églises, synagogues, et mosquées (ou "sanctuaires" en général) ». À propos de ṣawmaʿa, ils se fondent sur A. Jeffery, The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān, (Baroda : Oriental Institute, 1938), 200–201 qui a traduit « cloister » et présumé un emprunt étranger, proposant, sur la foi de l'usage guèze tardif, d'y voir un mot d'origine sudarabique, tout en concédant « though we have as yet no S. Arabian word with which to compare it ». Je remercie Antoine Borrut pour m'avoir rappelé cette importante référence.

46. Sa célèbre ode (qaṣīda) en hommage à la victoire de ʿAbd al-Malik en 72/691–92 a été étudiée en détail par S. Stetkevych, « Umayyad Panegyric and the Poetics of Islamic Hegemony. Al-Akhṭal's "Khaffa al-Qaṭīnu" », Journal of Arabic Literature 28, nº 2 (1997) : 89–122 ; voir aussi S. Stetkevych, « Al-Akhṭal at the Court of ʿAbd al-Malik. The Qaṣida and the Construction of Umayyad Authority », dans Christians and Others in the Umayyad State, éd. A. Borrut et F. M. Donner, 129–55 (Chicago : Oriental Institute, 2016) ; A. Borrut, Entre mémoire et pouvoir. L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides (v. 72–193/692–809) (Leyde : Brill, 2011), 69, n. 23 souligne qu'il serait utile de « mieux préciser » « les conditions de transmission » du panégyrique qui lui est attribué.

47. Al-Aḫṭal al-Taġlibī, Šiʿr al-Aḫṭal (riwāya [. . .] ʿan Abī Saʿīd al-Sukkarī ʿan M. Ibn Ḥabīb ʿan Ibn al-Aʿrābī), éd. A. Ṣāliḥānī, 4 vol. (Beyrouth : Imprimerie catholique, 1891), 71, vv. 5–6.

48. Lammens, « Le chantre des Omiades », 109 [16].

49. Lammens, « Poète royal », 35–36.

lexicographes postérieurs, nous avons rendu « ṣaumaʿa » par ermitage, sens que lui assignent le plus souvent les dictionnaires actuels. Ce n'est là ni l'unique ni surtout la primitive signification du terme, lequel se dit originairement d'une construction élevée, se terminant en forme de tour ou de pyramide. C'est ainsi que les minarets des mosquées sont également appelés ṣaumaʿa, et l'ancien tombeau romain de Homs, à forme pyramidale, porte encore ce dernier nom. La signification d'ermitage s'est développée beaucoup plus tard, quand on avait perdu le souvenir de la vie des stylites et peut-être aussi sous l'influence de cette hostilité contre le célibat et l'ascétisme monastiques, hostilité concrétisée dans cet aphorisme très musulman : « les ermitages des fidèles, ce sont leurs demeures[50] ».

Lammens a alors proposé de corriger sa première traduction de ṣawmaʿa du sens tardif et générique « d'ermitage » à celui d'une « tour » de « stylite[51] ». Il se fondait avant tout sur l'usage courant du même vocable pour désigner les minarets des mosquées dont l'apparence se rapprochait des tours de stylites de l'espace syrien tardo-antique. L'idée d'élévation, dans le distique d'al-Aḫṭal, résidait avant tout dans la préposition « fawq », un usage qu'il est tentant de comparer à celui d'un ḥadīṯ attribué à ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (r. 36–41/656–61), dans l'exégèse d'Ibn Wahb (m. 197/813), à propos des moines (ruhbān)[52]. Le calife les aurait définis comme ceux qui « s'enferment (ḤBS) eux-mêmes (anfusahum) <u>en haut</u> (ʿalā) des ṣawmaʿa-s[53] ».

Il est aussi possible de rapprocher ce dispositif de celui du poète al-ʿAttābī (m. 220/835) qui, d'après la « Séance » (Mujālasa) mystique d'Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī (m. 333/944), se serait exclamé : « Alors que je passai près d'un couvent (dayr), j'entendis un moine m'appeler : je levai la tête vers lui et appelai : "Ô moine !" et il me regarda d'en haut (ašrafa ʿalayya)[54]. » Selon Ibn Ḥanbal (m. 241/855) l'ascète israélite archétypal nommé Jurayj devait « monter (ṣaʿada) pour accéder à sa ṣawmaʿa »[55]. Ici encore, la ṣawmaʿa consiste en une retraite monastique en hauteur[56]. Toutefois Lammens n'a jamais étayé son hypothèse et on ne peut déduire sans équivoque qu'« en haut » (fawq, ʿalā) désigne une tour d'ermitage à l'exclusion, par exemple, d'une grotte de montagne ou du sommet pyramidal d'un tertre[57]. Il existe

---

50. *Ibid.*, 36.

51. *Ibid.*, 34–36.

52. Dans Qurʾān 18 : 103–4.

53. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, éd. A. M. Šākir, 24 vol. (Le Caire : Dār al-Maʿārif, 1961), 18 : 126.

54. Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, *al-Mujālasa wa-jawāhir al-ʿilm*, éd. M. Āl Salmān, 10 vol. (Bahrain : Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1998), 3 : 365.

55. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, éd. A. Šākir, 8 vol. (Le Caire : Dār al-Ḥadīṯ, 1995), 8 : 155.

56. J.-M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne* 3 (Beyrouth : Institut de lettres orientales, 1968), 242–43 avait observé que les ruines des monastères du Bēt Aramāyē étaient souvent appelées *al-qāʾim* : « les dressés ».

57. Cette hypothèse fut à la fois reprise et critiquée par Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs*, 233–35 qui pourtant ne cite pas Lammens lorsqu'il traduit le vers. Néanmoins, il critique l'emploi univoque de ṣawmaʿa comme colonne et rappelle son emploi comme ermitage au sens large dans al-Ṭabarī à propos du moine Baḥīra : « The Arabic term sawmaʿa has caused confusion. This term was applied to any elevated structure. The Taghlibī

de nombreuses occurrences de réclusions qui sont, symboliquement ou réellement, « en hauteur », sans qu'il soit possible de garantir qu'il s'agisse toujours d'une colonne de stylite. C'est notamment le cas, dans l'espace ex-sassanide, de ceux des moines « qui ont choisi la station et ne descendent point à terre » que le métropolite Marūtā (m. 28/649) aurait installés près d'un couvent[58].

Néanmoins, il est possible d'affirmer qu'au ɪᵛᵉ/xᵉ siècle, le terme syriaque désignant la colonne du stylite (*esṭūnō*) pouvait correspondre sans difficulté à la *ṣawmaʿa* arabe. En effet, les syro-orthodoxes d'époque ayyūbide, Michel le Syrien et l'anonyme de 1234 coïncident dans la description d'une violente tempête qui, en plus d'arracher les arbres, fit « chuter — beaucoup de — colonnes (*esṭūnē*) de bienheureux (*ṭūbōnē*) — de leur place —[59] » aux alentours de l'année 29/648. Cette tradition syriaque est très probablement issue de la chronique perdue de Denys de Tell Maḥrē. En outre, elle apparaît aussi dans les chroniques de deux historiens chalcédoniens, l'hellénophone Théophane le Confesseur (m. 201/817) et l'arabophone Agapius/Maḥbūb de Manbij (m. après 330/942). Le premier décrit le même évènement en rapportant que « beaucoup de fûts de colonnes (*stulous kionōn*) tombèrent[60] » tandis que, un siècle plus tard, Agapius traduisit, en une version en apparence fidèle à celle de Théophane, que « beaucoup de *ṣawmaʿa*-s tombèrent[61] ».

Ceci suggère nettement que cette information dérive d'une source commune. Lawrence Conrad et Robert Hoyland l'ont attribué à Théophile d'Édesse (m. v. 164/780), historien et astrologue de la cour abbasside qui aurait écrit une chronique en syriaque[62]. Muriel Debié a néanmoins démontré récemment que cette supposition n'était pas un fait assuré[63],

---

poet Akhṭal swears "by the God of the solitaries, walking on the tops of their columns". Al-Akhṭal, *Shiʿr*, 71, l. 5. The column had a platform on top where the hermit could walk about. They were not confined to their column and would come down to attend church at festivals. But the term was also applied to the pyramidal-shaped structures in which desert ascetics frequently lived. » Il n'apporte pas non plus de référence au qualificatif de *ṣawmaʿa* associé aux structures pyramidales de ces ascètes : « Generally, sawmaʿa means simply "hermitage", and the Arab poets distinguish *ruhban*, "monks", as *ashab as-sawami*: "dwellers of the hermitages". The Prophet Muhammad, according to tradition (Ṭabarī, I. 1124), associated with the *rahib* Bahira in his *sawmaa* at Bostra or during the journey there, and in the plural the word makes its appearance once in the Qur'an, in *Sura* 22:41. »

58. *Vie de Marūtā*, 88.

59. Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, 429 ; *Chronicon 1234*, 260.

60. Théophane le Confesseur, *Chronographia*, éd. C. de Boor (Leipzig : Teubner, 1885), 343 ; il est instructif ici que les textes syriaques, grecs et arabes de *1234*, Théophane et Agapius sont presque équivalents tandis que la version de Michel est assez différente.

61. Agapius de Manbij, *Kitab al-ʿUnvan, histoire universelle* [. . .] (II-2), éd. A. Vassiliev, *Patrologia Orientalis* 8 (1912) : 397–550, ici 480 [220].

62. L. I. Conrad, « Theophanes and the Arabic Historical Tradition », *Byzantinische Forschungen* 15 (1990) : 1–44 ; Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 83 et 144 et A. Borrut, « Court Astrologers and Historical Writing in Early ʿAbbāsid Baghdād. An Appraisal », dans *The Place to Go. Contexts of Learning in Baghdād, 750–1000 C.E.*, éd. J. Scheiner et D. Janos, 455–501 (Princeton, NJ : Darwin Press, 2014), 458–59 et 477–79 ; Robert Hoyland a proposé une reconstruction de la chronique initiale dans R. Hoyland, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle. The Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 2011).

63. Debié, *Écriture de l'histoire*, 28–30.

car le témoignage de Théophile se limiterait à la période 126–36/744–54[64] et à quelques observations du règne d'al-Manṣūr (r. 136–58/754–75), qui ne sont pas communs avec Théophane[65]. En outre, Maria Conterno a remarqué que l'informateur de Théophane semble avoir plutôt consulté une source arabe[66], tandis que les notices syriaques similaires à celle du byzantin proviennent souvent d'un original grec[67]. Enfin, la source commune la plus reconnaissable pour le VIIᵉ siècle a de bonnes chances d'être issue d'un milieu officiel byzantin[68].

Ici, Théophane dépeint une catastrophe dont le paroxysme fut atteint par la chute d'antiques colonnes. Pourtant, il ne mentionne pas les stylites. Toutefois, Denys de Tell Maḥrē comprit tout autrement un évènement dont la conséquence la plus drastique aurait été humaine : des colonnes des stylites furent abattues par une fulgurante tempête. Ceci implique d'une part qu'il est possible que Théophane (ou sa source byzantine) fut la véritable source commune de l'évènement, et que, dans un second temps, Denys (ou sa source syriaque) l'interpréta avec une légère variation. D'autre part, nous apprenons que pour Agapius, le terme ṣawāmiʿ (pluriel de ṣawmaʿa) est une fidèle et exacte traduction de *stulous kionōn*. En outre, il est possible que son interprétation fût influencée par un original syro-occidental consulté par Denys : ṣawāmiʿ traduisait non seulement les « fûts de colonnes », mais peut-être également les « colonnes de bienheureux » (*esṭūnē d-ṭūbōnē*).

Nous disposons d'un second cas de traduction arabe du terme *esṭūnōyō*, mais dont la datation est moins aisée. Ainsi, la version *garšūnī*[69] de la *Vie de Théodote d'Amid* (m. 696) comporte deux allusions à des *ahl/ḏawī al-ṣawāmiʿ*[70]. Cette expression y traduit un original syriaque dont une copie est préservée à Mārdīn, où les mêmes « gens des ṣawmaʿa-s » sont qualifiés d'*esṭūnōyē* : « Allons aujourd'hui sortir et recevoir les bénédictions des bienheureux et des stylites (*ahl al-ṣawāmiʿ = esṭūnōyē*) et des reclus qui sont autour de la cité [. . .][71] » et aussi : « Rappelle, seigneur Dieu, en ce moment, tous les moines croyants, et aussi les reclus et les stylites (*ḏawī al-ṣawāmiʿ = esṭūnōyē*)[72] ». Comme dans la *Chronique jusqu'en 1234* à propos d'Abū Bakr, il y a une association sémantique et littéraire avec les ḥubasāʾ/*ḥabīšōyē*, sans que ces derniers ne soient toutefois confondus. Par ailleurs, selon le

---

64. M. Conterno, « Theophilos, "the More Likely Candidate"? Towards a Reappraisal of the Question of Theophanes' Oriental Source(s) », dans Montinaro et Jankowiak, *Studies in Theophanes*, 19 : 383–400, voir 395.

65. Debié, « What Can We Learn », 380–81.

66. Conterno, « Theophilos », 396–98.

67. *Ibid.*, 387–93.

68. *Ibid.*, 386.

69. Moyen-arabe écrit en faisant usage d'un alphabet syriaque.

70. *Vie de Théodote*, ms. St Mark 199, fᵒˢ 557 r/874 et 561v/883, je remercie Jack Tannous pour sa communication de l'édition et de sa traduction de la version *garšūnī* de ce récit.

71. *Vie de Théodote*, fᵒ 551/271v : ar *: Fa-daʿā li-talmīḏihi Yūsuf wa-qāla lahu : taʿāl al-yawm naḫruju wa-natabāraku min al-ṭūbāniyyīn wa-min ahl al-ṣawāmiʿ wa-l-ḥubasāʾ allaḏīna ḥawl al-madīna =* syr : *w-qrā l-Yawsef talmīdeh w-emar leh :Tā yawmōnō nafūq w-netbarīk men ṭūbōnō w-men esṭūnōyē w-ḥbīšōyē da-ḥdor mdī(n)tō.*

72. *Ibid.*, fᵒ 583/288v : *b-ʿedōnōʿadnō hōnō, l-kulhūn yaḥīdōyē mhaymōnē w-ōf l-esṭūnōyē w-l-ḥabīšōyē.* Ar : *al-ruhbān al-muʾmīnīn wa-l-ḥubasāʾ wa-li-ḏawī al-ṣawāmiʿ.*

lexicographe Bar Bahlūl (m. fin ivᵉ–xᵉ siècle) *esṭūnā* se traduit en arabe *ṣawmaʿa isṭawāna* et *esṭūnārā* est rendu par *al-ṣawmaʿ*[73].

Comment, et à partir de quand, le terme *ṣawmaʿa* était-il devenu une traduction acceptable pour l'*esṭūnō* syriaque et le *stulos kionos* grec ? Est-il possible de remonter au sens originel de ce vocable auquel les dictionnaires modernes donnent l'unique sens de « cellule » ?

2.3. La tour et le phare du moine

En 1989, Jonathan Bloom a réalisé une synthèse sur l'histoire architecturale et philologique du minaret islamique. Il s'est appuyé sur K. A. G. Creswell qui avait déterminé, à l'appui d'une tradition isolée, que les premiers *ṣawmaʿa*-s de mosquée seraient apparus à Fusṭāṭ en l'an 53/673, sans que le terme ne désignât une tour[74]. Selon Bloom, la mosquée de Médine aurait été rebâtie au début du viiiᵉ siècle avec quatre tours d'angle comportant une petite guérite. Elle aurait été imitée d'une forme architecturale des angles du *téménos* de Baʿl-Ḥadad/Zeus-Capitolin de Damas, qui aurait été préservée dans la mosquée cathédrale impériale après 86/705. Bloom s'est fondé sur une hypothèse de Joseph Schacht[75] pour démontrer qu'un escalier de la mosquée omeyyade de Boṣra conduisait, sur le toit, à une structure pour l'appel à la prière (*miʾḏana*). Sa forme de cahute expliquerait l'usage d'un terme renvoyant à la cellule[76]. Il faudrait donc, selon cette interprétation, considérer que *ṣawmaʿa* définissait initialement une cellule du type de celles des moines, avant de désigner une cabine pour l'appel à la prière, et, finalement, la tour qui l'aurait plus tard prolongée.

Toutefois, il est possible d'opposer à Bloom que ce furent peut-être ces tours antiques de Damas qui constituèrent, à l'inverse, le modèle de celles ajoutées à Médine à l'époque marwānide. En outre, malheureusement pour cette théorie, le plus ancien lexicographe arabe, al-Ḫalīl b. Aḥmad (m. v. 170/786) n'associe ce vocable ni à une « cellule » de moine, rendue plus fréquemment par *qill(ā)ya*[77], ni à une structure pour l'appel à la prière (*miʾḏana*)[78]. Enfin, aucune des acceptions sémantiques renvoyant à une forme menue, étriquée, étroite, creusée et/ou quadrangulaire n'est reliée, dans les dictionnaires médiévaux, à la racine *ṣamaʿa*.

---

73. Bar Bahlūl, *Lexicon Syriacum auctore Hassano bar Bahlule*, éd. R. Duval (Paris : Reipublicae Typographaeo, 1888), 1 : 221–22.

74. K. A. G. Creswell, *The Evolution of the Minaret* (Londres : Burlington Magazine, 1926), 13 et 28–29.

75. J. Schacht, « Ein archaischer Minaret-Typ in Ägypten und Anatolien », *Ars Islamica* 5, nᵒ 1 (1938) : 46–54, ici 46.

76. J. Bloom, *Minaret. Symbol of Islam* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1989), 31–32.

77. A. de Biberstein Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français contenant toutes les racines de la langue arabe* (Paris : Maisonneuve, 1860), 2 : 808, ne recense que la forme *qilliyya* ; Bar Bahlūl, *Lexicon Syriacum*, 3 : 1791 traduit *qellāytā* par « *Qillāya* : logement, habitat, pièce du moine (*rāhib*) ». Ces termes dérivent probablement du grec byzantin depuis le latin *cellia*.

78. Al-Ḫalīl, *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, éd. M. al-Maḫzūmī et I. al-Sāmarrāʾī (Bagdad : Dār al-Rašīd, 1980), 1 : 316.

Ainsi, le verbe ṣamaʿa fulān (bi-) signifie « frapper ou détourner quelqu'un (avec) » tandis que la variante ṣamiʿa fī induit, en plus de l'idée de « lapsus », un « départ sans crainte du danger ». Ceci se rapproche de la notion de « moine » (rāhib) qui, en arabe, repose sur une racine sous-tendant le champ sémantique de l'effroi et de la fuite. Quant à ṣammaʿa (forme II), le sens induit est une « action qui suit une décision résolue » tandis que la forme VII confirme la notion de « persister dans une disposition d'esprit[79] ». Bar Bahlūl proposait quant à lui de rapprocher la racine syriaque de la forme adjectivale arabe aṣmaʿ /ṣamʿāʾ[80], qui désigne ce qui s'élève, se dresse, et par extension, d'une part, ce qui est insolent ou audacieux, et d'autre part le sabre, l'esprit vif et pénétrant. La deuxième forme arabe revêt un second sens, qu'elle partage avec la forme exceptionnelle ṣawmaʿa : « faire un tas en cône pointu[81] ». Il est possible de rapprocher ce sens du nom syriaque courant (ṣemʿā) qui désigne les ordures[82] et qui a peut-être produit le (ou été dérivé du) sens du tas d'ordure en forme de cône, et a pu, dans un second temps, être associé au lieu de retraite des ermites dans les dépotoirs extra-urbains. Néanmoins, ce schème hétérodoxe fawʿal(a) pose problème, il découle d'une forme araméenne pourtant absente des dictionnaires de syriaque classique. Dès lors, le nom ṣawmaʿ (avec ou sans tāʾ marbūṭa) désigne à la fois la « tour », le « bonnet » conique, « l'aigle » ou le « petit couvent » tandis que la forme adjectivale aṣmaʿ, les adjectifs muṣammaʿ et muṣawmaʿa renvoient effectivement à quelque chose de pointu et de perçant[83]. Pour synthétiser, les champs lexicaux figurés induisent l'idée d'une pénétration de l'esprit, d'une idée ferme, dressée et aigüe tandis que le sens propre renverrait à un objet, un animal, un matériau, ou un bâtiment pointu ou pointant.

Nous avons dit qu'al-Ḫalīl b. Aḥmad, au VIIIe siècle, ne connaissait ni le sens de minaret ni celui de petite pièce. En revanche, il connaissait bien une « ṣawmaʿa du moine » qu'il définissait comme le « phare (manāra) où il se réfugie/cloître (tarahhaba) »[84]. Il est certain qu'un phare ne correspond pas systématiquement à une tour. Néanmoins, Bloom avait lui aussi envisagé que des feux de signalisation fussent généralement installés sur des structures élevées[85]. Lammens a en son temps souligné l'expression de la « lampe du stylite » dans la poésie arabe post-hégirienne[86]. Dès les fondements du stylitisme, au Ve siècle, la colonne du reclus était déjà comparée, à tout le moins au sens figuré, à un phare, ainsi Théodoret de Cyr à propos de Siméon disait : « Les Ismaélites, par exemple, asservis par myriades aux ténèbres (zofō) de l'impiété, c'est la station sur la colonne (kionos) qui les a éclairés (épi tou efōtise

---

79. De Biberstein Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire*, 2 : 1371.

80. Bar Bahlūl, *Lexicon*, 1671–72. Et aussi la finesse d'une oreille dressée.

81. On se représentera un tas de fruits au sūq.

82. J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of Robert Payne Smith* (Oxford : Clarendon, 1903), 481.

83. De Biberstein Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire*, 2 : 1371 ; mutaṣammiʿ semble utilisé surtout pour des plumes en forme de pointe.

84. Al-Ḫalīl, *al-ʿAyn*, 1 : 316.

85. Bloom, *Minaret*, 37.

86. Lammens, « Poète royal », 34.

stasis). Car, posée comme sur une lampe (*lu<u>k</u>nos*) [. . .] toute brillante, elle a projeté tous ses rayons à l'instar du soleil [. . .][87]. »

Et encore, désignant Siméon, certes, mais au sommet de sa colonne : « Ils arrivent en bandes de 200 ou 300 en même temps, même parfois par milliers, ils renoncent à leurs erreurs ancestrales à grands cris, brisant devant ce grand luminaire (*fōsteros*) les idoles adorées par leurs pères[88]. » Lukas Schachner a mis en évidence « l'appropriation symbolique », par les stylites, de leur environnement, à travers à la fois leur propre « champ de vision » et « l'énorme visibilité de leurs piliers ». Il a notamment dressé une très importante carte des contacts visuels entre les différents hommes saints perchés sur la crête calcaire, au croisement des voies Apamée-Cyrrhus et Antioche-Alep/Chalcis[89]. À cette occasion, il a matérialisé cette citation de Jean d'Éphèse à propos des *Vies d'Abraham et Mārūn* : « tandis que le monastère et le saint homme étaient visibles comme le soleil depuis le village[90] » et l'a mise en relations avec l'organisation de l'espace[91].

Le lexicographe al-Ḫalīl ne nous a pas laissé de description de ce genre de « phare du moine » de retraite monacale. Il considérait cette notion comme tellement évidente que, pour définir le terme polysémique *qaws*, il se contenta de le décrire comme « le sommet de la *ṣawmaʿa* »[92]. Ce manque de précision révèle cependant que la forme d'une « tour de signalisation (*manāra*) » ne souffrait guère de débat à la fin du VIIIe siècle. Une tradition attribuée au compagnon de ʿUmar II et son gouverneur pour Mossoul, Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Ġassānī, reflète cette notion de tour associée à la *ṣawmaʿa*. En effet, son petit-fils rapporte de lui qu'un moine résidait en une *ṣawmaʿa* qui se trouvait au sommet d'une *manāra* de la cathédrale St Jean Baptiste, au moment où al-Walīd Ier (r. 86–96/705–15) lança les travaux d'agrandissement de la mosquée[93].

De son côté, le sunnite cilicien Abū ʿUbayd b. Sallām se proposa d'expliciter un *ḥadīṯ* prophétique qui conseillait aux voyageurs de presser la marche en passant près du *Ṭirbāl*[94].

---

87. Théodoret de Cyr, *Histoire des moines de Syrie*, éd. P. Canivet et A. Leroy-Molinghen (Paris : Le Cerf, 1979), 2 : 193 (XXVI.13).

88. *Ibid.*

89. L. Schachner, « The Archaeology of the Stylite », dans *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, éd. D. M. Gwynn et S. Bangert, 329–97 (Leyde : Brill, 2010), 378–80.

90. Jean d'Éphèse, « Lives of the Eastern Saints », 82.

91. Schachner, « The Archaeology of the Stylite », 378, n. 182 a proposé que les sites de Jabal Sarīr ; ainsi que al-Ṣawmaʿa, Kīmār et Androna, entre autres, fussent dominés de la sorte par leur solitaire.

92. Al-Ḫalīl, *al-ʿAyn*, 5 : 189 ; à propos du *qaws*, Ibn Hišām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, éd. M. al-Saqqā, I. al-Abyārī et ʿA. al-Šallabī (Beyrouth : Iḥyāʾ Turāṯ al-ʿArabī, 1971), 554 propose une définition semblable : *al-qaws : ṣawmaʿat al-rāhib*.

93. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tāʾrīḫ madīnat Dimašq*, éd. U. al-ʿAmrawī, 80 vols (Beyrouth: Dār al-Fikr, 1995-2000), 2 : 252 : Abū Muḥammad al-Sulamī → ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Aḥmad → Abū Muḥammad al-Akfānī → Ibrāhīm b. Hišām b. Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Ġassānī → Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā : « Il entra dans l'église et monta à la *manāra* Ḏāt al-Aḍāliʿ connue sous le nom des « Heures » (*al-Sāʿāt*) : il s'y trouvait un moine (*rāhib*) qui s'était retiré (*yaʾawī*) dans une *ṣawmaʿa* à lui. Alors il le somma de descendre de la *ṣawmaʿa* mais le moine accrut ses paroles et la main d'al-Walīd ne quitta point sa nuque (*qafā*) jusqu'à l'avoir fait descendre de la *manāra*. »

94. Le *Ṭirbāl* désigne une tour monumentale du IIIe siècle située au centre de la « ville ronde » de Gūr (Fārs, Iran), le terme arabe dérive probablement du *tribulum* (planche à battre), métonymie du cirque à battre le blé et

Pour définir cet objet, il s'appuya sur le lettré Abū ʿUbayda, qui le décrivait ainsi : « Ceci ressemble à une tour [. . .] de guet (*manẓar*) des Perses (*ʿajam*) qui a l'aspect d'une ṣawmaʿa, c'est-à-dire d'une construction élevée[95]. » Ainsi, à l'aube du IXᵉ siècle, le terme ṣawmaʿa était en mesure de définir sans équivoque l'objet de tant de répulsion. Il s'agissait en fait de l'énorme tour quadrangulaire qui darde le coeur de la « ville ronde » sassanide de Gūr (IIIᵉ siècle). À l'époque d'Abū ʿUbayda, des minarets cultuels monumentaux commençaient à apparaître, mais il n'était pas envisageable de décrire le Ṭirbāl comme une tour d'appel à la prière (*miʾḏana*)[96]. Ainsi, la ṣawmaʿa était un terme profane qui désignait précisément une tour quadrangulaire, et ce bien avant d'avoir été associée à quelque bâtisse que ce fût sur le toit d'une mosquée.

Il nous semble donc établi que ṣawmaʿa, à haute époque, signifiait déjà une tour et, au moins à partir du IIIᵉ/IXᵉ siècle, la tour d'un reclus, à l'exclusion des concepts respectifs de « cellule » et de « minaret », absents de la lexicographie de l'époque. Il désignait avant tout un « phare » ou une structure juchée sur un « phare », voire au sommet d'une « colonne » (*ʿamūd*) comme la ṣawmaʿa décrite par Abū ʿUbayda dans le quartier damasquin de Jayrūn[97]. Dans cette zone, les larges colonnes qui subsistaient des propylées du *téménos* de Zeus, ou celles du *péribolos* qui le prolongeaient[98], étaient en effet propices à l'installation d'un stylite. Dès lors, nous suivons Schachner qui a récemment proposé de traduire le toponyme Ṣawmaʿa, un village du Jabal Barīšā entre Chalcis et Antioche, où se situent les ruines impressionnantes d'une colonne, comme « a monk's *manār* »[99].

Les textes arabo-musulmans, lorsqu'ils dépeignent les communautés de moines autour de leurs ṣawmaʿa-s, se réfèrent à ces autorités à la fois conventuelles et solitaires. Ce concept désignait la « colonne » (*esṭūnō*), qui prenait l'apparence générale d'une « tour » et se revêtait de la symbolique du « phare » (*manāra*) éclairant les croyants. Comment cette équivalence sémantique entre le reclus, la tour et la colonne du stylite s'est-elle constituée dans l'environnement syro-mésopotamien dans lequel évoluaient les Arabo-musulmans ?

2.4. Le stylite comme reclus syro-occidental archétypal

La fusion conceptuelle entre la retraite anachorétique et l'ascétisme du stylite domine dans la littérature syro-occidentale à l'époque hégirienne. Elle constituait le résultat d'un

---

par extension du poteau pour attacher la bête correspondant aussi à la *meta* de l'hippodrome, donc à un pilier, une tour.

95. Abū ʿUbayd Ibn Sallām, *Ġarīb al-ḥadīṯ,* éd. M. A. Ḫān, 4 vol. (Hyderabad : Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif, 1964), 1 : 18 ; Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb al-Jarāṯīm*, éd. M. J. al-Ḥamīdī, 2 vol. (Damas : Ministère de la Culture, s.d.), 2 : 302, se contente également de dire que le Ṭirbāl est une « grande ṣawmaʿa ».

96. Je n'ai pas trouvé cette définition dans ces œuvres.

97. Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamdānī, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, éd. Y. al-Hādī (Beyrouth : ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1996), 162 ; Schachner, « Archaeology of the Stylite », 382–83 n'a pas identifié de traces d'un stylite au cœur de Damas. Il est possible qu'il y ait confusion avec le toponyme Jayrūn du Mont Liban.

98. M. Eychenne, A. Meier et É. Vigouroux, *Le waqf de la mosquée des Omeyyades de Damas. Le manuscrit ottoman d'un inventaire mamelouk établi en 816/1413 (Beyrouth : Presses de l'Ifpo, 2018)*, 410–11.

99. Schachner, « Archaeology of the Stylite », 333 ; il se fonde sur E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 4 vol. (Londres : Williams & Norgate, 1872), 1728.

long et patient travail de domestication des ermites et solitaires dont l'influence et l'abus d'autorité sur les populations rurales posaient problèmes à la hiérarchie ecclésiastique.

Un avis de Georges, évêque syro-orthodoxe des tribus (ʿammē) dans la région du *jund* de Qinnasrīn (r. 68–105/687–724)[100], dénonçait le fait que des gyrovagues erraient et, à l'aide d'amulettes usurpaient l'autorité divine pour influer sur les populations[101]. Les autorités du monde syro-araméen étaient confrontées à un paradoxe. D'un côté, elles continuaient à considérer le retrait du monde comme l'une des voies privilégiées de la sainteté chrétienne, de l'autre, il leur fallait soumettre les solitaires errants et les ermites à un ordre monastique. Ces deux motivations contradictoires les incitèrent à intégrer l'anachorèse à un cursus. Ce processus est mieux connu pour l'Église syro-orientale, en dépit du fait que l'archéologie n'y a pour le moment jamais identifié de tour ou de colonne et que la philologie n'y connaît aucun *esṭūnārā* (stylite). Ainsi, dans l'ex-empire sassanide, Dad-Išoʿ le Qaṭarien (m. v. 80/700) décrivait la hiérarchie depuis le laïc et le « fils du pacte » jusqu'aux gyrovagues et anachorètes en passant par les moines et les différents grades de solitaires[102]. Il s'employait en fait à les intégrer à la règle monastique en prévoyant notamment une période cénobitique de trois ans avant de recevoir du supérieur l'autorisation de se reclure[103]. L'historiographie contemporaine comme l'histoire sainte nestorienne[104] attribuent l'origine de cette réforme monastique à Abraham de Kaškar (m. 588)[105]. Il aurait instauré une règle pour fédérer les solitaires de l'Orient et, durant le demi-siècle précédant l'hégire, les institutions monastiques de l'Adiabène, de l'Irak et du golfe persique (Baḥrayn) en furent profondément modifiées.

Les Pères Peña, Castellana et Fernandez avaient déjà remarqué comment les *Reclus syriens* s'étaient le plus souvent installés dans des tours à ermitage et qu'il semblait manquer un terme syriaque pour définir ces retraites. Ils ne connaissaient qu'un exemple pour l'année 457–58 où un dérivé du terme grec *purgos* (*pūrqasā*) était employé[106]. Or, à cette date, le fondateur du stylitisme, Siméon, était encore en vie et son modèle d'anachorèse

---

100. Sur ce personnage voir n. 155.

101. Bar Hébraeus, *Nomocanon*, 113.

102. Dad-Išoʿ, *Traité sur la solitude*, 202, voir aussi Fauchon, « Vie ascétique », 42–48.

103. *Ibid.*

104. L'idée d'une « Église nestorienne » a été réfutée par S. Brock, « Nestorian Church. A Lamentable Misnomer », *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78 (1996) : 23–53. Pour autant, si l'on suit le raisonnement très argumenté de G. J. Reinink, « Tradition and the Formation of the 'Nestorian' Identity in Sixth- to Seventh-Century Iraq », dans *Religious Origins of Nations? The Christian Communities of the Middle East, éd.* T. Bas Romeny*, 217–50 (Leyde : Brill, 2009), l'expression n'est plus anachronique dès lors que l'on traite d'une période où tous les opposants à Babay le Grand, partisan d'une théologie exclusivement puisée aux enseignements de Théodore de Mopsueste, eurent été bannis de l'Église dyophysite ou aient rallié les miaphysites, lesquels formèrent leur propre institution en 8/629. Il semble en effet qu'une auto-identification « nestorienne » vit le jour au cours du Iᵉʳ/VIIᵉ siècle. Dès lors, ce terme nous parait légitime pour qualifier l'Église de l'Orient à l'époque islamique. À partir du VIIIᵉ siècle, l'expression n'était clairement plus perçue par les intéressés comme réductrice pour les syriaques dyophysites de l'ancien espace sassanide et elle fut employée par Šahdost de Ṭīrhān lui-même dès les années 130/750 (Reinink, « Tradition », 219).

105. F. Jullien, *Le monachisme en Perse. La réforme d'Abraham le Grand, père des moines de l'orient*, (Louvain : Peeters, 2008).

106. Peña, Castellana et Fernandez, *Reclus syriens*, 300–301.

ne s'était pas encore diffusé[107]. Dans l'espace syro-romain, l'Église semble avoir opté, afin de conjuguer cet appel à la sainte retraite et sa méfiance à l'égard d'hommes saints autodidactes, pour une institutionnalisation consistant à les « emmurer dans l'enceinte d'un monastère ou percher sur une colonne de stylite dans la cour, comme dans les monastères du Ṭūr ʿAbdīn[108] ».

Dans ce massif des confins orientaux de l'ex-empire romain, terrain favoris de retraite des moines syro-orthodoxes, de nombreuses colonnes furent édifiées au sein des établissements conventuels comme celle de Lazare à Ḥabsenūs datée de 175–76/791–92[109]. La *Vie de Siméon des Oliviers*, outre de lui attribuer erronément la construction de cette « ronde colonne pour les reclus (*ḥbīšōyē*) », assure que les moines s'y relayaient « dans la tour (*būrgō* du gr. *purgos*, cf. : arabe *al-burj*)[110] ». Or il s'agissait bien d'une colonne, mais conçue en creux, comme un espace habitable[111], à l'instar de la tour de réclusion quadrangulaire étagée identifiée par Palmer dans l'enceinte du monastère principal de Gabriel de Qarṭmīn, assez largement répandue dans l'espace syro-romain[112]. Selon Schachner : « In Syriac, the ambiguity of the term "pillar" (*esṭunā*) is even more apparent, as the Syriac term *esṭunā* can also mean "tower". Most stylites—*esṭunāyē* or *esṭunārē*—were indeed of Syriac origin, and the physical resemblance of pillar and tower has led to a certain degree of semantic interchangeability in Syriac texts[113]. »

---

107. Fauchon, « Vie ascétique », 52–53.

108. R. Payne, « Monks, Dinars, and Date Palms. Hagiographical Production and the Expansion of Monastic Institutions in the Early Islamic Persian Gulf », *Arabian Archeology and Epigraphy* 22 (2011) : 97–111, ici 101–2 : « the incorporation of the perfect life of solitaries, whether immured within a monastery's walls or perched upon a stylite's column in the courtyard as in the West Syrian monasteries of Tur ʿAbdin ». Il fait allusion au développement de modèles équivalents dans l'espace syro-oriental, lesquels, cependant, ne connaissent pas de stylites.

109. Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 105, 188 et 217. Voir également Desreumaux, « L'épigraphie syriaque », 287 : INSCR A.9 : « Cette colonne (*esṭunō*) fut édifiée en l'an 1103 des Grecs, Marqūnō écrivit ceci ». Au sujet du processus de domestication dans la sphère syro-occidentale ou syro-romaine, en milieu chalcédonien comme anti-chalcédonien, on lira utilement S. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1990) et D. Boero, « Symeon and the Making of the Stylite » (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2015).

110. *Vie de Siméon des Oliviers*, ms. Mārdīn, Église des quarante martyrs, nᵒ 259, fᵒˢ 105r–127r, ici 122v.

111. Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 102. Elle aurait été fondée par Siméon des Oliviers (*d-Zaytē*), évêque de Ḥarrān (r. 80–115/700–34).

112. *Ibid*., 105 ; Peña, Castellana et Fernandez, *Reclus syriens*, 300–301. La *Vie de Jacques de Ṣalaḥ* décrirait une tour similaire dans le désert égyptien.

Le bandeau de mosaïque des « quatorze cités » qui fut peut-être aménagé entre 718 et 756 dans l'entre-colonnement de l'église St. Etienne de Kastron Mefaa (Umm Rasas, Jordanie) (P.-L. Gatier, « Inscriptions grecques, mosaïques et églises des débuts de l'époque islamique au Proche-Orient ». Dans *Le Proche-Orient de Justinien aux Abbassides, peuplement et déynamiques spatiales*, édité par A. Borrut, M. Debié, A. Papaconstantinou, D. Pieri et J.-P. Sodini (Turnhout : Brepols, 2011), 22-25), symbolise ce même bourg par une colonne classique. Pourtant, le bâtiment d'ermitage adjacent, parfaitement conservé, est bien une tour quadrangulaire creuse et aménagée.

113. Schachner, « Archaeology of the Stylite », 333.

Il s'est notamment fondé sur la *Vie de Luc le Stylite* qui, à propos des adeptes de ce genre d'ascèse dans l'espace byzantin au ixe siècle, déclarait : « Ils refusaient de vivre au sol, et s'élevèrent au sommet de colonnes en forme de tour (*purgoeidès*)[114] ». Ce dernier terme y caractérise en outre la colonne de Daniel près de Constantinople[115]. Certaines de ces bâtisses, notamment dans le nord du massif calcaire, ressemblaient beaucoup à des tours de guet domaniales ou politiques. Les fouilles du sanctuaire de St Siméon et de Dayḥis (syr. Dēḥes) ont mis en évidence l'existence de multiples tours dont celles édifiées à l'entrée des monastères purent avoir servi de poste de surveillance ou de guérite[116]. Néanmoins, Schachner a remarqué que ces tours étaient le plus souvent construites dans le même espace que les colonnes, et partageaient les mêmes fonctions ascétiques et symboliques, ce dont atteste encore le site de Qaṣr B(a)rād au nord du sanctuaire de Saint Siméon[117]. La fonction ambigüe de ces tours et leur identification à des colonnes ou piliers de réclusion restent à ce jour incertaines et nécessiteraient de poursuivre les recherches archéologiques, épigraphiques et textuelles.

Pour autant, il existe une seconde allusion à une tour occupée par un stylite dans la *Vie de Siméon des Oliviers.* L'évêque de Ḥarrān aurait en effet nommé un certain « Jovien, moine et stylite » comme son représentant à Nisibe, dans le monastère de saint Élisée, qui, dit-on, « était confiné (*ḥbīš*) dans une tour (*būrgō*)[118]. Autrement dit, l'ensemble des attestations syriaques de « stylites » (*esṭūnōyē/esṭūnōrē*) désigneraient en réalité l'ensemble des ermites prenant abri dans une structure en forme de tour ou de colonne. Ainsi, le terme *esṭūnōrō* serait alors devenu un quasi-synonyme de reclus (*ḥbīšōyō*). À l'aube de l'hégire, selon Claire Fauchon, « les stylites ne sont plus des stylites mais simplement des ascètes, plus spécialement des reclus[119] ». Ceci permet de comprendre pourquoi la chronologie de Qarṭmīn donne autant d'importance à sa liste de stylites (*esṭūnōrē*) et n'hésite pas à la faire débuter par « Mathieu le Reclus (*ḥbīšōyō*) », pourtant antérieur à Siméon le Stylite[120].

En outre, les « stylites » n'étaient plus des autorités solitaires et sans attaches, mais étaient bien souvent inclus dans un cadre cénobitique, voire à l'intérieur même de la *mandra*, le mur d'enceinte du monastère[121].

---

114. *Ibid.*, 377, n. 174 citant Delehaye, *Saints Stylites*, chap. 5.

115. *Ibid.*, 333, citant Delehaye, *Saints Stylites*, chap. 7 ; Schachner, « Archaeology of the Stylite », 377, n. 173 signale aussi, que cet élément impacta les représentations géorgiennes de stylite, ainsi que celle de Siméon dans la nouvelle « église cachée » de Göreme en Cappadoce.

116. J.-L. Biscop, « Réorganisation du monachisme syrien autour du sanctuaire de Saint-Syméon », dans *Les églises en monde syriaque*, éd. F. Briquel-Chatonnet, 131–67 (Paris : Geuthner, 2013) ; J.-L. Biscop, M. Mundell Mango et D. Orssaud, *Deir Déhès, monastère d'Antiochène. Étude architecturale* (Beyrouth : Institut français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient, 1997).

117. Schachner, « Archaeology of the Stylite », 377.

118. *Vie de Siméon des Oliviers*, f° 117r.

119. Fauchon, « Vie ascétique », 49.

120. Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 105.

121. Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 80 ; voir également A. Binggeli, « Les stylites et l'eucharistie », dans *Pratiques de l'eucharistie dans les Églises d'Orient et d'Occident*, éd. N. Bériou, B. Caseau et D. Rigaux, 421–44 (Turnhout : Brepols, 2009), 430.

Deux ou trois siècles plus tard, ceci était devenu une institution : une colonne avait sa propre communauté monastique, dont le devoir était de servir le stylite et ses visiteurs et d'y fournir un successeur à sa mort [. . .]. Un tel monastère rendait physique la relation existant entre les consciences des moines de ces régions, même lorsqu'il n'y avait point de colonne, <u>entre le *coenobium* et l'ermitage</u>[122].

Les exemples de dignitaires ayant opté pour cette forme de retraite en colonne ou en tour (ou issus de celle-ci) se multiplièrent au cours des VIIᵉ–VIIIᵉ siècles, comme, entre autres, Georges (m. v. 80/700)[123], Thomas de Tellā (m. 80/699)[124] ou Zacharie d'Édesse (évêque en 145–46/762–63)[125]. Dans la province de Takrīt, Jean, le métropolite héritier de Marūtā, est surnommé Chionite (*Kyūnōyō*) : un synonyme de stylite[126]. En outre, il était admis qu'un évêque abandonnât son office en fin de vie pour se retirer dans un monastère de sa fondation à l'instar de Théodote Iᵉʳ d'Amid à Qellet, dans le district de Ṣawrā, sur la bordure nord-ouest du Ṭūr ʿAbdīn[127]. Quant à son successeur Théodote II (r. 94–v. 110/712 ou 713–v. 728 ou 729), il aurait passé ses dernières années sur une colonne (*esṭūnō*) du Ṭūr ʿAbdīn[128] :

> Ce saint Théodote, évêque d'Amid, [. . .] abdiqua de l'épiscopat de la ville. Il se retira donc de son siège et, quittant la cité, il descendit dans la région de Dārā, dans les confins qui sont entre Dārā et Amid, il se construisit là une colonne (*esṭūnō*) sur laquelle il monta, marchant sur les traces de Mār Thomas de Tellā. Il bâtit aussi dans ce même lieu un grand monastère : celui-là même qui jusqu'à présent est établi à côté du village appelé Qalūq[129].

Son contemporain Siméon des Oliviers, évêque de Ḥarrān (r. 81–116/700–34), serait quant à lui entré en contact avec le premier Théodote d'Amid[130]. En outre, il aurait longtemps habité la colonne d'un monastère du Ṭūr ʿAbdīn[131]. Plus tard, « il construisit une colonne

---

122. *Ibid.*, 106 : « Two or three centuries later this had become an institution: a column had its own monastic community, whose duty it was to serve the stylite and his visitors and to provide a successor for him when he died [. . .]. Such a monastery made physical the relationship which existed in the minds of monks in this region, even where there were no columns, <u>between *coenobium* and "mourner"</u>. »

123. « Chronicon anonymum ad AD 819 », dans *Chronicon 1234*, 1–24, ici 13.

124. *Chronique de Zuqnīn = Chronique de Denys de Tell-Mahré. Quatrième partie* [. . .], éd. J.-B. Chabot (Paris : E. Bouillon, 1895), 12 ; « Chronicon 819 », 13 ; *Vie de Théodote,* fᵒ 286r, dans la version garšūnī son titre est traduit : ʿ*āmūd.*

125. *Chronique de Zuqnīn*, 77.

126. Bar Hébraeus, *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, 2 : col. 159.

127. Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 88–90.

128. *Chronique de Zuqnīn*, 20–21, à ne pas confondre avec Théodote Iᵉʳ d'Amid mort en 68/698, voir *infra*.

129. *Chronique de Zuqnīn*, 20–21.

130. *Vie de Siméon des Oliviers*, fᵒ 116r.

131. *Ibid.*, fᵒˢ 106r, 108v, 109v, 110r, 120r.

(*esṭūnō*) grande et haute pour les reclus (*ḥbīšōyē*) » dans un monastère à l'extérieur de Nisibe[132] et une autre dans le monastère de Saint Lazare[133]. Pour l'hagiographe, il était naturel qu'un reclus au sens large vive dans une colonne, qu'elle fût ou non cylindrique et pleine.

Quant à Denys de Tell Maḥrē, nous avons vu qu'il comprit l'information concernant la chute des colonnes comme une catastrophe touchant les « bienheureux » qui y vivaient. Cette interprétation met en évidence à quel point le terme « colonne » était interprété, par les auteurs syro-occidentaux et notamment miaphysites, comme indissoluble de ce stylitisme[134]. Ainsi, l'élévation, la tour, le phare ou la colonne (*ēsṭūnō* = *ṣawmaʿa*) semblent avoir désigné à la fois l'ensemble des retraites des moines et des reclus. Siéger au sommet d'une motte conique, d'une tour ou d'une colonne, à proximité ou non d'un monastère, constituait une expression sociale et spirituelle similaire. Il reste toutefois nécessaire de poursuivre les recherches sur les stylites dans la littérature syro-occidentale afin de vérifier l'importance de cette association sémantique et terminologique ainsi que ses variations géographiques.

Certains, à l'instar de leur modèle originel, eurent des relations importantes avec les populations arabes de leur voisinage. La figure du stylite semble avoir également été très liée à la question de la christianisation de ces tribus, et ce dans le prolongement de l'œuvre du premier d'entre eux, Saint Siméon l'Ancien. Nau a mis en évidence les passages de la *Vie de Siméon le Stylite* sur la conversion des bédouins Saracènes qu'il a conçu comme le modèle littéraire et social du processus d'évangélisation des Arabes du Proche Orient à l'aube de l'Islam[135]. En effet, les trois *Vies* rédigées en son honneur insistent sur l'influence du saint à l'égard de populations bédouines. La question de la christianisation des Arabes semble s'être accrue entre le milieu du vᵉ siècle et le début du viiᵉ siècle. Lorsque Théodoret faisait simplement allusion à l'attractivité de l'homme saint chez des populations bédouines informes[136], une *Vie* syriaque peut-être moins ancienne que ce que n'en dit le colophon[137] ajoute des éléments sur des démarches officielles liées au royaume d'al-Ḥīra[138], quant, finalement, la *Vie* grecque tardive attribuée à Antoine assure que le souverain lui-même

---

132. *Ibid.*, fᵒ 110r.

133. *Ibid.*, fᵒ 122v.

134. Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, 429 ; *Chronicon 1234*, 260 ; sur la question d'un stylitisme spécifiquement miaphysite et syro-orthodoxe, voir Pierre, « Stylitisme et christianisation des Arabes ».

135. Nau, *Arabes chrétiens*, 37–38 et 104.

136. Théodoret de Cyr, *Histoire des moines de Syrie*, 190 (XXVI.13).

137. P. Peeters, « Saint Syméon Stylite et ses premiers biographes », *Analecta Bollandiana* 61 (1943) : 29–71, à 48 note que le manuscrit comporte la date de 474 et la considère comme paléographiquement plausible, 57 ; Lire à ce sujet S. Brelaud, « Al-Ḥīra et ses chrétiens dans les guerres romano-perses », *Camenulae* 15 (2016) : 1–26, ici 6–7.

138. *Vie Syriaque de Siméon Stylite*, éd. P. Bedjan, dans *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* 4, 507–644 (Leipzig : O. Harrassowitz, 1894), 597.

se convertit[139]. Ceci suggère un intérêt croissant de ses hagiographes et de ses imitateurs stylites pour les des Saracènes et les *Ṭayyōyē*, à l'aube de l'hégire[140].

3. Du privilège à l'hostilité : le stylite face aux autorités normatives syro-orthodoxes et arabo-musulmanes

Le discours attribué à Abū Bakr en sa *waṣiyya* incorpore sans grande équivoque l'essentiel des infrastructures cénobitiques comme érémitiques syriennes fédérées autour d'un homme saint sur son « pilier ». Leur influence auprès des Arabes était suffisamment importante pour que le deuxième dirigeant de l'État médinois enjoigne à ses troupes de les respecter tout en les évitant. En dépit de l'effort de « domestication » monastique, ils continuèrent de défier autant les canonistes de l'Église syro-orthodoxe que les juristes et doctrinaires arabo-musulmans.

3.1. Le stylite et les Arabes

La ferveur des Arabes à l'égard des moines et anachorètes est fréquemment attestée à l'époque islamique. Ainsi, dès le milieu du VIIe siècle, le catholicos syro-oriental Išōʿ-Yahb III d'Adiabène (r. 28–39/649–59) soulignait, avec un brin d'exagération puisqu'il cherchait à réfuter les excuses de ses correspondants, que « non seulement [les Arabes (*Ṭayyāyē*)] ne combattent pas le christianisme, mais ils louent notre foi, honorent les prêtres et les saints de notre Seigneur et font des dons aux églises et aux couvents (*dayrātā*) ![141] ». Une génération plus tard, Jean Bar Penkāyē, auteur syro-oriental de Nisibe qui écrivit dans le contexte de la deuxième *fitna* (v. 63–83/683–92), insistait encore sur le respect religieux que les solitaires inspiraient aux Arabes :

> À propos de notre ordre (gr : *tagma*) des solitaires (*iḥīdāyē* = moines) il y eut prudemment quelque commandement de Dieu afin qu'ils les (main)tiennent en honneur[142] ! [. . .] Ils reçurent, comme je l'ai dit plus haut, un commandement de leur guide (*mhaddyānā*) à propos du peuple (*ʿamā*) des chrétiens et à propos de l'ordre des solitaires[143].

Alors que les monastères étaient ainsi révérés par les conquérants arabes, il semble que la forme de réclusion du stylitisme ait joui à la fin du Ier siècle de l'hégire d'un important regain d'attractivité pour les moines syro-occidentaux et particulièrement chez les miaphysites. Deux stylites du premier tiers du VIIIe siècle incarnent parfaitement la figure de l'autorité institutionnelle syro-orthodoxe alliée à celle du saint homme populaire en contact avec les Arabes. Nous avons vu plus haut que l'auteur de la *Vie de Siméon des Oliviers*

---

139. Voir la traduction chez R. Doran, *The Lives of Simeon Stylites (*Collegeville, MN : Cistercian Publications, 1992) et la description de l'évènement : 95–96.

140. Voir en détail dans Pierre, « Stylitisme et christianisation des Arabes ».

141. Išōʿ-Yahb III d'Adiabène, *Išōʿyahb Patriarchae III Liber epistularum*, éd. R. Duval, *CSCO* 64 (1904–5), 251. Il avait comme objectif de dénoncer l'impiété de ses correspondants baḥrayniens/qaṭariens.

142. Jean Bar Penkāyē, « Rīsh Mellē (Livre 15) », dans Mingana, *Sources syriaques* 1, 143–71, voir 141.

143. *Ibid.*, 146.

lui attribuait la prime fondation d'une colonne de monastère hors de la porte sud-est de Nisibe[144], probablement dans le même couvent de Mār Élisée où son disciple Jovien habitait une « tour[145] ». Il y aurait aussi fondé une hôtellerie (pūtqō, du grec pandokéion[146], au même titre que le terme arabe funduq) pour les commerçants. Cet établissement se trouvait ainsi à l'aboutissement de la route commerciale en provenance de Balad sur le Tigre et accueillait des négociants arabes[147]. En outre, selon la Vie de Gabriel de Qarṭmīn il aurait fondé, à côté de l'église St Théodore[148], un « bēt ṣlūtō[149] pour les Arabes[150] » qui est décrit en détail dans la Vie de Siméon des Oliviers[151].

Un second personnage représentatif de cette période est Jean de Mār Zʿūrā. Il est communément identifié avec le stylite Jean de Litarbā (m. 119/737), un des plus importants intellectuels syro-orthodoxes de l'époque marwānide[152]. Ce dernier est connu pour ces écrits aux nombres desquels une lettre en forme de responsum à une question d'un certain Daniel, « prêtre Ṭuʿōyō », une des expressions ethniques du diocèse de Georges[153], l'évêque des tribus (ʿammē) (r. 687–724)[154]. Elle portait sur le sujet de la succession prophétique, au cours de laquelle il s'appuyait sur l'autorité de Georges, décrit comme « votre évêque[155] ».

---

144. Palmer, *Monk and Mason*, 107 ; *Vie de Siméon des Oliviers*, f° 110 il fonde une colonne (esṭūnō) hors de la porte orientale de la ville.

145. *Vie de Siméon des Oliviers*, f° 117r.

146. Payne Smith, *Dictionary*, 440.

147. L'auteur de la *Vie de Marūtā*, 86 décrit un même type d'hôtellerie sur la route « entre l'Euphrate et le Tigre », qui comptaient des négociants « qui voyageaient dans le désert » (87), mais aussi de nombreux pèlerins, « principalement les peuples (ʿammē) qui demeurent dans cette Ǧazīra » (86–87) mais aussi Qaṣr Sarij/ʿAyn Qnōyē, explicitement associé au culte des Arabes dans la *Vie d'Aḥūdemmeh*, 29 situé à quelques kilomètre de la route commerciale entre Balad et Nisibe. Le funduq monastique de Nisibe est à mettre en relation avec le commerce Saracène contraint de passer par Nisibe et Dārā sous Justinien et Ḫosrō Iᵉʳ. Ménandre, *The History of Menander the Guardsman*, éd. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool : Francis Cairns, 1985), 70–72.

148. *Vie de Siméon des Oliviers*, f° 112.

149. Un bēt ṣlūtō, littéralement « demeure de prière », consiste en principe en une petite pièce ou chapelle accolée à une église pour des dévotions populaires, voir à ce sujet E. Keser-Kayaalp, « Églises et monastères du Ṭur ʿAbdin. Les débuts d'une architecture "syriaque" », dans Briquel-Chatonnet, *Les églises en monde syriaque*, 269–88, ici 273 et 280 et E. Keser-Kayaalp, « Church Building in the Ṭur ʿAbdin in the First Centuries of the Islamic Rule », dans *Authority and Control in the Countryside. From Antiquity to Islam in the Mediterranean and Near East (6th–10th Century)*, éd. A. Delattre, M. Legendre et P. Sijpesteijn, 176–209 (Leyde : Brill, 2018), 194–95.

150. *Vie de Gabriel de Bēt Qūsṭān*, dans « A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Qartmin Trilogy », éd. A. Palmer (Cambridge, 1989), 55–92, ici 89.

151. *Vie de Siméon des Oliviers*, f° 114v : un masgdō et madraseh.

152. Debié, *Écriture de l'histoire*, 199–200 ; sa retraite est mentionnée par Peña, Castellana et Fernandez, *Stylites syriens*, 51.

153. Pierre, « Les ʿAmmē », 31–33.

154. Dans les sources du IIᵉ/VIIIᵉ siècle, Georges n'était pas qualifié « d'évêque des Arabes », mais uniquement d'« évêque des ʿammē » ce qui n'est pas sans importance (« Chronicon 819 », 13 ; « Chronicon ad annum 846 pertinens », éd. E. W. Brooks, dans *Chronica Minora* 2, 157–238 [Paris : CSCO 3, 1904], 232). Georges ne signe jamais non plus autrement que comme évêque des ʿAmmē des Tanūkōyē, des ʿAqūlōyē et des Ṭūʿōyē.

155. W. Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* (Londres : Gilbert & Rivington, 1871), 2 : 988 : ms. BL Add 12,154, f°ˢ 291–93. Sur cette lettre, lire J. Tannous, *Between Christology and Kalam? The Life*

En outre, l'archivistique syro-occidentale préserva jusqu'à nos jours un court traité subdivisé en « sermons (*mēmrē*) » adressé aux « clercs du peuple/de la tribu (ᶜ*amō*) croyant des Arabes (*Ṭayyōyē*)[156]. » Litarbā était un bourg à proximité immédiate de la zone des stylites étudiée par Schachner où se trouvaient, entre autres, le sanctuaire de Saint Siméon, le site d'al-Ṣawmaᶜa et le monastère de Tell ᶜAddē où siégeait régulièrement le patriarche syro-orthodoxe. Jean de Mār Zᶜūrā aurait donc résidé lui-aussi à proximité immédiate des principales voies commerciales du *jund* de Qinnasrīn. Ce dernier est surtout connu pour les multiples *responsa* que lui aurait renvoyées Jacques d'Édesse (m. 89/708). Un certain nombre des questions qu'il y aborda traitent de la proximité de certains Arabes (*Ṭayyōyē*) et/ou musulmans (*mhaggrōyē*) avec l'Église[157]. Ainsi, dans la deuxième lettre, il apprenait de Jacques que les portes d'une église devaient demeurer closes « à cause des *mhaggrōyē*, afin qu'ils ne puissent entrer ». Il interrogeait aussi le maître canoniste sur la possibilité de les soigner ou exorciser[158], une pratique généralement bien attestée de la part des hommes saints syriaques[159]. Plus avant, il s'interrogeait sur la nécessité du re-baptême d'un ancien chrétien désireux de « revenir de son paganisme[160] ». Enfin, étonné de voir juifs et musulmans des environs prier tous vers le sud, il en demanda la raison à Jacques, qui, pour avoir voyagé en Égypte, savait qu'ils priaient « en direction de Jérusalem et de la Kaᶜba, le lieu ancestral de leur peuple[161]. »

Ce stylitisme officialisé et généralisé eut une influence non-négligeable sur les Arabes conquérants. En outre, le caractère visuel spectaculaire et la localisation sur les routes commerciales, dans les cols de l'Antiochène ou le long de la route trans-mésopotamienne, impressionnaient nécessairement les commerçants. Dès lors, l'institution, par les arabo-musulmans, d'un tel privilège explicite attribué à la *waṣiyya* d'Abū Bakr prend tout son sens.

3.2. *Les Arabo-musulmans et le clergé chrétien*

Il existe de bonnes raisons pour avancer que les solitaires et notamment les stylites et autres saints hommes (*holy men*) des communautés influencèrent le courant ascétique islamique en formation à tel point que, comme l'a souligné Thomas Sizgorich : « Le moine, emblème de militantisme et de piété ascétique joint en la personne d'une avant-garde

---

and Letters of George, Bishop of the Arab Tribes (Piscataway, NJ : Gorgias Press, 2009), 676.

156. Alice Croq prépare actuellement une étude sur ce texte. Je la remercie infiniment de m'avoir informé de son existence.

157. M. Penn, *Envisioning Islam. Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (Philadelphie : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 144–60 ; voir les traductions de ces lettres dans M. Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims. A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland : University of California Press, 2015), 167–73.

158. Lettre 1, trad. Penn, *When Christians Met Muslims*, 167.

159. J. Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East. Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 2018), 154.

160. Lettre 1, trad. Penn, *When Christians Met Muslims*, 168–69. Mentionnée par Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 335.

161. Lettre 4, trad. Penn, *When Christians Met Muslims*, 172–73.

communautaire réémerge dans les premières descriptions islamiques du *jihād* et de ceux qui l'accomplissaient[162]. »

À en croire Ibn Isḥāq (m. 150/768), le célèbre compagnon Salmān « le Perse » fut lui-même un moine anachorète d'obédience syro-orientale dont les maîtres ne cessèrent, à la veille de leurs trépas respectifs, de le recommander à un autre, ce qui l'aurait conduit, en bout de chaine, à rejoindre le Prophète[163]. Plus tard, mystiques et ascètes de la fin de la période abbasside se référèrent à ce personnage comme fondateur de leur mouvement, en insistant sur son inspiration chrétienne. En outre, ce compagnon clef fonde la chaine de transmission d'un *ḥadīṯ* qui confirme cette opinion islamique favorable aux reclus : « "Laisse les prêtres (*qasīsūn*) dans les *ṣawmaʿa*-s et les ruines", m'a déclaré l'Apôtre, "car parmi eux, il y a des *ṣiddiqūn* (véridiques) et des *ruhbān*"[164]. »

Ce *ḥadīṯ* reprenait la proposition modèle de la *waṣiyya* d'Abū Bakr « laisse les . . . » et entretient l'ambivalence exégétique du verset. Le *ḥadīṯ* de Salmān confirmait l'influence et la vénération dont jouissaient les moines stylites tout en entretenant une certaine ambiguïté. Il opposait les « prêtres » chrétiens qui vivent dans « les *ṣawmaʿa*-s et les ruines » et qui sont bel et bien « véridiques » à d'autres prêtres, desquels il faut se méfier et qu'on ne doit pas « laisser ». Il démontre comment des Arabo-musulmans étaient encore tentés par l'intercession des solitaires tandis que leur opinion « nazaréenne » était repoussée comme hétérodoxe. Au sujet de l'intercession des moines nazaréens, Ibn Abī Šayba (m. 235/849) transmit un avis du juriste syrien al-Awzāʿī (m. 157/774) qu'il aurait lui-même appris d'un maître d'époque omeyyade[165] : « Il n'y a point de mal de dire "amen" à la prière invocatoire du moine [s'il invoque pour toi] ; car ils nous en font profiter tandis qu'ils ne s'en font pas profiter eux-mêmes ![166] ». Cet avis constitua un des fondements de la religiosité ascétique d'Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, un siècle postérieur (m. 333/944) dans sa séance mystique[167]. Pour Ibn Abī Šayba, savant *muḥaddiṯ* contemporain de la *miḥna*, il semble toutefois refléter un moment d'ambivalence où l'on révérait encore l'extraordinaire piété exemplaire des solitaires des hauteurs, tout en combattant ardemment le *credo* chrétien.

Dans la même veine, Muqātil b. Sulaymān (m. 150/767), un des premiers exégètes, tenta d'expliquer les termes clefs du verset Qurʾān 9 : 30 qui affirme que les enseignants (*aḥbār*) et les moines (*ruhbān*) auraient été adoptés par les chrétiens « comme maîtres/seigneurs (*arbāba-n*) » en place de Dieu. Les premiers, selon Muqātil, seraient des savants, « des *ʿulamāʾ* de leurs religions », sans que le savant eût eu connaissance du lien probable avec

---

162. T. Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity. Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphie : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 160 : « The monk as an emblem of militancy and ascetic piety joined in the person of a communal vanguard reemerges in early Islamic descriptions of *jihād* and those who waged it. »

163. Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, éd. M. ʿĀṭāʾ, 8 vol. (Beyrouth : Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990), 4 : 56 ; Ibn Hišām, *Sīra*, 1 : 214–22; sur sa migration mystique, S. Bowen Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-conquest Iran. Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2013), 63.

164. Ibn Abī Šayba, *Musnad*, éd. ʿĀ. al-ʿAzzāzī et A. al-Mazīdī, 2 vol. (Riyad : Dār al-Waṭan, 1997), 309–10.

165. Ḥassān b. ʿAṭiyya al-Muḥāribī.

166. Ibn Abī Šayba, *al-Muṣannaf* ,éd. K. Y. al-Ḥawt, 7 vol. (Riyad : Maktabat al-Rušd, 1988), 6 : 105.

167. Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī, *al-Mujālasa*, 3 : 365.

le vocabulaire judéo-araméen. Quant aux seconds ils « sont les *mujtahidūn* de leur religion (*dīn*) : ce sont les gens des ṣawmaʿa-s[168]. » Il semble donc avoir opposer les savants formels que seraient les *aḥbār* aux intellectuels, « ceux qui s'efforcent » (*mujtahidūn*), que seraient les habitants des tours d'ermitage. Cependant, ce verset dut être accordé avec Qurʾān 57 : 26–27 qui édicte que « le monachisme (*rahbāniyya*), ils l'inventèrent![169] ». Muqātil envisagea donc une voie médiane, où, parmi les vrais chrétiens persécutés et retirés dans les ṣawmaʿa-s, aurait fini par apparaître un groupe qui aurait finalement renoncé à sa vraie religion pour adopter le « nazaréisme » : « Lorsque les polythéistes se multiplièrent et que les croyants furent vaincus et méprisés, après Jésus fils de Marie, ils se retirèrent et prirent les ṣawmaʿa-s. Ceci dura longtemps et alors certains renoncèrent (*rajaʿa ʿan*) à la religion de Jésus (ʿĪsā) et inventèrent le nazaréisme (*naṣrāniyya*)[170]. »

L'exégète de la fin VIIIᵉ siècle hésite, comme nombre de ses contemporains, à adopter ou non une posture respectueuse des ermites, garants de la vraie foi chrétienne. Le livre saint critiquait de manière acerbe l'anachorèse et reflétait la méfiance ecclésiastique syro-orthodoxe à l'égard des ermites. En revanche, Muqātil produisit un véritable « hors sujet » et atténua — voire inversa — la thématique. Il ne parlait plus de l'invention du monachisme du point de vue d'opposants à l'aura des moines, mais de l'invention de la doctrine nazaréenne, œuvre de certains, seulement, des stylites ou ermites, décrits collectivement comme les vrais croyants du christianisme primitif.

3.3. Le bon stylite et le mauvais tonsuré

Ibn Abī Šayba rapporta, outre une version assez classique de la *waṣiyya*[171], un propos du calife Abū Bakr connecté à cette tradition, où le calife aurait interdit explicitement de « tuer le moine (*rāhib*) dans la ṣawmaʿa[172] ». Cette formulation abrupte qui prohibait avec force d'occire le reclus dans sa tour suggère que ces derniers jouissaient d'un statut d'exception parmi les chrétiens ordinaires qui auraient légitimement pu être abattus. Une génération auparavant, les chroniqueurs al-Wāqidī et Sayf b. ʿUmar, ainsi que le *muḥaddiṯ* ʿAbd al-Razzāq avaient seulement reçu d'Abū Bakr l'ordre de « laisser » les stylites en paix.

Ces nouvelles problématiques du IXᵉ siècle reflètent à notre sens une crispation des savants sunnites à l'égard des religions de l'Écriture. Un indice important pourrait être la récurrence dans la littérature syriaque, à partir des années 160/780 et de manière accrue sous Hārūn al-Rašīd (r. 169–93/785–809) et après sa mort, de mentions de destructions d'églises « nouvellement construites » en Syrie du Nord et en Haute-Mésopotamie[173].

---

168. Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, éd. ʿA. M. Šiḥāta, 5 vol. (Beyrouth : Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāṯ al-ʿArabī, 2002), 2 : 167–68 (cf. : Q. 9 : 30).

169. Ce verset fut l'objet d'intenses débats entre les exégètes, et ce à toutes les époques.

170. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, 4 : 246.

171. Ibn Abī Šayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 6 : 484 (nº 33134).

172. *Ibid.*, 6 : 483 (nº 33127).

173. Sur ce processus J.-M. Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbassides surtout à Bagdad, 749–1258* (Louvain : CSCO, 1980), 44–46 ; A. Noth, « Problems of Differentiation between Muslims and Non-Muslims. Re-reading the "Ordinances of ʿUmar" », *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987) : 103–24 ; M. Levy-Rubin,

Ces excès et autres émeutes populaires légalisées se multiplièrent à partir de la fin de la quatrième *fitna* (v. 193–209/809–825)[174]. Ciblant des édifices dont la population musulmane considérait qu'ils auraient été élevés après le traité (*ṣulḥ*) de leur conquête, ces églises étaient dénoncées comme illégales. En effet, les annales arabo-musulmanes confirment certains débats et décisions judiciaires à cette époque[175]. Ibn Abī Šayba illustre parfaitement cette tension et transmit le même propos, mais cette fois attribué au Prophète en personne (par une tradition de Ibn ʿAbbās et ʿIkrima), avec la même interdiction explicite : « Sur le point d'expédier ses légions, il aurait déclaré : "Ne tuez point les gens des *ṣawmaʿa*-s"[176] ». Qu'un combattant musulman fût sommé d'épargner le stylite et de le « laisser à lui-même » n'allait plus de soi, seule la figure prophétique pouvait encore leur éviter le sort qu'on désirait désormais infliger aux infidèles. Les savants de l'époque de la *miḥna* recoururent abondamment à des *ḥadīṯ* muḥammadiens pour justifier ce type de privilèges ou d'exceptions devenus alors inhabituels ou inacceptables, tandis que leurs prédécesseurs s'étaient contentés d'avis ou de précédents de Compagnons et de premiers califes[177].

Un courant opposé aux stylites semble alors avoir entrepris de reformuler l'ensemble des traditions favorables aux reclus. ʿAbd al-Razzāq lui-même avait ajouté dans sa *Composition* un second *ḥadīṯ*, rapporté par le savant syrien Maʿmar b. Rāšid (m. 153/770) à partir du grand juriste pro-omeyyade al-Zuhrī (m. 121/740), où la recommandation d'Abū Bakr revêtait une toute autre tonalité : « Vous trouverez un groupe (*qawm*), ils se sont tonsurés (*faḥaṣū*) le sommet de la tête <u>avec des épées.</u> Et puis vous trouverez un groupe (*qawm*), ils se sont enfermés eux-mêmes dans les *ṣawāmiʿ*. <u>Ignorez-les (*ḏarhum*) à leurs erreurs/péchés (*ḥaṭāyā*)</u> ![178] »

Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire. From Surrender to Coexistence (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2011), 60–68, 70–75, 78–84, 100-103 ; P. Wood, « Christian Elite Networks in the Jazīra, c. 730–850 », dans *Transregional and Regional Elites. Connecting the Early Islamic Empire*, éd. H.-L. Hagemann et S. Heidemann, 359–84 (Berlin : De Guyter, 2020), 371 et entre autres nombreux témoignages : al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīḫ*, série 3, 713 ; Théophane, *Chronographia*, 452–53 ; Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, 478.

174. La bibliographie manque encore sérieusement à ce sujet, voir notamment l'opinion de Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques*, 87–89.

175. Al-Kindī, *Kitāb wulāt wa-quḍāt Miṣr*, éd. M. Ismāʿīl et A. al-Mazīdī (Beyrouth : Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003), 99–100 ; J. M. Fiey, *Mossoul chrétienne. Essai sur l'histoire, l'archéologie et l'état actuel des monuments chrétiens de la ville de Mossoul* (Beyrouth : Librairie orientale, 1959), 20–25 mentionne al-Azdī, *Taʾrīḫ al-Mawṣil*, éd. ʿA. Ḥabība (Le Caire : al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-l-Šuʾūn al-Islāmiyya, 1967), 244 (année 163/779) et C. Robinson, *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest. The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2000), 11–12, al-Azdī, *al-Mawṣil*, 340 (année 200/815), voir aussi la version d'al-Ḫaṭīb al-Baġdādī, *Taʾrīḫ Madīnat al-Salām* (*Baġdād)*, éd. B. ʿA. Maʿrūf (Beyrouth : Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, 2002), 8 : 456.

176. Ibn Abī Šayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 6 : 484 (nº 33132) ; l'informateur du *ḥadīṯ* prophétique est incertain, il s'agit d'un *šayḫ* médinois, qui transmet d'un *mawlā* non nommé lui-même d'un disciple de ʿIkrima. Ceci incite à douter de la pertinence de ce propos prophétique isolé.

177. Voir par exemple au sujet du cas des chrétiens Banū Taġlib, le recours au *ḥadīṯ* prophétique par le même auteur et son contemporain Ibn Saʿd, à propos d'un sujet auquel tous leurs prédécesseurs se contentaient des précédents des premiers califes, S. Pierre, « Subjugation and Taxation ».

178. Al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, 5 : 199–200.

Dans ces différentes versions, le calife distinguait le *qawm* des stylites et autres reclus d'un autre groupe (*qawm*) de « tonsurés ». Les deux types de religieux chrétiens devaient être épargnés, mais plus par souci de préserver les musulmans de « leurs errements » que pour leur manifester respect ou déférence. En revanche, il est impossible d'éclaircir le passage faisant allusion à une tonsure réalisée « avec les épées » sans recourir à certains éléments collectés par des *muḥaddiṯ*-s contemporains. Ainsi, Abū ʿUbayd (m. 224/838) entreprit de définir précisément le verbe *faḥaṣa* dans son dictionnaire des *ḥadīṯ* étranges : « Tu trouveras un groupe (*qawm*), ils se sont tonsuré (*faḥaṣū*) leurs têtes. Alors frappe avec l'épée ce qu'ils ont tonsuré ! Et vous trouverez un groupe (*qawm*) dans les ṣawmaʿa-s, alors laisse-les (*daʿhum*), et (pour/ainsi que ?) ce qu'ils se sont faits à eux-mêmes [. . .][179]. »

Le célèbre légiste recomposait ici différemment le même *ḥadīṯ* califal : il insistait sur la distinction entre, d'une part, les bons reclus (« "quant aux gens des ṣawāmiʿ" : cela veut dire : "les moines" (*ruhbān*)[180] ») que l'on doit laisser tranquille, et, d'autre part les mauvais religieux qui sont tonsurés, et que l'on doit frapper « avec l'épée ». Ceci suggère que la version de ʿAbd al-Razzāq, où l'épée aurait servi de rasoir, était défectueuse. Abū ʿUbayd fournit en outre une piste d'interprétation au sujet de ces mystérieux tonsurés : « Il désigne les *šamāmisa* qui se sont tonsurés[181] ». Le singulier *šammās* est un calque du vocable *šammōšō* qui désigne en syriaque le ministre du culte et le diacre et en arabe, par extension, n'importe quel clerc chrétien[182]. Les tonsurés équivalaient déjà à ces clercs dans la *Composition* de ʿAbd al-Razzāq quelques décennies plus tôt[183].

Ce courant de traditions manifeste une violente aversion à l'égard des dignitaires officiels des Églises. Il opposerait clairement deux types de religieux chrétiens : (1) le moine solitaire, qui, *a minima* doit jouir d'un privilège, et (2) le clerc, l'ecclésiastique qu'il faut pourchasser. Le Croyant aurait dès lors autant le devoir d'épargner les premiers que de combattre les seconds. Par conséquent, selon Abū ʿUbayd, le *ḥadīṯ* distinguerait entre de bons moines reclus dans leurs tours et des diacres et des prêtres affiliés à l'ordre épiscopal.

Malheureusement, cette hypothèse séduisante se concilie difficilement avec l'usage de la tonsure dans la littérature syriaque de son temps. Les sources syro-orientales associent même cette marque capillaire à Abraham de Kashkar (m. v. 586), le (ré)formateur du cénobitisme dans l'Empire sassanide. Ainsi, selon Išōʿ-Dnaḥ de Baṣra (m. fin-IIIᵉ/IXᵉ siècle), « il initia la tonsure (*sūfrā*) qui est sur la tête des solitaires (*iḥidāyē* = moine au sens large)[184] ».

---

179. Abū ʿUbayd, *Ġarīb al-ḥadīṯ*, 2 : 231 ; presqu'identique dans Ibn Abī Šayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, 7 : 198, de Yaḥyā b. Abī Muṭayʿ : « Vous atteindrez un groupe (*qawm*), ils sont dans des ṣawāmiʿ, laissez-les et ce qu'ils se font à eux-mêmes [*ibid.* jusqu'ici la 6 : 484 (nᵒ 33134)]. Puis vous irez à un *qawm* qui se sont tonsurés le sommet du crâne au milieu de la tête [. . .] frappez alors ce qu'ils ont rasés au milieu de leur tête ! »

180. Abū ʿUbayd, *Ġarīb al-ḥadīṯ*, 2 : 231.

181. *Ibid.*

182. *Šammōšō*, du verbe *šammeš* (forme II : paʿʿel) qui signifie : « servir un culte » et par extension : « célébrer la messe », à l'origine, de toute évidence, il s'agissait de servir un culte solaire (araméen et akkadien : ŠMŠ).

183. Al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, 5 : 200.

184. Išōʿ-Dnaḥ de Baṣra, *Le livre de la Chasteté composé par Jésusdenah, évêque de Baçrah*, éd. J.-B. Chabot (Rome : École française de Rome, 1896), 7 ; *Chronique de Seert = Histoire nestorienne inédite. Seconde partie* (I), éd. A. Scher, *Patrologia Orientalis* 7 (1911) : 42–43 (*al-Sufār*).

Dès lors, contrairement à l'affirmation d'Abū ʿUbayd, la tonsure constituait une des marques par excellence du monachisme et n'aurait donc que peu à voir avec le clergé. Néanmoins, l'insistance des sources sur cet aspect de la réforme d'Abraham de Kashkar induit aussi que cette norme était encore peu développée au début de la période hégirienne. Selon Dad-Išōʿ (m. v. 70/690), la tonsure était le propre des moines en couvent (dayrāyē)[185] depuis que Babay le Grand (m. 6/628), le successeur d'Abraham, l'avait imposée à tout nouvel entrant[186]. Nous avons vu que Dad-Išōʿ situe les cénobites à un degré inférieur aux différents rangs des « solitaires » (iḥīdāyē) qui, au terme d'une période de probation, devaient accéder au droit de devenir ascète. Ces derniers n'auraient eu dès lors plus l'occasion d'être à nouveau tondus, si tant est qu'ils eussent bien été intégrés à ce cursus théorique. Par ailleurs, selon l'auteur anonyme de la *Chronique de Séert*, un responsable politique (ṣāḥib) du Bēt Garmay qui siégeait à al-Sinn au début de l'époque islamique aurait accordé une exonération de *jizya* à « quiconque se vêtit de laine, qu'il fussent tonsurés (musaffar) ou non », privilège qui était toujours en vigueur à l'époque de l'auteur[187]. Était-ce à cette dichotomie entre le moine tonsuré et le stylite/reclus non-tonsuré que les informateurs d'Abū ʿUbayd et d'Ibn Abī Šayba faisaient référence ?

Selon une seconde interprétation, Abraham de Kashkar aurait imposé une tonsure (ēskīmā) pour distinguer celle de ses frères de celle (ēskīmā grīʿā) des moines « sévériens », c'est-à-dire des miaphysites qui se répandaient alors dans l'Empire perse (= les futurs syro-orthodoxes)[188]. Ainsi, il n'aurait pas inventé la tonsure, mais l'aurait rendue spécifique et reconnaissable, par souci de se distinguer des héritiers de Jacques Baradée. Par ailleurs, l'auteur de la *Vie de Rabban Hormizd*, un saint homme syro-oriental et dyophysite d'Adiabène mort peu avant la deuxième *fitna*, se refusait à appeler ses rivaux autrement que « moines tonsurés (grīʿē) » et « hérétiques[189] ». Ces derniers semblent avoir été nombreux à pratiquer le monachisme et l'anachorèse. Ainsi, la première des trois questions posées par Ḫosrō II (r. 589–7/628) lors de la controverse intra-chrétienne de 612 opposait « les nestoriens (nesṭūryānē) » aux miaphysites, simplement désignés comme « les moines (dayrāyē)[190]». Florence Jullien confirme que « le terme de "moines" renvoie classiquement aux syro-orthodoxes » et ajoute que « l'organisation et la constitution de cette Église étaient

185. Fauchon, « Vie ascétique », 42.

186. *Ibid.*, 45, dans le canon 19.

187. *Chronique de Seert = Histoire nestorienne inédite. Seconde partie* (II), éd. A. Scher, *Patrologia Orientalis* 13 (1919) : 312–13.

188. *Ibid.*, 45–46 ; F. Jullien, « Les controverses entre chrétiens dans l'empire sassanide. Un enjeu identitaire », dans *Les controverses en milieu syriaque*, éd. F. Ruani (Paris : Geuthner, 2016), 209–38, ici 216 ; Thomas de Margā, *The Book of Governors . The Historia Monastica of Thomas, Bishop of Margâ A. D. 840* [. . .], éd. E. W. Budge (Londres : K. Paul, 1893), livre 1, 23.

189. « Histoire de Rabban Hormizd », dans *The Histories of Rabban Hormizd the Persian and Rabban Bar-Idta* [. . .], éd. E. W. Budge, 2–109 (Londres : Luzac, 1902), 54, 57, 58, 60–62, 64, 69–70.

190. Jullien, « Controverses », 221 ; Babay le Grand, « Martyr de Giwargis Mihram-Gushn-Asp », dans *Histoire de Mar-Jabalaha, de trois autres patriarches, d'un prêtre et de deux laïques, nestoriens,* éd. P. Bedjan, 416–571 (Leipzig : O. Harrassowitz, 1895), 516–17.

en effet avant tout l'œuvre de moines, ordonnés en masse pour les besoins de la mission[191]. » Selon cette interprétation, la tonsure constituait peut-être encore, au début du VIIᵉ siècle, un critère de discrimination des moines « sévériens ». Ce motif rhétorique aurait-il pu être repris par les arabo-musulmans ? Est-il possible d'en déduire que les tonsurés étaient jacobites par excellence, et que les non-tonsurés étaient, à l'inverse, les syro-orientaux dyophysites[192] ?

Quelle que fut la signification des « tonsurés » par rapport aux « stylites/reclus », il est intéressant de constater que dans les versions plus anciennes, Abū Bakr interdisait de faire le moindre mal à chacun des deux groupes également. Dans le *ḥadīṯ* produit par Ibn Abī Šayba, une génération plus tard, la *waṣiyya* d'Abū Bakr leur réservait pourtant deux sorts différents :

1) Ceux des *ṣawāmiʿ*, les *esṭūnōrē* des sources syriaques équivalentes (Denys de Tell Maḥrē dans *1234*) devaient être « abandonnés à ce qu'ils se faisaient eux-mêmes », préservant une tonalité relativement neutre : passer son chemin, ne point les opprimer, mais sans les suivre pour autant.

2) À l'inverse, les tonsurés devaient être « frappés » par les combattants au niveau même de leur tonsure : sur la tête !

De quelle manière l'antagonisme entre ces deux types de figures religieuses chrétiennes se constitua-t-il dans la littérature moyen-orientale des débuts de l'islam ?

3.4. Une autorité populaire et contestée : le stylite devin

Plusieurs traditions attribuent à une autorité divinatoire vivant dans une *ṣawmaʿa* la fondation des capitales abbassides de Bagdad et al-Raqqa[193]. Un certain Ibn Jābir rapporte de son père une histoire à propos d'al-Manṣūr qu'al-Ṭabarī situait à la fois lors de la fondation de Bagdad en 145/762 et de celle de Rāfiqa en 154/771, et répèta même à une troisième reprise. Nous ne citerons qu'une seule des versions :

Il voulut construire al-Rāfiqa dans la Terre des Romains, les gens d'al-Raqqa s'opposèrent et voulurent le combattre, en disant : « Tu vas endommager nos marchés, faire fuir nos aliments et rétrécir nos domiciles ! » Il était soucieux à l'idée de les combattre. Il envoya donc (un message) à un moine dans la *ṣawmaʿa* : « As-tu connaissance qu'un humain construira ici même une cité ? »

Il répondit : « On m'a informé qu'un homme appelé Miqlāṣ devait la bâtir ».

---

191. Jullien, « Controverses », 221.

192. Thomas de Margā, *Monastica*, livre 2, 91 insiste à l'inverse pour dire que les moines sévériens sont eux-mêmes spécifiquement tonsurés (*grīʿē*) ; quant à la *Chronique de Seert* (I), 42–43 et 80 elle n'associe pas l'existence ou la forme de la tonsure à une distinction, mais uniquement les vêtements des moines.

193. Mentionnées par C. Sahner, « The Monasticism of My Community Is Jihad. A Debate on Asceticism, Sex, and Warfare in Early Islam », *Arabica* 64, nᵒ 2 (2017) : 149–83, ici 162.

Il dit alors : « [Par Dieu], c'est moi Miqlāṣ[194] ! » et il la construisit sur le modèle de construction de Bagdad[195].

La localisation surprenante de « Rāfiqa dans la Terre des Romains (arḍ al-Rūm)[196] » ne doit pas surprendre car elle désigne couramment la partie anciennement romaine de l'empire abbasside, le Bilād al-Šām, dans les sources syriaques. En revanche, il s'agit d'un indice de l'origine possiblement chrétienne d'une telle information. De manière amusante, le géographe iranien Ibn al-Faqīh (IIIe/IXe s.)[197] transmit un ḫabar légèrement semblable à ces traditions, à partir d'un obscur baṣrien, Ibn Bašīr, en partance pour une expédition estivale (ṣāʾifa). Il aurait appris d'un « moine (rāhib) dans une ṣawmaʿa » la prochaine révolution abbasside et la fondation consécutive de Bagdad. Pourtant, « il ne s'y trouvait rien d'autres que des dattiers, des villages et un couvent (dayr) [le sien . . .] ; il y avait du gibier (daʿālija) et le reste n'était que désert ». Ces récits ne spécifient nullement que ces ermites furent systématiquement des reclus ou des stylites, même si la disposition est proche. Il est frappant de retrouver chez l'anonyme de Zuqnīn un récit très similaire à propos de la « reconstruction de Callinice (al-Raqqa) ». L'auteur était lui-même possiblement un stylite, et un témoin vivant de cet évènement[198] :

> [Al-Manṣūr] avait une propension à suivre les magiciens et les devins[199], il écoutait et faisait tout ce qu'ils lui disaient. [. . .] Ils lui dirent : « Il y aura un roi fort, qui bâtira une ville à côté de Callinice [al-Raqqa] ; il ira ensuite à Jérusalem et y bâtira une mosquée. Il doit régner quarante ans ». Ce misérable dit : « C'est moi ![200] »

Ceci permet de suggérer qu'al-Ṭabarī faisait probablement erreur en associant l'une des versions à la fondation de Bagdad. Cette tradition s'inscrit plus probablement à Raqqa, dans l'espace où l'institution des stylites est bien attestée pour le IIe/VIIIe siècle. L'anonyme de Zuqnīn cessa d'écrire peu de temps après le lancement du projet urbain, vers 159/775, époque présumée où vivait son contemporain musulman Ibn Jābir. Ceci implique que cette légende circula nécessairement très tôt dans les différents milieux jazīriens, musulmans et chrétiens. Ces récits sont le probable produit de l'exagération de faits réels : la recherche par l'autorité publique d'une justification divinatoire par le recours à un homme saint, face à l'opposition de l'élite urbaine locale. Les sources syriaques et musulmanes divergent toutefois sur la qualité du conseiller surnaturel du prince. Pour les musulmans, c'est une autorité chrétienne dont l'aura s'étend à la bourgeoisie syriaque comme à l'élite arabo-musulmane. Pour les syro-orthodoxes de Haute-Mésopotamie, à l'inverse, il s'agit d'un

---

194. Dans la version consacrée à Bagdad, il s'exclame : « J'ai été appelé Miqlāṣ dans ma jeunesse ! ».

195. Al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīḫ, série 3, 276 ; voir également 372.

196. Ibid., 372.

197. Ibn al-Faqīh, al-Buldān, 357–58.

198. Voir n. 236.

199. Jullien, « Controverses », 226.

200. Chronique de Zuqnīn, 120.

magicien de cour, sans rapport avec l'Église même s'il put être chrétien de confession[201]. Il est important de souligner que les *holy men* d'une Église rivale étaient constamment dépeints comme des sorciers (ḥarašē) et des séducteurs, même lorsqu'il s'agissait d'un évêque, voire d'un patriarche.

Dès lors, ce récit de la fondation d'al-Rāfiqa se rapproche d'un passage de polémique anti-chalcédonienne de la source commune des chroniques miaphysites de *1234* et de Michel le Syrien, probablement Denys de Tell Maḥrē. Selon lui, Théodore, le frère d'Héraclius (r. 610–20/641), cheminait avec son armée pour mater l'invasion des Arabes (Ṭayyōyē), considérés avec mépris :

> Ils arrivèrent au village appelé Gūsīt, dans la région d'Antioche où se tenait un chalcédonien sur une colonne (esṭūnō), à la manière d'un moine. [415] Theodore alla le trouver avec quelques-uns des capitaines (rēšōnē). [. . .] Alors le stylite (ēsṭūnōyō) déclara à Théodore : « Je sais que l'empire des Romains sera livré entre tes mains [. . .] et je suis persuadé que tu reviendras victorieux si tu me promets qu'à ton retour tu feras disparaître les partisans de Sévère. » En entendant ces choses, Théodore répondit : « Moi-même, en dehors de ta parole, j'étais disposé à persécuter les partisans de Jacques (Baradée) ». Un des soldats qui l'accompagnaient était orthodoxe, en entendant ce qui se disait, il brûla d'un grand zèle. [. . .] Les Arabes l'emportèrent contre les Romains, et les Romains se mirent à fuir [. . .]. Ce soldat s'approcha de Theodore et lui dit : « Quoi donc, Théodore ! Où sont les promesses que le stylite t'a faites, que tu reviendrais avec un grand nom ?[202] »

Ces textes invoquent successivement la préscience réelle ou supposée d'un moine depuis sa ṣawmaʿa. *L'esṭūnōrō*, orthodoxe ou hérétique, véridique ou fallacieux constituait sans doute, au VIIIᵉ siècle, une figure prophétique commode autant dans les littératures syriaques qu'arabes[203]. Le *topos* s'étend à chaque fois à l'aura dont il jouit parmi les laïcs, du petit peuple à l'élite foncière d'une grande cité comme Raqqa/Callinice, et même à un membre des cours impériales romaines et abbassides. Cette instrumentalisation confirme l'autorité charismatique dont les stylites jouissaient effectivement. Ces récits reflètent ainsi une même défiance de la part de l'orthodoxe ecclésiastique chrétien comme du savant musulman à des stylites comme autorités spirituelles rivales et enseignants autoproclamés.

---

201. Au sujet des magiciens, astrologues et médecins chrétiens des cours d'al-Manṣūr et al-Mahdī, et du cas spécifique de Théophile, on se reportera à Borrut, « Court Astrologers », 458–59, 461, n. 34, 462, 473 et surtout 477–81 ; et Borrut, *Entre mémoire et pouvoir*, 83 et 144.

202. Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, 414–15 et *Chronicon 1234*, 242–44. Version de Michel citée par Tannous, *Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 162. Selon Peña, Castellana et Fernandez, *Stylites syriens*, 69 : Gūsit équivaut à Jūsiya al-Ḥarab : une journée au sud de Ḥimṣ. Ce serait aussi l'emplacement du fameux village de Baʿaltān d'où est originaire le patriarche Georges (r. 758–89).

203. Jūsiya aurait accueilli un autre stylite avant lui, du nom de Serge, qui aurait écrit un traité de controverse contre les juifs durant la première moitié du VIIIᵉ siècle, édité par A. P. Hayman, *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite Against a Jew* [CSCO 338–339] (Louvain : Secrétariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1973). Je remercie Bastien Dumont pour cette référence essentielle.

3.5. Dénonciation des stylites chez les syro-orthodoxes

Ce modèle de sainteté, plus constant que l'errant et plus admirable que le cénobite constituait un des piliers du christianisme syrien. Les différentes tentatives d'intégration des solitaires à l'ordre monastique n'étaient pas parvenues à étouffer la concurrence qu'exerçaient les reclus à l'égard des hiérarchies ecclésiastiques en construction. Même emmurés dans des cloîtres, ils continuèrent à poser problème aux évêques et, dès lors, leurs abus émanèrent régulièrement de la littérature canonique[204]. En outre, nombre de ces saints hommes des hauteurs furent admis dans les ordres du diaconat et de la prêtrise afin d'être intégrés à l'Église officielle. Siméon Stylite le Jeune lui-même avait été ordonné diacre puis prêtre au milieu du vıᵉ siècle[205]. Il est établi qu'il prêchait, depuis sa colonne située dans l'octogone à l'ouest du complexe cultuel, notamment à des laïcs contrairement à ce que sa *Vie* prétend. En l'absence d'ambon dans l'église de la Sainte Trinité, il a été suggéré que sa fonction put avoir été supplantée par la colonne du saint homme[206]. Ceci explique pourquoi se posait la question de leur position face à l'évêque consécrateur à la fin du ıᵉʳ siècle de l'hégire. Ainsi Jacques d'Édesse, principal intellectuel de l'Église syro-orthodoxe du tournant des vııᵉ et vıııᵉ siècles condamnait le fait que certains usurpassent la prêtrise : « Il n'est point licite aux stylites (*esṭūnōrē*) d'offrir l'hostie du haut de leur colonne [. . .] sauf en cas de nécessité. [. . .] Il n'est pas juste que le stylite brandisse le saint corps au-dessus de sa colonne[207]. »

Ces stylites ordonnés diacres (*šammās* = *šammōšō*) ou prêtres célébraient sans doute des messes au mépris des règles ecclésiastiques. Parfois, peut-être, ne respectaient-ils point le monopole sacerdotal et élevaient-ils l'eucharistie sans même en avoir reçu l'onction[208]. En outre, ils se constituaient en chefs spirituels de communautés rurales lorsqu'ils « faisaient, en plus, des assemblées autour d'eux »[209]. Jean de Litarbā[210], lui-même stylite, arrache cependant à Jacques, son maître spirituel, qu'il est juste (*zdaq*) « de placer le corps sacré

204. O. Ioan, « Controverses entre la hiérarchie ecclésiale et les moines dans le christianisme syriaque », dans Jullien, *Le monachisme syriaque*, 89–106, voir 95–100 décrit le processus qui conduisi moines et évêques, détenteurs de légitimités ecclésiastiques inverses et concurrentes, à fusionner dans la figure du moine-évêque, que favorisa la période hégirienne et les tendances musulmanes.

205. A 33 ans en 554 selon A. Belgin-Henry, « A Mobile Dialogue of an Immobile Saint. St. Symeon the Younger, Divine Liturgy, and the Architectural Setting », dans *Perceptions of the Body and Sacred Space in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*, éd. J. Bogdanović, 149–65 (New York : Routledge, 2018), 151 ; Binggeli, « Les stylites et l'eucharistie », 436–38.

206. Belgin-Henry, « Symeon the Younger », 155 a affirmé qu'il était inimaginable qu'il ne fut pas inclus dans la liturgie d'un complexe édifié en son honneur, voir aussi l'opinion de Binggeli, « Les stylites et l'eucharistie », 435 et 442–43.

207. Bar Hébraeus, *Nomocanon*, 112. Cité par Tannous, *Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 163–64. S. Harvey, « The Stylite's Liturgy. Ritual and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity », *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, nᵒ 3 (1998) : 523–39, ici 535–36, s'est interrogée sur les implications du canon de Jacques d'Édesse.

208. Binggeli, « Les stylites et l'eucharistie », 428-29.

209. Le canon 7 de Jacques d'Édesse dans *Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition,* éd. A. Vööbus, 2 vol., *CSCO* 367 et 375 (1975–76), 1 : 270.

210. Voir n. 153.

(l'hostie) près d'eux, sur la colonne (*ēsṭūnō*) »[211]. Il arrivait même, à en croire l'évêque démissionnaire d'Édesse, que des stylites refusent de descendre de leur tour lorsqu'un évêque, afin d'officialiser leur statut de pasteur, se résolvait à les ordonner « de telle sorte que celui qui devrait l'ordonner se tiendrait au sol sous lui ! ». Cette pratique était jugée inacceptable car « les pères n'ont même pas voulu en parler, [. . .] il ne leur est jamais apparu que ça ait jamais existé ![212] ». En plus d'arbitrer les conflits, « l'*ēsṭūnōrō* se dresse contre l'[évêque] et écrit des interdits/excommunication (*ḥermē*) dans les districts ruraux (*qūryās*) ». Jacques répond avec véhémence que l'on doit « l'interdire (*nettaḥram*), ainsi que quiconque reçoit ses interdits[213] ». Dès lors, on comprend mieux le risque que présentaient certains hommes saints lorsqu'ils s'élevaient contre la hiérarchie, voire soutenaient ou menaient des mouvements hérétiques ou messianiques qui menaçaient l'ordre établi.

Ce fut notamment le cas d'un certain Marūtā, un demi-siècle plus tard. Après avoir quitté le cénobitisme de Mār Mattay pour vivre en solitaire cinq années à Sinjār[214], il fut exclu de la communauté et vint s'installer dans le village de Ḥāḥ dans le Ṭūr ʿAbdīn[215]. Il en devint le véritable directeur spirituel tout en acquérant une réputation étendue de guérisseur et de protecteur contre les démons, prodiges que réfute absolument l'anonyme de Zuqnīn[216]. Devenu un quasi-gouverneur de sa communauté, car « un évêque ou un moine ne pouvait aller là, ni dire quelque chose, sans s'exposer à être tué par les habitants de ce village qui disaient : "Vous êtes jaloux de lui !" », il bénéficia, au gré du bouche à oreille, de l'afflux de caravanes qui commencèrent à inclure le bourg dans leurs itinéraires[217] :

> Ainsi tous les pays se mettaient en mouvement et venaient vers lui. On lui apportait de l'or, de l'argent, des marchandises et des objets précieux. [. . .] Il se tenait sur un siège élevé comme un évêque, bien qu'il eût seulement reçu l'ordre du diaconat. Il est prescrit par les canons apostoliques que le prêtre (*qašīšō*) ne soit béni que par son confrère prêtre ou par l'évêque [. . .]. Cet audacieux, non seulement bénissait, mais il faisait même le signe de la croix et imposait la main sur la tête des prêtres. Il faisait aussi l'huile de la prière [. . .] de cette manière : il récitait dessus une prière, puis il crachait dedans et la consacrait par son crachat[218].

Finalement, en 153/770, face à l'immensité de son aura populaire :

> Saint Mār Cyriaque, évêque de l'endroit, voyant que son troupeau était détenu captif par le Malin, qu'ils n'écoutaient point ses paroles et voulaient même le mettre à mort,

---

211. *Synodicon in the West,* 1 : 247–48.

212. *Ibid.,* 1 : 167.

213. Bar Hébraeus, *Nomocanon,* 112 : « de même, le supérieur et les moines qui font un *kanon*, c'est-à-dire des réunions, contre [lui] et ne lui obéissent pas, seront déposés [. . .]. »

214. *Chronique de Zuqnīn,* 140–41.

215. *Ibid.,* 141–42.

216. *Ibid.,* 144–45.

217. *Ibid.,* 143 : *sīrtō* et *šīʿtō*.

218. *Ibid.,* 145.

se rendit près du vénérable patriarche David [de Dārā, r. v. 147–58/764–75, lequel] en apprenant ces choses, fit enlever le séducteur et l'enferma dans la prison de Ḥarrān. Cela ne mit pas fin à ses impostures, car beaucoup de gens venaient le trouver dans la prison [. . .][219].

Ce genre de reclus était encore en mesure de mener ce type de dissidences doctrinales et ecclésiastiques comme il apparaît du synode réuni en mai 168/785 par le patriarche Georges[220] à Kefar Nabū, non loin de Sarūj. Ainsi, après avoir traité d'autres formes d'hétérodoxie superstitieuse, comme le re-baptême et l'onction du *myron* aux malades, le dix-neuvième canon stipulait que « quiconque des abbés, stylites (*ēṣṭūnōrē*) ou reclus (*ḥbīšōyē*) rédigeait des lettres d'interdiction (*ḥermō*) aux cités et aux districts ruraux (*qūryās*), nous tous avons décidé, par l'ordre et l'interdit de Dieu qu'ils ne les écrivent point [. . .] ». Il est intéressant de constater à quelles communautés laïques les stylites, parmi d'autres autorités monastiques, destinaient leurs lettres d'excommunication : les « cités et les villages ». À Georges succéda, une décennie plus tard, Cyriaque le Takrītien (r. 176–201/793–817), qui convoqua à Bēt Batīn non loin de Ḥarrān en 177/794, peu de temps après son intronisation, un concile dont le dix-huitième canon reprenait en substance la même thématique. Il figurait au bas d'un décret menaçant les abbés qui s'opposeraient à leurs évêques.

> Si des abbés, ceux qui sont avec eux parmi les stylites (*ēṣṭūnōrē*) et les reclus (*ḥbīšōyē*) [. . .] écrivent des lettres d'interdiction (*ḥermō*) et d'oubli — au nom du patriarche ou de l'évêque — aux cités et aux districts ruraux (*qūryō*) — ou qui mal-font le *myron* — nous avons décidé par notre ordre collectif qu'ils n'ont aucune juridiction de Dieu de faire ceci. Mais s'ils [. . .] enfreignent notre canon ; qu'ils n'aient point d'autorité de Dieu pour servir (*šammeš* = agir au rang de diacre) jusqu'à ce que l'évêque du pays en ait été informé ![221]

Cet élément montre que de nombreux reclus et stylites entouraient les abbés et officiaient comme ministres du culte (*šammōšē*), parfois à la limite de la légalité canonique. Non contents de célébrer la messe, de réunir des assemblées, de s'opposer à leurs évêques et de prononcer des excommunication, certains stylites usurpaient même le rôle séculier de gouverneurs et de juges. Simonsohn a récemment abordé cette fonction du juge-arbitre[222] typique des *holy men* décrits par Brown. Les *ʿabday-šlāmā*[223], capables de rallier les adeptes des Églises rivales, se muaient si nécessaire en médiateur (*mṣaʿʿāyā*), voire en directeur des communautés rurales dont ils étaient le saint protecteur vivant. Ainsi, le *Nomocanon* de Bar

---

219. *Ibid.*, 145–46.

220. Syrien de formation, il avait été persécuté par le parti jazīrien et les évêques de Qarṭmīn, et condamné à la prison par al-Manṣūr de 147/765 à 158/775 environ, avant d'être libéré par al-Mahdī, à condition de ne pas retourner en Syrie et de ne pas s'éloigner de la cour, voir Fiey, *Chrétiens syriaques*, 17 et 30.

221. *Synodicon in the West,* 2 : 11.

222. Simonsohn, « Seeking Justice », 198–99.

223. Mathieu 5 : 9.

Hebraeus préserve un canon de Georges (m. 105/724), évêque des *ʿammē*[224] : « Il n'est point licite aux abbés (*rēš dayrōtō*) et stylites (*ēsṭūnōrē*) de rédiger des lettres de décrets (*psōqē*), de jugements (*dīnē*), ou d'admonitions (*martyōnwōtō*) aux cités et villages[225]. »

Il semble que ce « canon » dérive en réalité d'une discussion avec Jean de Litarbā qui aurait initialement posé cette question à Jacques d'Édesse : « Est-il licite pour les stylites (*ēsṭūnōrē*) de donner proclamation (*tūrgamō*) ou admonition (*martyōnūtō*) au peuple (*ʿamō*) ou d'administrer des jugements et de décréter des lois (*namūsē*) en usant de la Parole de Dieu (*melltō d-Alōhō*) ?[226] ». Le canoniste de Qenneŝrē et de Kayŝūm aurait répondu en insistant sur fait que des solitaires montés sur la colonne (*esṭūnō*) « afin de pouvoir vivre selon le plaisir de Dieu à travers leurs œuvres et en silence, dans la quiétude (*nawḥō*), et avec prière sincère, sans distraction[227] » en auraient détourné le but, afin de « devenir les juges du peuple (*dayyōnē l-ʿamō*) et de décréter des lois (*nefsaqūn namūsē*)[228]. » Jacques d'Édesse considérait ces deux fonctions contradictoires et suspectait une forme de tartufferie. Il s'interrogeait ainsi sur la sincérité de l'engagement des stylites, et dénonçait à mots à peine couverts leurs abus d'influence sur l'opinion de la foule (*ʿamō*). Nous retrouvons ici inversée, la dichotomie employée par le *ḥadīṯ* arabo-musulman entre le bon moine stylite et le mauvais clerc (*šammās*) hypocrite.

Pour Jacques, leur enseignement devait passer par l'exemplarité de leurs œuvres et non par la « parole et la voix » (*meltō w-qōlō*). En revanche, ceux d'entre eux qui auraient souhaité être arbitres ou instituteurs « qu'ils descendent à terre et enseignent ». Ils devaient renoncer à leur ascèse spectaculaire, afin de ne pas profiter d'une position élevée superficielle[229]. Il est possible de déduire de ce propos que les stylites s'érigeaient, réellement et constamment, en enseignants de la foule (*malfōnō l-ʿamō*), directeurs de vie des gens du commun. Déjà, leur inspirateur, Siméon l'Ancien, est réputé avoir ordonné à une communauté villageoise, en la personne de son prêtre Côme, de limiter leurs taux d'intérêts usuraires à 0,5% par an[230].

Ces usurpations de la fonction magistrale, voire de celle de la magistrature, étaient perçues comme un véritable danger pour les autorités syro-orthodoxes instituées. Le problème principal de l'autorité des stylites semble avoir été caractérisé par leur « arrogance » (*maʿūlnūtō*) à usurper la fonction arbitrale, judiciaire, voire législative et

---

224. Voir n. 155.

225. Bar Hébraeus, *Nomocanon*, 113 ; cité par Tillier, *Invention du cadi*, 469 et Simonsohn, *Common Justice*, 106.

226. *Synodicon in the West*, 1 : 248.

227. *Ibid.*, 248.

228. *Ibid.*

229. *Ibid.*, 248–49.

230. S. E. al-Samʿānī, *Acta Sanctorum Martyrum Orientalium et Occidentalium in Duas Partes Distributa. Adcedvnt Acta S. Simeonis Stylitae. Omnia Nvnc Primvm Svb Avspiciis Johannis V. Lusitanorum Regis e Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana Prodeunt* (Rome : J. Collini, 1748), 2 : 394–96, la traduction de son courrier et la réponse du prêtre Côme représentant du village, (2 : 376–788), se trouvent dans H. Lietzmann, *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites* (Leipzig : Hinrichs, 1908), 183 et 187 pour le pourcentage, et la seconde dans Doran, *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 194–97.

gouvernementale. Selon l'opinion de Jacques, l'ensemble du clergé, et pas seulement les moines et solitaires, n'était point autorisé à juger des causes non-religieuses. En somme, le pouvoir, la justice et les lois « du monde » (*d-ʿōlmō*) ne devaient pas être l'apanage des prêtres, et encore moins celui des stylites qui n'étaient pas forcément ordonnés.

> Et au sujet de ce que j'ai ajouté qu'ils administrent des jugements et décrètent des lois séculières (*namūsē d-ʿōlmō*) au peuple (*l-ʿamō*) en usant de la Parole de Dieu (*meltō d-Alōhō*), c'est une grande arrogance. Car ce pouvoir (*šūlṭōnō*) de la Parole de Dieu n'a point été donné aux prêtres (*l-kōhnē*) pour qu'ils l'utilisent dans les affaires séculières (*sūʿrōnē d-ʿōlmō*), mais uniquement pour ceux qui pêchent et pour ceux qui se repentent [. . .][231].

On comprend dès lors mieux pourquoi Jacques fut poussé à la démission de l'évêché d'Édesse (r. v. 64–68/684–88) en raison, précisément, de la radicalité de ses canons qui choquèrent autant ses subordonnés, ses collègues et même le patriarche Julien II le Romain (r. 66–88/687–708)[232].

En outre, la réédition constante de ces interdits au cours des siècles suivants laisse supposer que cette active opposition ne cessait de se poursuivre, quelle que fut l'origine géographique, conventuelle et politique du patriarche. En effet, cette question fut à nouveau abordée en détail dans la lettre introductive d'Ignace au synode du couvent de Mōr Zakkay, près de Raqqa, en 264/878[233]. Les évêques étaient constamment menacés par la concurrence des monastères, et de ces solitaires qui, tels des magiciens, faisaient usage d'onguents magiques proscrits et, tels des dirigeants, appliquaient des sentences sur les laïcs sans en aviser la hiérarchie. Afin de contrôler ces concurrents dans l'éducation et l'influence des masses rurales, et notamment des populations tribales, la hiérarchie avait finalement opté pour l'ordination et, donc, pour la cléricalisation des stylites.

Ainsi, à partir de l'anachorète originel, le stylite avait été domestiqué et intégré au monastère. Pourtant, devenu le pilier du couvent qui l'accueillait, il avait continué à se rendre autonome, d'abord du supérieur du couvent, puis de la hiérarchie du diocèse, elle-même de plus en plus représentée par des évêques d'origine monacale. Il avait donc

---

231. *Synodicon in the West,* 1 : 249.

232. Debié, *Écriture de l'histoire*, 548.

233. *Synodicon in the West*, 2 : 54–55 : [Ignace, *Lettre introductive du synode de Mār Zakay près de Raqqa (264/878)*] :

> « Beaucoup de ceux qui revêtent la *sḥēma* du monachisme qui n'ont pas été auparavant examinés et certifiés aux causes de la perfection (*myattrūtō*), certains parmi eux n'ont pas même atteint le niveau du plein serment ; un certain trouble (*ḥāffō*) s'empare d'eux et ils se ruent vers une station (*qawmō*) qui est sur la colonne (*ēsṭūnō*). Celle-ci est assurément une posture (*dūkrō*) angélique qui élève du bas-monde ; puis quand leur espoir est déçu, ils descendent de cette élévation qu'ils n'avaient pas montée avec leur esprit et deviennent de ce fait cause de moquerie et de scandale pour beaucoup ! En conséquence, nul n'a l'autorité de monter à la colonne (*ēsṭūnō*) sauf par la connaissance et permission de l'évêque. [. . .] Il n'a pas l'autorité de servir à la prêtrise, et pas non plus de prononcer des jugements (*dōynīn dīnē*) et d'affronter l'évêque, ou de s'impliquer eux-mêmes dans des choses qui ne leurs sont pas autorisées ou de se servir d'écrits circulaires (*ktībwōtō gūnōyōtō*) et de trancher des litiges (*nepsaqūn psōqē*). »

fallu en faire un prêtre, et continuer de lutter pied à pied contre leur autorité concurrente, rurale et informelle[234]. Parallèlement, ce processus de cléricalisation des stylites et du reste des monastères accompagna l'émergence corrélée d'une hostilité dans la littérature islamique.

3.6. Une hostilité islamique grandissante

Celle-ci se matérialisa pour la première fois lorsque commença à être aboli le privilège fiscal et social dont semblent avoir joui les *holy men* reclus avant le milieu du VIIIe siècle. Théophane le Confesseur imputait au calife abbasside al-Manṣūr d'avoir, vers 139/756–57, « accru les taxes sur les chrétiens tant et si bien qu'il l'imposa aux moines (*monakous*), aux cloîtrés (*enkleistous*) et aux stylites (*kionitas*) qui menaient des vies qui plaisent à Dieu[235]. » Cette information concorde avec l'assertion du contemporain du calife, l'anonyme de Zuqnīn pour l'année 157/774–75, à la fin de sa longue (com)plainte fiscale : « Ils s'attaquèrent aux moines, aux reclus et aux stylites (*īḥīdōyē w-ḥbīšōyē w-ēsṭūnōyē*), ils en firent descendre beaucoup de leurs colonnes (*men esṭūnē*), et firent sortir les reclus (*ḥbīšōyē*) de leurs retraites.[236] »

La ressemblance entre les deux notices indique que les deux auteurs puisaient l'information à une origine commune. Or l'anonyme de Zuqnīn, lui-même peut-être un stylite du nom de Josué, était un témoin vivant des faits qu'il décrivait[237]. Il était aussi le contemporain du fameux Théophile d'Édesse à qui on a attribué nombre d'informations orientales reprises dans la *Chronographie* de Théophane[238]. L'anonyme miaphysite de Zuqnīn eût-il pu informer Théophane ? Il était en tout cas au fait des mêmes évènements que ceux rapportés par l'anonyme miaphysite de Zuqnīn : les exactions fiscales d'un calife tout récemment décédé. Ces deux textes convergent à dénoncer une même abolition d'un privilège fiscal qui trouvait en partie son fondement légal dans la *waṣiyya* d'Abū Bakr. C'est aussi dans ce contexte qu'il faut comprendre le rappel appuyé de l'auteur de la *Chronique*

---

234. Binggeli, « Stylites et l'Eucharistie », 431–32 cite une anecdote d'Anastase le Sinaïte, *Les récits inédits du moine Anastase*, tr. F. Nau (Paris : Revue de l'institut catholique , 1902), p. 137 (n° 43) à propos d'un stylite qui confirma la validité de l'eucharistie d'un prêtre dont on lui aurait dit du mal, à l'occasion d'un festival populaire dans un monastère de la région de Damas.

235. Théophane, *Chronographia*, 430–31.

236. L'auteur de la chronique était lui-même probablement stylite selon la *Chronique de Zuqnīn*, 201. On notera l'énumération ternaire qui réserve aux stylites la plus haute place en termes de sainteté.

237. Voir la synthèse des éléments probants dans Debié, *Écriture de l'histoire*, 561. Voir le point de vue de F. Nau, « Les parties inédites de la chronique de Denys de Tell Mahré », *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 2 (1897) : 11–68, ici 47–48 et A. Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV. A.D. 488–775* (Toronto : Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 4–9 mais A. Palmer, « Who Wrote the Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite? », dans *Lingua Restituta Orientalis. Festgabe für Julius Assfalg*, éd. M. Görg et R. Schulz, 272–84 (Wiesbaden : O. Harrassowitz, 1990), 272 en doute même s'il s'accorde avec eux pour assurer qu'il n'est pas l'auteur de la chronique edessénienne que l'auteur final y a inclus. Le manuscrit pourrait même être autographe de ce moine de Zuqnīn selon Harrak, *Zuqnin*, 11–14, à partir des comparaisons paléographiques de E. Tisserant, « Codex Zuqninensis rescriptus veteris testamenti. Texte grec des manuscrits Vatican Syriaque 162 et Mus. Brit. Additionnel 14 665 », *Studi e testi* 23 (1911) : xxx–xxxii et d'autres caractéristiques internes de nature textuelle et codicologique.

238. Voir sur ce débat, n. 63 à 69.

de Séert, à propos de l'exemption de la *jizya* sur les « vêtus de laine » de la province du Bēt Garmay[239]. Les sources musulmanes confirment cette évolution, et Abū Yūsuf (m. 182/798), promu à la toute nouvelle fonction de Grand *Qāḍī* une décennie plus tard, émit un avis (*rāʾī*) correctif à l'exemption dont abusaient certains stylites : « Les gens des *ṣawmaʿa*-s, s'ils ont quelque richesse et aisance (*ġināⁿ wa-yasār),* et s'ils ont transféré (*ṣayyarū*) ce qui est à eux à quelqu'un qui le dépense pour les couvents et ceux qui s'y sont fait moines (*mutarahhibūn*) et les résidents (*qāʾim*), qu'on leur prélève la *jizya*, que le responsable (*ṣāḥib*) du couvent la prélève[240]. »

Al-Šāfiʿī, légèrement postérieur (m. 204/820), s'attaqua aussi à l'immunité fiscale des reclus en rappelant qu'ils ne sont rien d'autres que des chrétiens : « tous ceux qui divergèrent (*ḫālafa*) de l'islam parmi les gens des *ṣawmaʿa*-s et autres, parmi ceux qui sont soumis à la religion des Gens de l'Écriture, alors ce sera soit l'épée soit la *jizya*[241] », symbole de leur sujétion confessionnelle. L'expression employée par le juriste révèle que certains pourraient ne pas diverger des dogmes de l'islam, suggérant que les ermites des hauteurs n'étaient pas tous explicitement considérés comme des chrétiens. Cette remarque théorique reflète l'aura, l'autorité et le prestige qui émanait encore à la toute fin du IIᵉ siècle de ces anachorètes, y compris sur les populations arabo-musulmans, ce qui légitimait encore partiellement certains passe-droits par rapport à leur Église chrétienne de tutelle.

Muqātil b. Sulaymān (m. 150/767) montrait une affection significative pour les stylites lorsqu'il faisait l'exégèse d'un verset passablement anti-chrétien qui dénonce ceux qui prirent les moines (*ruhbān*) « comme maîtres en place de Dieu[242] ». Pourtant, en d'autres occurrences, il s'attaquait aussi à ces même reclus. Ainsi, selon lui, l'expression coranique « les plus grands perdants pour leurs œuvres » (*aḫsarīn aʿmālāⁿ*) désignerait « parmi les Nazaréens, les gens des *ṣawmaʿa*-s[243] ». Un peu plus loin, pour expliquer Qurʾān 5 : 82, il relate comment le Prophète s'opposa au désir de ses compagnons de « s'interdire à nous-même la nourriture, le vêtement et les femmes[244] ; alors [. . .] certains d'entre [les compagnons du Prophète] se tranchèrent les testicules, s'habillèrent de peu (*yalbisu al-masraḥ*) et construisirent des *ṣawmaʿa*-s, s'y cloîtrèrent et se dispersèrent ».

Ces commentaires critiques à l'égard de cet ascétisme extrême reflète la symétrique méfiance et les condamnations de l'Église ancienne contre ces excès de jeûne et de chasteté. Les autorités arabo-musulmanes, à l'instar des canonistes syro-orthodoxes, dénonçaient l'excès d'ascèse des stylites charismatiques. Ces avis illustrent un glissement progressif de l'opinion générale à l'égard de la piété spectaculaire de ces ermites chrétiens. Les musulmans semblent être passés assez rapidement d'une attitude d'obédience, à tout le moins d'admiration, à un rejet assez radical. Cependant, à l'inverse, ils repoussaient aussi

---

239. *Chronique de Seert* (II), 312–13. Voir n. 188.

240. Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb, *Kitāb al-Ḫarāj*, éd. T. Saʿd et S. Muḥammad (Le Caire : al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, 1999), 135.

241. Al-Šāfiʿī, *al-Umm*, 8 vol. (Beyrouth : Dār al-Fikr, 1990), 4 : 304.

242. Voir n. 169 et 171.

243. Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, 2 : 604 (Q. 18 : 102–3).

244. *Ibid.*, 5 : 499 (Q. 5 : 82).

le cléricalisme auxquels les ecclésiastiques étaient parvenus à associer les stylites, parfois à leur corps défendant, notamment, on l'a vu, en les ordonnant[245]. Finalement, dans le second quart du ixᵉ siècle, Ibn Ḥanbal rapporta de Šuʿba (m. 160/776) l'opinion du père d'un de ses maîtres, Abū Ṣāliḥ, qui, au début du viiiᵉ siècle, était « sorti en expédition au Šām (Syrie) ». « Alors les Syriens (*ahl al-Šām*) passaient devant des gens des *ṣawmaʿa*-s et les saluaient (*yusallimūn ʿalayhim*). J'ai entendu mon père dire : "Ne commencez pas à les saluer vous-mêmes (*lā tabdaʾūhum*) : contraignez-les au plus étroit/à leurs chemins (*ilā aḍyaqihi*) !"[246]. »

Ce qualificatif de « gens du Šām » renvoie, en fonction du contexte, soit aux seuls arabo-musulmans de la province, soit aux habitants indigènes chrétiens ou enfin à tous les habitants de la région du « nord » indépendamment de leur communauté confessionnelle ou linguistique. En tout état de cause, ce *ḥadīṯ* non-prophétique constitue un rappel impérieux, de la part d'un « homme saint » (*holy man*) musulman et anonyme, de ne point se placer en situation d'obéissance à l'égard des stylites. Cet avis reflète néanmoins une situation de compromission et de flou entre les voyageurs arabo-musulmans, les Arabes syriens et l'autorité dont se revêtaient les moines. Le salut que leur prodiguaient les voyageurs impliquait sans doute une subordination, d'autant plus intolérable aux tenants de l'orthodoxie islamique en construction.

4. Conclusion

Nous avons souhaité démontrer que l'expression arabe courante des « gens des *ṣawmaʿa*-s (*ahl al-ṣawāmiʿ* ou *aṣḥāb al-ṣawāmiʿ*) » recoupe régulièrement celles des sources syro-occidentales qualifiant les stylites : *esṭūnōrē* ou *esṭūnōyē*. Le phénomène du stylitisme était devenu tellement important dans l'espace syrien (et pas, selon toute vraisemblance, dans l'ancien espace sassanide), que bien des types d'anachorèse furent associés directement ou non à l'ermitage « en hauteur ». Bien qu'il soit impossible de certifier à tout coup cette équivalence, il existe un faisceau de présomptions assez dense qui permet d'une part d'assurer que la *ṣawmaʿa* désignait une tour, et d'autre part que tous les reclus dans des tours étaient qualifiés de « stylites ». Au cours du iiiᵉ/ixᵉ siècle, les deux termes étaient devenus de commodes synonymes de traduction.

Dès lors, cet archétype de « l'homme saint » (*holy man*) de Peter Brown était devenu la principale autorité, en dépit des officiers de l'État omeyyade, et des prélats de la hiérarchie de l'Église, à arbitrer les différends des communautés de l'ancien Diocèse d'Orient. Ces solitaires pouvaient ainsi se tenir, par le biais de la colonne, au milieu du monde duquel ils auraient dû s'éloigner. Leur influence sur les populations rurales, et sur les groupes pastoraux en particulier, fut sans aucun doute déterminante, depuis Siméon l'Ancien au vᵉ siècle jusqu'au milieu de la période abbaside. Ainsi, les officiels sassanides, romains et arabo-musulmans vouèrent tous respect et admiration au stylite, notamment réputé pour ses qualités de divination.

---

245. Binggeli, « Les stylites et l'eucharistie », 438 : « Il y a sans aucun doute de la part de l'Église une volonté de récupérer à son profit une partie du prestige du saint homme ».

246. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 8 : 350 (n °8542).

Nous avons présenté la tradition commune à la chronique syriaque de 1234 et à la plupart des recueils de traditions historiques sur la recommandation (*waṣiyya*) d'Abū Bakr, le premier calife, au moment où il lançait ses troupes à la conquête de la Syrie. Il aurait alors formulé une triple injonction : ne point taxer les stylites, les laisser tranquilles, ainsi que tout ermite, à leur culte, et enfin, passer son chemin et ne point se mêler de leurs affaires. La polysémie des expressions utilisées montre bien l'ambivalence des points de vue des autorités arabo-musulmanes ultérieures. La récurrence de l'admiration, du respect et de la méfiance à leur égard dans les traditions musulmanes ressemble à maints égards à celle éprouvée par les partisans de l'Église syro-orthodoxe en construction.

Les dignitaires et intellectuels de l'Église syro-orthodoxe réagirent dès la fin du Iᵉʳ siècle de l'hégire. Jacques d'Édesse et Georges des Arabes tentèrent initialement de limiter leur influence en menaçant les rebelles d'excommunication. Ils proscrivirent leurs anarchiques missions d'enseignement et de justice de paix. Par la suite, la répétition des synodes montre une tendance à les intégrer au clergé, à les adjoindre aux organes officiels au cours des décennies suivante.

En parallèle, l'admiration et la terreur superstitieuse qu'éprouvaient les arabo-musulmans à leur égard commença à intimer méfiance et répulsion de la part de leurs élites. En effet, ces autorités incontrôlées et situées en terrain flou dérangeaient tout autant les institutions califales et islamiques. Ceux qui, de plus en plus, se réclamaient de l'ascèse restaient attirés par leur idéal et prenaient les bons moines comme modèle. Dès lors, leur rapprochement avec le clergé facilita la tâche du « milieu sectaire » islamique et conduisit à les dénoncer comme les déformateurs d'une bonne doctrine chrétienne désormais perdue. Ce changement radical de paradigme s'explique par l'accroissement de l'hostilité générale à l'égard du christianisme durant la seconde moitié du IIᵉ siècle. Il est également contemporain d'une plus grande rigueur apportée à la collecte des taxes sur les revenus monastiques, jusqu'alors en grande partie exemptés. Cette dénonciation se développait aussi afin de justifier l'abolition de leurs privilèges fiscaux, ce dont témoignèrent, ulcérées, les sources chrétiennes qui mirent explicitement en exergue le ciblage des stylites (chionites, *esṭūnōyē*). Dans un premier temps, la vindicte à laquelle on vouait les officiels tonsurés par les Églises chrétiennes épargnait les plus indépendants des solitaires. Finalement, la *waṣiyya* d'Abū Bakr commença à être amendée et à évoluer vers une dénonciation « des erreurs » des stylites et autres ermites « d'en haut », associée à une répulsion désormais générale du clergé. Du côté des intellectuels musulmans syriens et irakiens, il était encore possible de demander des invocations de moines tout en considérant que leur dogme associationiste les vouait aux enfers. Finalement, les auteurs du IIIᵉ/IXᵉ siècles décidèrent d'abroger les nombreuses dispositions qui en faisaient des autorités chrétiennes privilégiées.

Ainsi, les traditions littéraires islamiques comme syro-orthodoxes ciblèrent les reclus en général, et parmi eux, les stylites en particulier. Ces attaques traduisent la crainte de ces élites institutionnelles et politiques à l'égard de la concurrence d'autorités qu'ils percevaient comme rebelles et hétérodoxes. Elles occupèrent tout d'abord l'espace médian entre la centralisation ecclésiastique syro-orthodoxe et le rejet radical du cléricalisme chrétien par les arabo-musulmans. Pris entre ces deux positions, les stylites continuèrent de proposer une influente troisième voie, en concurrence du clergé ordinaire qui tentait de les intégrer

et des savants du milieu muḥammadien, qui les voyaient de plus en plus clairement comme des clercs nazaréens.

La question de l'*esṭūnōrō* dans sa ṣawmaʿa, venue se nicher jusque dans l'exégèse arabo-musulmane, signale à quel point l'influence de ces hommes saints fut déterminante sur les relations sociales, culturelles et spirituelles des arabophones de l'espace syro-mésopotamien pendant la période formative de l'Islam. Il s'agit d'un bon exemple de « l'inertie religieuse » des *simple believers* mise en lumière par Jack Tannous[247]. C'est peut-être à leur contact que certains groupes furent rattachés à l'Église syro-orthodoxe tandis que d'autres alternaient avec le pôle muḥammadien. Progressivement, à mesure que la définition confessionnelle de l'islam se faisait plus précise, il fallut que chacun choisisse de devenir musulman ou non[248]. Au cours de cette structuration, les stylites devinrent des rivaux sociaux et institutionnels qui devaient être marginalisés ou soumis. Les Églises et les milieux de construction du ḥadīṯ s'y résolurent ardemment, ce dont nous avons gardé les traces. Pour l'Église syro-orthodoxe, il s'agissait de limiter au maximum leur influence sur les monastères et les communautés rurales.

Plus tard, le stylitisme décrut et le terme de ṣawmaʿa fut restreint aux petits couvents ou ermitages isolés, tandis que les musulmans avaient pris l'habitude d'ainsi qualifier les tours de leurs mosquées congrégationnelles. Les *holy men* de Brown avaient-ils fini par trouver des concurrents musulmans ?

---

247. Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East*, 386–87.

248. F. Donner, « From Believers to Muslims. Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community », *Al-Abḥāth* 50–51 (2002–3) : 9–53.

Bibliographie

ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī. *Al-Muṣannaf*. Édité par Ḥ. R. al-Aʿẓamī. 11 vol. Beyrouth : al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983.

Abū Bakr al-Dīnawarī. *Al-Mujālasa wa-jawāhir al-ʿilm*. Édité par M. Āl Salmān. 10 vol. Bahrain : Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1998.

Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnawarī. *Al-Aḫbār al-ṭiwāl*. Édité par ʿA. ʿĀmir. Le Caire : Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabī, 1960.

Abū ʿUbayd Ibn Sallām. *Ġarīb al-ḥadīṯ*. Édité par M. A. Ḫān. 4 vol. Hyderabad : Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif, 1964.

Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb. *Kitāb al-Ḫarāj*. Édité par T. Saʿd et S. Muḥammad. Le Caire : al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya, 1999.

Agapius de Manbij. *Kitab al-ʿUnvan, histoire universelle* [. . .] (II-2). Édité par A. Vassiliev. *Patrologia Orientalis* 8 (1912) : 397–550.

Al-Aḫṭal al-Taġlibī. *Šiʿr al-Aḫṭal (riwāya [. . .] ʿan Abī Saʿīd al-Sukkarī ʿan M. Ibn Ḥabīb ʿan Ibn al-Aʿrābī)*. Édité par A. Ṣāliḥānī. 4 vol. Beyrouth : Imprimerie catholique, 1891.

Anastase le Sinaïte, *Les récits inédits du moine Anastase*, tr. F. Nau (Paris : Revue de l'institut catholique , 1902).

M. Azaiez, « Sourate 22 : *Al-Ḥajj* (Le Pèlerinage) », dans *Le Coran des Historiens*, sous la direction de M. A. Amir-Moezzi et G. Dye, 3 vols. Paris : Le Cerf, 2019, 2/1 : 821-42.

Al-Azdī. *Taʾrīḫ al-Mawṣil*. Édité par ʿA. Ḥabība. Le Caire : al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-l-Šuʾūn al-Islāmiyya, 1967.

Babay le Grand. « Martyr de Giwargis Mihram-Gushn-Asp ». Dans *Histoire de Mar-Jabalaha, de trois autres patriarches, d'un prêtre et de deux laïques, nestoriens,* édité par P. Bedjan, 416–571. Leipzig : O. Harrassowitz, 1895.

Al-Balāḏurī. *Jumal ansāb al-ašrāf*. Édité par S. Zakkār et R. Ziriklī. 13 vol. Beyrouth : Dār al-Fikr, 1996–2005.

Bar Hebraeus. *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum quod e codice Musei Britannici descriptum* [. . .]. Édité par J.-B. Abbeloos et T. Lamy. Paris : Maisonneuve/Louvain : Peeters, 1874.

———. *Nomocanon Gregorii Barhebraei*. Édité par P. Bedjan. Leipzig : O. Harrassowitz, 1898.

Belgin-Henry, A. « A Mobile Dialogue of an Immobile Saint. St. Symeon the Younger, Divine Liturgy, and the Architectural Setting ». Dans *Perceptions of the Body and Sacred Space in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*, édité par J. Bogdanović, 149–65. New York : Routledge, 2018.

Binggeli, A. « Les stylites et l'eucharistie ». Dans *Pratiques de l'eucharistie dans les Églises d'Orient et d'Occident*, édité par N. Bériou, B. Caseau et D. Rigaux, 421–44. Turnhout : Brepols, 2009.

Biscop, J.-L. « Réorganisation du monachisme syrien autour du sanctuaire de Saint-Syméon ». Dans *Les églises en monde syriaque*, édité par F. Briquel-Chatonnet, 131–67. Paris : Geuthner, 2013.

———, M. Mundell Mango et D. Orssaud. *Deir Déhès, monastère d'Antiochène. Étude architecturale.* Beyrouth : Institut français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient, 1997.

Bloom, J. *Minaret. Symbol of Islam.* Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1989.

Boero, D. « Symeon and the Making of the Stylite ». PhD dissertation, University of Southern California, 2015.

Borrut, A. « Court Astrologers and Historical Writing in Early ʿAbbāsid Baghdād. An Appraisal ». Dans *The Place to Go. Contexts of Learning in Baghdād, 750–1000 C.E.*, édité par J. Scheiner et D. Janos, 455–501. Princeton, NJ : Darwin Press, 2014.

———. *Entre mémoire et pouvoir. L'espace syrien sous les derniers Omeyyades et les premiers Abbassides (v. 72–193/692–809).* Leyde : Brill, 2011.

Bowen Savant, S. *The New Muslims of Post-conquest Iran. Tradition, Memory, and Conversion.* Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Brelaud, S. « Al-Ḥīra et ses chrétiens dans les guerres romano-perses ». *Camenulae* 15 (2016) : 1–26.

Brelaud, S. « Présences chrétiennes en Mésopotamie durant l'époque sassanide (IIIe–VIIe siècles). Géographie et société ». PhD dissertation, Sorbonne Université, 2018.

Brock, S. « Nestorian Church. A Lamentable Misnomer ». *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78 (1996) : 23–53.

Brown, P. « The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity ». *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971) : 80–101.

Callot, O., et P.-L. Gatier. « Les stylites de l'Antiochène ». Dans *Antioche de Syrie. Histoire, images et traces de la ville antique, Lyon, 4–6 octobre 2001*, édité par B. Cabouret, P.-L. Gatier et C. Saliou, 573–96. Lyon : Société des amis de la Bibliothèque Salomon-Reinach, 2004.

Caseau, B. « Syméon Stylite l'Ancien entre puanteur et parfum ». *Revue des études byzantines 63 (*2005) : 71–96.

« *Chronicon* ad annum *846* pertinens ». Édité par E. W. Brooks. Dans *Chronica Minora* 2, 157–238. Paris : CSCO 3, 1904.

« Chronicon anonymum ad AD 819 ». Dans *Chronicon anonymum ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, édité par J.-B. Chabot, 1–24. Paris : CSCO 14, 1916.

Chronicon anonymum ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens. Édité par J.-B. Chabot. Paris : CSCO 14, 1916.

« Chronicon miscellaneum ad annum Domini 724 pertinens ». Édité par E. W. Brooks. Dans *Chronica Minora* 1, 77–155. Paris : CSCO, 1903.

Chronique de Séert = Histoire nestorienne inédite. Seconde partie (I). Édité par A. Scher. *Patrologia Orientalis* 7 (1911).

Chronique de Séert = Histoire nestorienne inédite. Seconde partie (II). Édité par A. Scher. *Patrologia Orientalis* 13 (1919).

Chronique de Zuqnīn = Chronique de Denys de Tell-Mahré. Quatrième partie [. . .]. Édité par J.-B. Chabot. Paris : E. Bouillon, 1895.

Conrad, I. « Theophanes and the Arabic Historical Tradition ». *Byzantinische Forschungen* 15 (1990) : 1–44.

Conterno, M. « Theophilos, 'the More Likely Candidate'? Towards a Reappraisal of the Question of Theophanes' Oriental Source(s) ». Dans *Studies in Theophanes*, vol. 19, édité par F. Montinaro et M. Jankowiak, 383–400. Paris : Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2015.

Creswell, K. A. G. *The Evolution of the Minaret*. Londres : Burlington Magazine, 1926.

Dad-Išōʿ Qaṭrāyā. *Traité sur la solitude et la prière* (*Sept semaines de solitude*) [*Livre des degrés*]. Édité par A. Mingana. Toronto : Woodbrooke Studies, 1934.

De Biberstein Kazimirski, A. *Dictionnaire arabe-français contenant toutes les racines de la langue arabe*. Paris : Maisonneuve, 1860.

Debié, M. *L'écriture de l'histoire en syriaque. Transmissions interculturelles et constructions identitaires entre hellénisme et islam*. Louvain : Peeters, 2015.

———. « What Can We Learn from Syriac Historiography? ». Dans *Studies in Theophanes*, vol. 19, édité par F. Montinaro et M. Jankowiak, 365–82. Paris : Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2015.

Desreumaux, A. « L'épigraphie syriaque du monachisme ». Dans *Le monachisme syriaque*, édité par F. Jullien, 261–90. Paris : Geuthner, 2010.

Donner, F. « From Believers to Muslims. Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community ». *Al-Abḥāth* 50–51 (2002-3) : 9–53.

Doran, R. *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*. Collegeville, MN : Cistercian Publications, 1992.

Eychenne, M., A. Meier et É. Vigouroux. *Le waqf de la mosquée des Omeyyades de Damas. Le manuscrit ottoman d'un inventaire mamelouk établi en 816/1413. Beyrouth : Presses de l'Ifpo, 2018.*

Fauchon, C. « Les formes de vie ascétique et monastique en milieu syriaque, vᵉ–viiᵉ siècles ». Dans *Le monachisme syriaque*, édité par F. Jullien, 37–63. Paris : Geuthner, 2010.

Fiey, J.-M. *Assyrie chrétienne* 3. Beyrouth : Institut de lettres orientales, 1968.

———. *Chrétiens syriaques sous les Abbassides surtout à Bagdad, 749–1258.* Louvain : CSCO, 1980.

———. *Mossoul chrétienne. Essai sur l'histoire, l'archéologie et l'état actuel des monuments chrétiens de la ville de Mossoul.* Beyrouth : Librairie orientale, 1959.

Fisher, G. *Between Empires. Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity.* Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011.

———, et P. Wood. « Arabs and Christianity ». Dans *Arabs and Empires before Islam*, édité par G. Fisher, 276–372. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2015.

Fowden, E. K. *The Barbarian Plain. Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran.* Berkeley : University of California Press, 1999.

———. « Des églises pour les arabes, pour les nomades ? ». Dans *Les églises en monde syriaque*, édité par F. Briquel-Chatonnet, 391–412. Paris : Geuthner, 2013.

Frankfurter, D. T. M. « Stylites and Phallobates. Pillar Religions in Late Antique Syria ». *Vigiliae Christianae* 44, nᵒ 2 (1990) : 168–98.

Gatier, P.-L. « Inscriptions grecques, mosaïques et églises des débuts de l'époque islamique au Proche-Orient ». Dans *Le Proche-Orient de Justinien aux Abbassides, peuplement et déynamiques spatiales*, édité par A. Borrut, M. Debié, A. Papaconstantinou, D. Pieri et J.-P. Sodini, 7-28. Turnhout : Brepols, 2011.

Hainthaler, T. « Christian Arabs before Islam. A Short Overview ». Dans *People from the Desert. Pre-Islamic Arabs in History and Culture. Selected Essays*, édité par N. Al-Jallad, 29–44. Wiesbaden : Reichert, 2012.

Al-Ḫalīl. *Kitāb al-ʿAyn.* Édité par M. al-Maḫzūmī et I. al-Sāmarrāʾī. Bagdad : Dār al-Rašīd, 1980.

Al-Ḫaṭīb al-Baġdādī. *Taʾrīḫ Madīnat al-Salām* (*Baġdād).* Édité par B. ʿA. Maʿrūf. Beyrouth : Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, 2002.

Harrak, A. *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts III and IV. A.D. 488–775.* Toronto : Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999.

Harvey, S. *Asceticism and Society in Crisis.* Berkeley : University of California Press, 1990.

———. « The Stylite's Liturgy. Ritual and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity ». *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, nᵒ 3 (1998) : 523–39.

Hayman, A. P. *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew* [CSCO 338–339]. Louvain : Secrétariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1973

« Histoire de Rabban Hormizd ». Dans *The Histories of Rabban Hormizd the Persian and Rabban Bar-Idta* [. . .]. Édité par E. W. Budge. Londres : Luzac, 1902.

« Histoire du monastère de Bēth Qōqā ». Dans *Sources Syriaques* 1, édité par A. Mingana, 171–220. Leipzig : O. Harrassowitz, 1908.

Histoires d'Ahoudemmeh et de Marouta, métropolitains jacobites de Tagrit et de l'Orient (VIᵉ et VIIᵉ siècles). Édité par F. Nau. *Patrologia Orientalis* 3 (1909).

Hoyland, R. *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle. The Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam.* Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 2011.

Ibn Abī Šayba. *Al-Muṣannaf.* Édité par K. Y. al-Ḥawt. 7 vol. Riyad : Maktabat al-Rušd, 1988.

———. *Musnad.* Édité par ʿĀ. al-ʿAzzāzī et A. al-Mazīdī. 2 vol. Riyad : Dār al-Waṭan, 1997.

Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tāʾrīḫ madīnat Dimašq*, éd. U. al-ʿAmrawī, 80 vols. Beyrouth: Dār al-Fikr, 1995-2000.

Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamdānī. *Kitāb al-Buldān.* Édité par Y. al-Hādī. Beyrouth : ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1996.

Ibn Ḥanbal. *Musnad.* Édité par A. Šākir. 8 vol. Le Caire : Dār al-Ḥadīṯ, 1995.

Ibn Hišām. *Al-Sīra al-nabawiyya.* Édité par M. al-Saqqā, I. al-Abyārī et ʿA. al-Šallabī. Beyrouth : Iḥyāʾ Turāṯ al-ʿArabī, 1971.

Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnawarī. *Kitāb al-Jarāṯīm.* Édité par M. J. al-Ḥamīdī. 2 vol. Damas : Ministère de la Culture, s.d.

Ibn Saʿd. *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā.* Édité par M. ʿĀṭāʾ. 8 vol. Beyrouth : Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990.

Ioan, O. « Controverses entre la hiérarchie ecclésiale et les moines dans le christianisme syriaque ». Dans *Le monachisme syriaque*, édité par F. Jullien, 89–106. Paris : Geuthner, 2010.

Išōʿ-Dnaḥ de Baṣra. *Le livre de la Chasteté composé par Jésusdenah, évêque de Baçrah.* Édité par J.-B. Chabot. Rome : École française de Rome, 1896.

Išōʿ-Yahb III d'Adiabène. *Išōʿyahb Patriarchae III Liber epistularum.* Édité par R. Duval. *CSCO* 64 (1904–5).

Jean Bar Penkāyē. « Rīsh Mellē (Livre 15) ». Dans *Sources syriaques* 1, édité par A. Mingana, 143–71. Leipzig : O. Harrassowitz, 1908.

Jean d'Éphèse. « Lives of the Eastern Saints. IV: Next the Fourth History, of the Saints Abraham and Maro the Brothers ». Édité par E. W. Brooks. *Patrologia Orientalis* 17 (1923) : 56–84.

Jeffery, A. *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān.* Baroda : Oriental Institute, 1938.

Jullien, F. *Le monachisme en Perse. La réforme d'Abraham le Grand, père des moines de l'orient.* Louvain : Peeters, 2008.

———. « Les controverses entre chrétiens dans l'empire sassanide. Un enjeu identitaire ». Dans *Les controverses en milieu syriaque*, édité par F. Ruani, 209–38. Paris : Geuthner, 2016.

Keser-Kayaalp, E. « Church Building in the Ṭur ᶜAbdin in the First Centuries of the Islamic Rule ». Dans *Authority and Control in the Countryside. From Antiquity to Islam in the Mediterranean and Near East (6th–10th Century)*, édité par A. Delattre, M. Legendre et P. Sijpesteijn, 176–209. Leyde : Brill, 2018.

———. « Églises et monastères du Ṭur ᶜAbdin. Les débuts d'une architecture "syriaque" ». Dans *Les églises en monde syriaque*, édité par F. Briquel-Chatonnet, 269–88. Paris : Geuthner, 2013.

Al-Kindī. *Kitāb wulāt wa quḍāt Miṣr.* Édité par M. Ismāᶜīl et A. al-Mazīdī. Beyrouth : Dār al-Kutub al-ᶜIlmiyya, 2003.

Lammens, H. « Le chantre des Omiades. Notes bibliographiques et littéraires sur le poète arabe chrétien Akhṭal ». *Journal asiatique* 9, nᵒ 4 (1894) : 94–242 et 381–459.

———. « Un poète royal la cour des Omeyyades ». *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 8 (1903) : 325–87 et 9 (1904) : 32–64.

Lane, E. W. *An Arabic-English Lexicon.* Londres : Williams & Norgate, 1872.

Levy-Rubin, M. *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire. From Surrender to Coexistence.* Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Lietzmann, H. *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites.* Leipzig : Hinrichs, 1908.

Ménandre Protecteur. *The History of Menander the Guardsman.* Édité par R. C. Blockley. Liverpool : Francis Cairns, 1985.

Michel le Syrien. *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche, 1166–1199.* Édité par J.-B. Chabot. Paris : Pierre Leroux, 1910.

Muḫtaṣar al-aḫbār al-bīᶜiyya. Édité par B. Ḥaddād. Bagdad : al-Dīwān, 2000.

Muqātil b. Sulaymān. *Tafsīr.* Édité par ʿA. M. Šiḥāta. 5 vol. Beyrouth : Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāṯ al-ʿArabī, 2002.

Nasrallah, J. « Le couvent de Saint Siméon l'Alépin. Témoignages littéraires et jalons sur l'histoire ». *Parole de l'Orient* 1 (1970) : 327–56.

———. « Couvents de la Syrie du nord portant le nom de Siméon ». *Syria* 49, nᵒ 1/2 (1972) : 127–59.

———. « L'orthodoxie de Siméon Stylite l'Alépin et sa survie dans l'Église Melchite ». *Parole de l'Orient* 2, nᵒ 2 (1971) : 345–65.

Nau, F. *Les Arabes chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie du VIIᵉ au VIIIᵉ siècle.* Paris : Cahiers de la Société asiatique, 1933.

———. *Les canons et les résolutions canoniques.* Paris : P. Lethielleux, 1906.

———. « Les parties inédites de la chronique de Denys de Tell Mahré ». *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 2 (1897) : 11–68.

Noth, A. « Problems of Differentiation between Muslims and non-Muslims. Re-reading the "Ordinances of ʿUmar" ». *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987) : 103–24.

Palmer, A. *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier. The Early History of Tur ʿAbdin.* Londres : Cambridge University Press, 1990.

———. *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles.* Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 1993.

———. « Who Wrote the Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite? ». Dans *Lingua Restituta Orientalis. Festgabe für Julius Assfalg*, édité par M. Görg et R. Schulz, 272–84. Wiesbaden : O. Harrassowitz, 1990.

Payne, R. « Monks, Dinars, and Date Palms. Hagiographical Production and the Expansion of Monastic Institutions in the Early Islamic Persian Gulf ». *Arabian Archeology and Epigraphy* 22 (2011) : 97–111.

Payne Smith, J. *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of Robert Payne Smith.* Oxford : Clarendon, 1903.

Peeters, P. « Saint Syméon Stylite et ses premiers biographes ». *Analecta Bollandiana* 61 (1943) : 29–71.

———. *Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine.* Bruxelles : Société des Bollandistes, 1950.

Peña, I., P. Castellana et R. Fernandez. *Les Reclus syriens. Recherches sur les anciennes formes de vie solitaire en Syrie.* Milan : Franciscan Printing Press, 1980.

———. *Les stylites syriens.* Milan : Franciscan Printing Press, 1975.

Penn, M. *Envisioning Islam. Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World.* Philadelphie : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

———. *When Christians First Met Muslims. A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam.* Oakland : University of California Press, 2015.

Pierre, S. « Les ʿAmmē en "Ğazīra et en Occident". Génèse et fixation d'un ethnonyme standardisé pour les tribus arabes chrétiennes. Les Tanukōyē, Ṭūʿōyē, ʿAqūlōyē à l'âge marwānide ». *Annales islamologiques* 52 (2018) : 11–44.

———. « Le développement du stylitisme et l'enjeu de la christianisation des Arabes en Syrie-Mésopotamie tardo-antique (vᵉ–viiiᵉ siècles) ». *Camenulae* (à paraître).

———. « The Subjugation and Taxation of the Banū Taghlib in Jazīra and Mosul (ca. 153–193 H/770–809 CE) ». Dans *The Reach of Empire*, édité par S. Heidemann et K. Mewes. Berlin : De Gruyter, 2021.

Ps-Josué le Stylite. *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite composed in Syriac A.D. 507.* Édité par W. Wright. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1882.

Reinink, G. J. « Tradition and the Formation of the "Nestorian" Identity in Sixth- to Seventh-Century Iraq ». Dans *Religious Origins of Nations? The Christian Communities of the Middle East, édité par.* T. Bas Romeny, 217–50. Leyde : Brill, 2009.

Robinson, C. *Empire and Elites after the Muslim Conquest. The Transformation of Northern Mesopotamia.* Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Sahner, C. « The Monasticism of My Community is Jihad. A Debate on Asceticism, Sex, and Warfare in Early Islam ». *Arabica* 64, nᵒ 2 (2017) : 149–83.

Al-Samʿānī, S. E. *Acta Sanctorum Martyrum Orientalium et Occidentalium in Duas Partes Distributa. Adcedvnt Acta S. Simeonis Stylitae. Omnia Nvnc Primvm Svb Avspiciis Johannis V. Lusitanorum Regis e Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana Prodeunt.* Rome : J. Collini, 1748.

Schachner, L. « The Archaeology of the Stylite ». Dans *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, édité par D. M. Gwynn et S. Bangert, 329–97. Leyde : Brill, 2010.

Schacht, J. « Ein archaischer Minaret-Typ in Ägypten und Anatolien ». *Ars Islamica* 5, nᵒ 1 (1938) : 46–54.

Segal, J. « Arabs in Syriac Literature before the Rise of Islam ». *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984) : 89–124.

Al-Šāfiʿī. *Al-Umm.* 8 vol. Beyrouth : Dār al-Fikr, 1990.

Shahid, I. *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century.* Washington, DC : Dumbarton Oaks, 1995.

Simonsohn, U. *A Common Justice. The Legal Allegiances of Christians and Jews under Early Islam.* Philadelphie : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

———. « Seeking Justice among the 'Outsiders': Christian Recourse to Non-ecclesiastical Judicial Systems under Early Islam ». *Church History and Religious Culture* 89, nᵒ 1–3 (2009) : 191–216.

Sizgorich, T. *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity. Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam.* Philadelphie : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

Soler, E. « La figure de Syméon Stylite l'Ancien et les controverses christologiques des vᵉ–vɪᵉ siècles en Orient ». Dans *Dieu(x) et hommes. Histoire et iconographie des sociétés païennes et chrétiennes de l'antiquité à nos jours. Mélanges en l'honneur de Françoise Thelamon*, édité par S. Crogiez-Pétrequin, 187–210. Caen : Publications des universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2005.

———. « Al-Akhṭal at the Court of ʿAbd al-Malik. The Qaṣida and the Construction of Umayyad Authority ». Dans *Christians and Others in the Umayyad State*, édité par A. Borrut et F. M. Donner, 129–55. Chicago : Oriental Institute, 2016.

———. « Umayyad Panegyric and the Poetics of Islamic Hegemony. Al-Akhṭal's "Khaffa al-Qaṭīnu" ». *Journal of Arabic Literature* 28, nᵒ 2 (1997) : 89–122.

Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition. Édité par A. Vööbus. 2 vol. *CSCO* 367 et 375 (1975–76).

Synodicon orientale ou recueil de synodes nestoriens. Édité par J.-B. Chabot. Paris : Imprimerie nationale, 1902.

Al-Ṭabarī. *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl al-Qurʾān.* Édité par A. M. Šākir, 24 vol. Le Caire : Dār al-Maʿārif, 1961.

———. *Taʾrīḫ al-rusul wa-l-mulūk.* Édité par M. de Goeje. 3 séries. Leyde : Brill, 1879.

Takahashi, H. and L Van Rompay, "Reshʿayna, Theodosiopolis". Dans *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, édité par S. Brock et al., 351. Piscataway : Gorgias, 2011.

Tannous, J. *Between Christology and Kalam? The Life and Letters of George, Bishop of the Arab Tribes.* Piscataway, NJ : Gorgias Press, 2009.

———. *The Making of the Medieval Middle East. Religion, Society, and Simple Believers.* Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 2018.

Théodoret de Cyr. *Histoire des moines de Syrie.* Édité par P. Canivet et A. Leroy-Molinghen. Paris : Le Cerf, 1979.

Théophane le Confesseur. *Chronographia.* Édité par C. de Boor. Leipzig : Teubner, 1885.

Thomas de Margā. *The Book of Governors. The Historia Monastica of Thomas, Bishop of Margâ A. D. 840* [. . .]. Édité par E. W. Budge. Londres : K. Paul, 1893.

Tillier, M. *L'invention du cadi. La justice des musulmans, des juifs et des chrétiens aux premiers siècles de l'Islam.* Paris : Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2017.

Tisserant, E. « Codex Zuqninensis rescriptus veteris testamenti. Texte grec des manuscrits Vatican Syriaque 162 et Mus. Brit. Additionnel 14665 ». *Studi e testi* 23 (1911).

Trimingham, J. *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times.* Londres : Longman, 1979.

Trombley, F. *Hellenic Religion and Christianization, c. 370–529.* Leyde : Brill, 1993.

Vie de Gabriel de Bēt Qūsṭān. Dans « A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Qartmin Trilogy », édité par A. Palmer, 55–92. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Vie de Siméon des Oliviers. Ms. Mārdīn, Église des quarante martyrs, nᵒ 259. 105r–127r.

Vie de Théodote. Ms. Mārdīn, Église des quarante martyrs, nᵒ 275. 237r–296v.

Vööbus, A. *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient. A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East.* Louvain : CSCO, 1958.

Wood. P. « Christian Elite Networks in the Jazīra, c. 730–850 ». Dans *Transregional and Regional Elites. Connecting the Early Islamic Empire*, édité par H.-L. Hagemann et S. Heidemann, 359–84. Berlin : De Guyter, 2020.

Wright, W. *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum.* Londres : Gilbert & Rivington, 1871.

Special Dossier

Islamic History Broadly Conceived:
A Tribute to Michael Cook and the Holberg Seminar

Guest Editors
Sébastien Garnier, Matthew L. Keegan,
and Pamela Klasova

Introduction:

- Sébastien Garnier, Matthew L. Keegan, and Pamela Klasova, "A Note from the Holbergians"

- Antoine Borrut, "The Holberg Seminar"

Contents:

- Theodore S. Beers, "The Treatment of Coeval Persian Poetry in Arabic Anthologies of the Eleventh/Seventeenth Century: A Preliminary Study"

- Sébastien Garnier, "Dans le ventre de l'histoire : Sindbad le marin ou la satire du glouton ?"

- Matthew L. Keegan, "*Adab* Without the Crusades: The Inebriated Solidarity of a Young Officer's Hunting Epistle"

- Pamela Klasova, "*Ḥadīth* as Common Discourse: Reflections on the Intersectarian Dissemination of the Creation of the Intellect Tradition"

- Daisy Livingston, "The Paperwork of a Mamluk *Muqṭaʿ*: Documentary Life Cycles, Archival Spaces, and the Importance of Documents Lying Around"

- Christian Mauder, "Being Persian in Late Mamluk Egypt: The Construction and Significance of Persian Ethnic Identity in the Salons of Sultan Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 906–922/1501–1516)"

Introduction:
A Note from the Holbergians

SÉBASTIEN GARNIER

EHESS, Paris

(sebastiengarnier@hotmail.fr)

PAMELA KLASOVA

Macalester College

(pklasova@macalester.edu)

MATTHEW L. KEEGAN

Barnard College of Columbia University

(mlkeegan@barnard.edu)

O n the last day of each year's Holberg Seminar, we Holbergians would gather at the home of Michael Cook and his wife Kim for a delicious and delightful dinner. The final meeting was held over four days in the summer of 2018, and there was a feeling of nostalgia in the air as we picked over our coffee, wine, and dessert at that closing dinner. Rather spontaneously, each member of the group shared their own reflections and heartfelt thanks to Michael, to Kim, and to the professors and graduate students who made up the Holberg Seminar. For many of us, these meetings were the highlight of the academic year: an opportunity to gather with a wide range of excellent scholars who would read our work and respond to it thoughtfully. But the Holberg Seminar's long duration meant that it was also a time when we could be ourselves, without the facades and performances of knowledge that we all sometimes fall back on in academic settings.

That level of comfort did not come spontaneously. Many of us faced the first meeting of the Holberg Seminar with both excitement and trepidation. We were to be surrounded by well-established scholars and brilliant graduate students from an array of different fields. But after four years of exhausting and exhilarating meetings, what had once seemed intimidating was now a room full of familiar faces and supportive colleagues who could find our mistakes with kindness, broaden our knowledge of adjacent fields, and deepen our understanding of our own texts. This kind of supportive community is precious in academic life. And it takes time. Each summer, we met for four days, from the early morning to the late evening. Soon enough, everyone had little choice but to lose the academic personas they assumed and be themselves. Michael designed the seminar so that we devoted at least three hours to each submitted thesis chapter or article draft. The format

was intense and exhausting, but also extremely stimulating. After three hours of questions, corrections, and comments, the Holbergian in the "hot seat" was inevitably exhausted but also inevitably enriched. It is, after all, such a rare experience for a graduate student to have so many thoughtful and meticulous responses to a piece of writing prior to the dissertation defense. Each meeting broadened our horizons and inspired us to venture into fields beyond our own.

The fact that the Holberg Seminar was such a success and had such an impact on so many graduate students will come as no surprise to those who know Michael (as he asked us to call him at our first meeting). He is a consummate engineer of pedagogical spaces. In the Holberg Seminar, he gathered a group of scholars who worked on different fields of Islamic history, from the earliest Arabic historiography to early modern Persian literature, Islamic theology, and social history. This plethora of academic perspectives from diverse subfields meant that our fellow Holbergians were often asking us questions that we had never thought to pose before, thus revealing the blind spots of our individual specialties and academic disciplines. The Holbergians came with academic training from Egypt, France, Germany, England, the Czech Republic, and the United States, and we each came to learn something more about these distinct academic traditions as the years went on, just as we also came to appreciate the particular quirks and queries we were likely to receive from our colleagues. As we developed our own scholarly voices, we learned to appreciate the proclivities and predilections of the other Holbergians. The peculiar styles of the members' contributions became a source of warmth, familiarity, and community. These divergent methodological approaches proved harmonious rather than cacophonous, thanks to Michael and to the other Holberg faculty members.

Antoine Borrut, Jack Tannous, and Khaled El-Rouayheb, the other Holberg faculty members, each contributed in their own way. Antoine helped us see new connections to existing scholarship, enthusiastically circulating sources that were related to each paper as he helped guide the discussion. Khaled's quiet, calm voice would offer succinct comments that often revealed the unresolved issues lurking behind each paper. Jack's perspective from Late Antiquity offered material that many of us would have overlooked, and he delivered it with the affable air of a storyteller. Special thanks are also due to Marina Rustow and Lale Behzadi, who brought their expertise as guest scholars, as well as to Sabine Schmidtke, who hosted us at the Institute for Advanced Studies for part of our deliberations in 2017. The willingness and ability of each of these scholars to reach outside of their own subfield to engage with the wide variety of scholarly disciplines on offer at the Holberg was a model for us all, encouraging us to stretch ourselves beyond our habitual modes of thinking. We also wish to thank the staff at Princeton's Department of Near Eastern Studies for their administrative support in organizing our visits.

And, of course, there's Michael, who made Holberg happen. One remarkable thing about Michael is his indefatigability through the long days of Holberg. He seemed to derive immense energy and pleasure from listening to the conversation unfold around each paper, smiling or chuckling at this or that comment. But in his typical, self-effacing manner, he would wait patiently for everyone else to offer up their thoughts. He would then take out his scribbled notes to see if something had been left unsaid. When we had exhausted our stores,

Michael somehow still had a crucial nugget that we had overlooked. The unselfishness of allowing others to speak first was not, we imagine, simply a matter of temperament. The point of the seminar was to build knowledge as a group, not through attacking one another or posturing, but rather through a collective intellectual effort. Scholarship need not be a solitary affair, and Michael's gift to us was making our graduate education that much less solitary. It is much more fun and much more fruitful when scholarship is undertaken together and when critiques come from colleagues who are looking out for you and not trying to tear you down. It is a testament to Michael's spirit of scholarly generosity that we have all benefited so much from the Holberg experience and that it generated personal and scholarly connections that will long outlast it. For many of us, it is difficult to imagine what would have come of our graduate experience without it, but one thing is certain: It would have been a lot less fun.

We, the graduate students of the Holberg Seminar, dedicate this special dossier to Michael Cook for giving us that annual experience of academic camaraderie and rejuvenation. It was at that final dinner that one of our number asked Michael if, upon receiving the Holberg award for a career of academic excellence, he might have spent his award on a yacht or something of the sort. In his typically humble manner, he replied that he doesn't know how to sail (this story is a case of *riwāya bi-l-maʿnā* and not *bi-l-lafẓ*). But given the frequent appearance of Michael's broad smile during the swampy Princeton summer days we spent around a seminar table, we like to hope that Michael is pleased with what came of his award.

Introduction:
The Holberg Seminar

ANTOINE BORRUT

University of Maryland

(aborrut@umd.edu)

In recognition of his remarkable contributions to scholarship on the history and traditions of Islam, Michael Cook was awarded the prestigious Holberg Prize in 2014. Established by the Norwegian Parliament in 2003, the award is intended "to increase awareness of the value of academic scholarship in the arts, humanities, social sciences, law, and theology." In keeping with his abiding commitment to teaching, Michael decided to use part of the award to establish the Holberg Seminar, envisioned as an international graduate seminar on pre-1800 Islamic history. Michael invited Khaled El-Rouayheb (Harvard University), Jack Tannous (Princeton University), and myself to assist in organizing the seminar, starting with the selection of participants. Drawn from a considerable pool of applicants, a highly cosmopolitan group of ten students—hailing from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Egypt—was thus formed. The plan was to work with the same cohort over several years; when a few participants withdrew for personal reasons, they were replaced by equally talented peers.

The inaugural meeting took place in June 2015. Subsequently, the seminar met in Princeton every summer until June 2018. Each of the annual meetings began with a dinner followed by three to four days of dense programming. The final session always took place at Michael's home and was followed by a lovely farewell dinner. Each year, the students had the opportunity to extend their stay in Princeton for a few days to enjoy the endless resources of the Firestone Library.

The central aim of the Seminar was to provide the participants with sustained and high-level feedback on their research and writing at a formative stage in their careers. This approach generated an extraordinary level of discussion, far superior to anything I have

experienced to date in my own career. The format followed, in part, Michael's practice of using his own graduate seminar as a "dissertation chapter clinic." Each year, several of the Holberg students submitted chapters of their theses or draft articles in advance; each submission was then read by all the participants and divided among multiple discussants. We usually spent about three hours on each paper. A typical day entailed discussing a first paper in the morning, a second one in the afternoon, and a third one over dinner. Conversations often continued well into the evening. Another option was for participants to give a talk on a topic of interest, such as new scholarly trends or recent publications. When time allowed, faculty members also presented new research of their own. In this fashion, the students were exposed to what can be termed best intellectual and scholarly practices.

In addition, following our initial meeting, we decided each year to invite a major scholar to present her own work and share with the students the trajectory of her career and the lessons it offered to those embarking on similar paths. Marina Rustow (Princeton University), Sabine Schmidtke (Princeton, Institute for Advanced Study), and Lale Behzadi (University of Bamberg) all proved significant sources of inspiration for the participants. Sabine Schmidtke also generously hosted part of the seminar at the Institute in June 2017, thus giving the students an opportunity to interact with IAS visiting scholars that year.

Another, more latent purpose of the seminar was to provide a setting in which the students would get to know each other's scholarly profiles well, develop relations of trust, and network with each other, as well as with the faculty members and other guests. Only time will tell, of course, but the co-convenors anticipate that the Holberg Seminar will continue to bear fruit in the work of its graduate participants.

List of the Holberg Participants:

Najah Nadi Ahmad
Theodore S. Beers
Sébastien Garnier
Lidia Gocheva
Matthew L. Keegan
Pamela Klasová
Daisy Livingston
Christian Mauder
Eugénie Rébillard
Naseem Surhio
Edward Zychowicz-Coghill

The Treatment of Coeval Persian Poetry
in Arabic Anthologies of the Eleventh/Seventeenth
Century: A Preliminary Study*

Theodore S. Beers
Freie Universität Berlin

(theo.beers@fu-berlin.de)

Abstract

*In this short article, I draw attention to the discussion of poets from Iran (*al-ʿAjam*) in two Arabic biographical anthologies of the eleventh/seventeenth century: the* Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr *of Ibn Maʿṣūm (d. 1120/1709) and the* Nafḥat al-rayḥāna *of Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī (d. 1111/1699). The latter text not only addresses the careers of noteworthy Persian poets, but it also presents samples of their work that al-Muḥibbī has translated into Arabic verse. In the case of the poet Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676), at least one of al-Muḥibbī's translations can be traced to the original Persian. This reveals a specific instance of cross-cultural literary appreciation in the Ottoman-Safavid-Mughal period.*

Introduction

This paper is intended to alert specialists in Persian literary history to a heretofore unnoted curiosity: that some Arabic literati of the eleventh/seventeenth century were familiar with recent happenings in Persian poetry. As a general statement, given the context of Ottoman cosmopolitanism, this should come as no surprise. However, it is the particulars of the present case that are most interesting. Two anthologists of the period, the Damascene Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī (d. 1111/1699) and the Medinese (though widely

---

itinerant) Ibn Maʿṣūm (d. 1120/1709), included sections on ʿAjamī poets in works that are otherwise mainly devoted to surveying literary and intellectual figures from around the Arab world. The result is that we are able to gain some insight into *which* Iranian or Persian poets of the early modern era developed reputations that crossed into the Arabic cultural sphere. (Of course, it was nothing special for Ottoman Turkish literati of this period to have extensive knowledge of Persian poetry, from the classics to the works of some of their contemporaries. But here we are considering Arabic anthologies, which represent a different scenario—an issue to which we will return.)

It should be acknowledged at the outset that what follows is one modest result from an initial assessment of a few sources. There are, in all likelihood, early modern Arabic anthologists apart from al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maʿṣūm who incorporate some treatment of Persian poets into their work. And it is difficult to imagine the full range of questions that might productively be investigated with regard to the sharing of literary culture across nominal political and linguistic lines in the Ottoman-Safavid-Mughal era. We are currently at a point at which the fields of Persian and Arabic literary history, each in its own way, are engaged in the process of revisiting texts from what was long considered a period of decline.[1] It will require still more time for us to understand the broader regional dialogues that accompanied this so-called decadence.

For the moment, we can pick a bit of low-hanging fruit. Among the simplest questions to ask of the sources at hand are the following: Which Persian poets do al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maʿṣūm discuss in their anthologies? What do they have to say about those figures? What selections of verse do they quote, and in what manner? A particularly exciting finding is that al-Muḥibbī provides a notice on the poet Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī (d. ca. 1087/1676), who was not long dead at this time, and translates snippets of his poetry into Arabic—into Arabic verse, no less. We will see that it is possible, in at least one case, to identify the original Persian poem(s) in Ṣāʾib's *dīvān.* In the process, we find an innovative image that Ṣāʾib deploys in a number of his *ghazal*s, and which was evidently successful enough to find its way to Damascus and to be rendered into Arabic. Such a result is already useful, despite the preliminary nature of the current paper.

A Note of Appreciation

Before moving forward, I must express my gratitude to the members of the Holberg Seminar on Islamic History, a group that met annually at Princeton between 2015 and 2018. The seminar was established by Michael Cook after he was awarded the Holberg Prize in 2014. The aim of this paper and the special issue in which it appears is to honor Michael, the other senior scholars who led the seminar—Khaled El-Rouayheb, Antoine Borrut, and Jack Tannous—and the graduate student members, myself included, who were

---

given transformative mentorship and learned a great deal from one another over the course of four years.

Considering this paper and the ongoing research that it represents, I can thank the Holberg Seminar in at least three ways. First, it was Khaled who suggested that I examine Arabic literary anthologies of the eleventh/seventeenth century, since he had studied them and noticed mention of Persian poets. I am not sure whether I would have stumbled upon this connection on my own or heard about it from anyone else. Second, in a more general sense, the other members of the Holberg group—who are mostly Arabists of one stripe or another—always encouraged me to continue working with Arabic sources in addition to my specialization in Persian. Our field stands in need of researchers who are able and willing to engage with texts in multiple languages and from different traditions. With regard to the literary history of the early modern Near East, it is relatively easy to find scholars with mastery of both Persian and Turkic (Sooyong Kim and Ferenc Csirkés come to mind). The artificial boundary in research between Persian and Arabic seems a bit stronger for the time being. In any case, were it not for my experiences in the Holberg Seminar, I might have remained in the safe territory of classical Persian poetry. Third, and finally, committing to writing a few thoughts about the anthologies of al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maʿṣūm, long before I will have the ability to do justice to the topic, strikes me as a reminder of how much my research plans have been enriched through interaction with my Holberg colleagues and mentors—and through Michael's generosity. I made note of so many questions that demand further study that I will likely never stop reaping dividends from the long days and evenings that we spent together in Jones Hall, listening to the cicadas' song and the pattering rain in the unmistakable atmosphere of the New Jersey summer.

Setting Out the Problem

Did Arabic literati of the early modern period follow contemporary developments in Persian poetry? The answer is clearly yes, to an extent; this much will be demonstrated below. But it is difficult to find discussion of the matter in scholarship on Persian literary history. It is certainly possible that this has been addressed in studies that I have not managed to find. And I will be pleased if the process of bringing this paper to publication makes me, and others, aware of additional prior literature.[2] To take a specific example, none of what I have read about Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī, either in Persian or in European languages, mentions his inclusion in the anthology of al-Muḥibbī.[3] If the connection were widely known, it would

---

2. There is more scholarship on literary interplay between Arabic and Persian in earlier historical periods. In this connection, two recent papers by Alexander Key and an important monograph in Persian by Āẕartāsh Āẕarnūsh should be highlighted: Alexander Key, "Moving from Persian to Arabic," in *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, ed. William Granara, Alireza Korangy, and Roy Mottahedeh, 93–140 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016); idem, "Translation of Poetry from Persian to Arabic: ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī and Others," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 5 (2018): 146–76; Āẕartāsh Āẕarnūsh, *Chālish-i miyān-i Fārsī va ʿArabī: Sada-hā-yi nukhust* (Tehran: Nashr-i Nay, 2008). Extending this body of work to later periods will be a valuable endeavor.

3. For a review, see Theodore S. Beers, "*Taẕkirah-i Khayr al-Bayān*: The Earliest Source on the Career and Poetry of Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī (d. *ca.* 1087/1676)," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 24 (2016): 114–38.

merit a note in any overview of the poet's biography and legacy.[4] There can be no doubt about the pertinence of the fact that Ṣāʾib's reputation spread to Damascus, with samples of his work being translated into Arabic, either during his life or within a couple of decades of his death. So there is clearly reason to draw further attention to these sources.

In any event, given that I propose to offer a bit of new insight into a question that does not have a well-defined treatment in the existing literature, it might be helpful to begin by sketching a few relevant ideas.

First, and most importantly, there should be no assumption that a cultural barrier stood between the Ottoman Arab provinces and Safavid Iran, or between the classical Persian and Arabic poetic traditions. If anything, we should default to the hypothesis that the Persian poets of a given era had some awareness of, if not interaction with, coeval Arabic poetry—and vice versa. It is in no way counterintuitive or, a priori, surprising that anthologists such as Ibn Maʿṣūm and al-Muḥibbī should have paid some attention to literary happenings in Iran and the broader Persianate sphere. What would have prevented authors in these lands from becoming aware of one another? At the same time, the intuitiveness of a phenomenon does not obviate the need to go to the trouble of investigating it. It is plausible that a Damascene intellectual would hear about a few of the famous Iranian poets of his day. The resulting discussion in an Arabic anthology may still be new to researchers (especially Persianists).

Second, there is probably a kernel of truth to the idea in Near Eastern history that more Persian-speakers were versed in Arabic literature than Arabic-speakers were versed in Persian, and, in turn, that more Turkic-speakers were versed in Arabic and Persian literature than either Arabic-speakers or Persian-speakers were versed in Turkic. This is, in part, a simple matter of chronology. The classics of Arabic poetry stretch back to the pre-Islamic era. The great works of New Persian literature (in poetry and prose) begin to appear in the fourth/tenth century. Turkic literature, by contrast, although it can be traced to the same early period, took longer to attain critical mass, at least in written form. It is illustrative that the work of the Timurid statesman-intellectual ʿAlī Shīr Navāʾī (d. 906/1501) is considered to have played a foundational role in the development of Turkic poetry, with classical Persian models among the dominant influences in this process.

Another obvious consideration is the use of Arabic in religious contexts and in the sciences. Any educated person would need to learn Arabic for purposes as fundamental as studying the Qurʾan, regardless of what poetry or belle-lettrist prose he or she might also read. These points are not worth belaboring. We know that transmission and influence in the literary culture of the premodern Near East were both multidirectional and continuous.[5]

---

4. See, for example, Paul E. Losensky, "Ṣāʾeb Tabrizi," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*; and Aḥmad Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, *Kārvān-i Hind: Dar aḥvāl va āṣār-i shāʿirān-i ʿaṣr-i Ṣafavī kih bih Hindūstān rafta-and*, 2 vols. (Mashhad: Āstān-i Quds-i Rażavī, 1369/1990–91), 700ff.

5. One of the more vivid cases in this dynamic is *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, a book that was repeatedly translated and adapted in all of the region's literary languages. The Arabic text of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ was reworked in Persian (ca. 540/1146) by Naṣr Allāh Munshī—whose version became influential enough that it was retranslated into Arabic in the Ayyubid period, under the title *Siyar al-mulūk* (ca. 683–98/1284–99). A later Persian adaptation, the

But we have valid reasons to be less predisposed to expect Arabic literati to have knowledge of Persian poets, in distinction to the familiarity that Persian literati are assumed to have with the Arabic tradition. It bears noting that some Persian biographical anthologies (*tazkira*s), including the genre-defining *Tazkirat al-shuʿarāʾ* (892/1487) of Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, include prefatory sections that honor the great Arabic poets.[6] The inverse is hardly true.

Third, on a related note, there is a difference between reading the older, "canonical" works of another literary tradition and following its recent or current developments. The former seems to have been more common in the case of intercultural appreciation between Arabic and Persian. If we found that an Arabic anthologist or *balāgha* theorist mentions Firdawsī (d. ca. 411/1020), Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), or Saʿdī Shīrāzī (d. ca. 690/1291), we would not be surprised in the slightest, given the longstanding importance of these figures. The *Shāhnāma* even saw a partial translation into Arabic at the hands of al-Fatḥ b. ʿAlī al-Bundārī (d. after 639/1241–42).[7] (There is no indication that al-Bundārī's rendering was particularly influential in its own right, but the fact that it was produced speaks to the status of Firdawsī's original.) A similar tendency holds in Persian authors' engagement with the Arabic tradition. For instance, the prefatory discussion in Dawlatshāh's *tazkira*, mentioned above, starts with Labīd (d. ca. 40/660–61) and goes no further than the generation of al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122). Dawlatshāh was writing in the 1480s, but it is not made explicit whether he was familiar with Arabic poetry from later than the sixth/twelfth century. A hypothetical equivalent of what we find with al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maʿṣūm—namely, an early modern Persian anthology that includes discussion of Arabic poets recently active in the Ottoman provinces—would be noteworthy indeed. The bias of classicism is perhaps more consistent, and more relevant, than the imbalance between Persians' familiarity with Arabic and Arabs' familiarity with Persian.

Fourth, on another related topic, it should be borne in mind that many Persian poets also composed verse in Arabic. This is, in fact, the context in which a chapter on Iran (*al-ʿAjam*) appears in Ibn Maʿṣūm's anthology: he focuses on Arabic poetry by his contemporaries from that land. (The differences between the approaches of al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maʿṣūm will be discussed below.) I have suggested that there is some validity to the idea that Arabs were less likely to be knowledgeable about Persian literature. One of the manifestations of this phenomenon is the relative paucity of authors whose native and primary language was Arabic but who also wrote in Persian. A list of figures meeting these criteria would be short, and they would fall under special circumstances. (Among the first examples that come to mind are the Shiʿi scholars who moved from the Jabal ʿĀmil region to Iran in the Safavid

---

Anvār-i suhaylī of Ḥusayn Vāʿiz Kāshifī (d. 910/1504–5), served as the basis for an Ottoman Turkish translation, the *Humāyūn-nāma* of Ali Vasi Çelebi (d. 959/1543–44). On this complex process, see Dagmar Riedel, "Kalila wa Demna i. Redactions and Circulation," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

6. See Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tazkirat al-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Fāṭima ʿAlāqa (Tehran: Pizhūhishgāh-i ʿUlūm-i Insānī va Muṭālaʿāt-i Farhangī, 2007), 33ff.

7. See David Durand-Guédy, "Al-Bundārī, al-Fatḥ b. ʿAlī," in *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 3rd ed.

period, such as Shaykh Bahāʾī, d. 1030/1621.)[8] The fact that it was common for Persian poets to have some work in Arabic may represent an additional vector by which they could gain an international reputation.

Fifth, whereas we still do not know a great deal about the sharing of poetry or belles lettres between the Arabic and Persian spheres in the early modern era, somewhat more work has been done on cosmopolitanism in intellectual culture. Of particular note here is an article by Khaled El-Rouayheb, which demonstrates that the eleventh/seventeenth century saw a kind of efflorescence of scholarship in the Ottoman Arab provinces.[9] El-Rouayheb discusses a number of important authors of this period, highlighting ways in which their work was influenced and invigorated through new contact with the ideas of Persian and Maghribī scholars. During the eleventh/seventeenth century, there was some migration of intellectuals from Safavid territory in the Caucasus to Ottoman Syria; from India to the Ḥijāz (Medina in particular); and from the Maghrib to Egypt. These movements gave students in the Ottoman provinces access to works with which they were previously unfamiliar—including, in the case of Persian influence in Syria, a number of commentaries by Jalāl al-Dīn Davānī (d. 908/1502) and ʿIṣām al-Dīn Isfarāʾīnī (d. ca. 943/1536–37). El-Rouayheb also points to a specific individual who settled in Damascus in this period and became a successful teacher credited with broadening the horizons of local intellectuals: Mullā Maḥmūd al-Kurdī (d. 1074/1663–64). He was one of a number of Sunni Kurdish or Azeri scholars who migrated westward into Ottoman territory upon the conquests of the Safavid Shah ʿAbbās I (r. 995–1038/1587–1629) in the Caucasus.[10] Maḥmūd al-Kurdī spent several decades teaching in Damascus, and his students carried his approach to a new generation, which included none other than Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī.

We could, therefore, posit a logical narrative to explain the way in which al-Muḥibbī, at least, initially became aware of Persian poets of his century. There was a political development—the seizure of territories in the Caucasus by the Safavids—which spurred the movement of scholars from that region into Syria. There they began teaching books (mainly ones written in Arabic) by prominent authors from the Persianate realm; and this could have given rise to a broader interest in the intellectual and cultural products of the eastern lands. In the end, a Damascene such as al-Muḥibbī was primed to learn Persian and to read (and translate!) a certain amount of recently composed poetry. There is, no doubt, more to the story, but this is a useful starting point.[11] We can leverage scholarship in intellectual history to begin to understand a related, but less-studied, phenomenon in literary history. It is also worth noting that the connection between Medina and India explains the familiarity of Ibn Maʿṣūm with Iranian and Persian poets. As we will see in the following section, he

---

8. See Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Jabal ʿĀmel," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*; and Etan Kohlberg, "Bahāʾ-al-Din ʿĀmeli," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

9. Khaled El-Rouayheb, "Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Florescence of the 17th Century," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 2 (May 2006): 263–81.

10. On these campaigns, see H. R. Roemer, "The Safavid Period," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart, 189–350 (Cambridge, 1986), 266–68.

11. As is mentioned below, al-Muḥibbī spent time in Istanbul, and he evidently learned Turkish. It is possible that the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the capital played a role in introducing him to Persian literature.

spent most of his life in India, starting when his father was offered a position at the Quṭb-shāhī court in the Deccan.

Where does this leave us? There may not be an acknowledged framework in the field of Persian literature studies within which to analyze the reception of Persian poetry among early modern Arabic anthologists. This type of question represents a small niche. But we may be guided by the ideas outlined above. Should we be surprised to find discussion of coeval Persian poets in Arabic biographical works of the eleventh/seventeenth century? Probably not, though it would be difficult to dispute the uncommonness of such sources. We are more accustomed to seeing Persian authors' engagement with the Arabic tradition— and, in many cases, their writing in Arabic—than we are to encountering the inverse. The reciprocal influence between Persian and Turkic poetry in the Timurid and Ottoman-Safavid periods is well understood,[12] but it seems less obvious how to conceptualize the Persian-Arabic nexus.[13] There is also the tendency, mentioned above, for the reception of an outside cultural tradition to focus on "canonical" texts. For now, we can begin by considering the sources before us and some of the factors that help to explain how authors such as al-Muḥibbī and Ibn Maʿṣūm may have gained their interest in, and familiarity with, the poets of al-ʿAjam.

Introducing the Authors and Texts

Although the work of al-Muḥibbī is of greater importance to this paper, I will start with a brief review of the career of Ibn Maʿṣūm, since his anthology was completed earlier and seems to have reached and influenced his Damascene contemporary.[14] His full name (sans patronymics) is ʿAlī Khān Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibn Maʿṣūm, and he was born in Medina in 1052/1642. His father, Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad (d. 1086/1675), belonged to a Shiʿi *sayyid* family, whereas his mother was the daughter of a Sunni merchant-cum-jurist. As will become clear, Ibn Maʿṣūm identified as a Shiʿi, or at least presented himself as such. Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad had a rather complicated career, which need not be addressed in detail here; but the most relevant point is that he was able to secure a position at the court of the Quṭb-shāhī dynasty

---

12. To give an illustrative example, the Ottoman historian Mustafa Âli of Gallipoli (d. 1008/1600) was an admirer and, for a time, a correspondent of the poet Muḥtasham Kāshānī (d. 996/1588)—despite the latter's close ties to the Safavid court. See Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541–1600)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 142.

13. One approach is to consider the process whereby Persian literature influenced developments in Ottoman Turkish, which in turn had an impact on Arabic authors. This phenomenon has been studied, for example, with reference to the history of the Arabic chronogram. See Thomas Bauer, "Vom Sinn der Zeit: Aus der Geschichte des arabischen Chronogramms," *Arabica* 50, no. 4 (2003): 501–31.

14. All of the details about Ibn Maʿṣūm's biography that are provided here, and a good deal more, can be found in Joseph E. Lowry, "Ibn Maʿṣūm," in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography, 1350–1850*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart, 174–84 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009). Please note, however, that I have corrected a couple of date conversions, including in the case of Ibn Maʿṣūm's death. He is reported to have died in Dhū al-Qaʿda 1120, which corresponds to January–February 1709. For more on this point, see Maḥmūd Khalaf al-Bādī's introduction to his edition of Ibn Maʿṣūm, *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr*, 2 vols. (Damascus: Dār Kinān, 1430/2009), 17.

in Golconda, near Hyderabad.[15] In due course, the rest of the family, including the teenaged Ibn Maʿṣūm, relocated to India. Our author would remain on the subcontinent for most of his adult life.

Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad served at the Quṭb-shāhī court through the 1660s and into the early 1670s, and it is probable that Ibn Maʿṣūm followed in his footsteps. When the Quṭb-shāh of that period, ʿAbd Allāh, died in 1082/1672, Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad was bold enough to make a claim for the throne, on the basis that he had taken one of the ruler's daughters as his second wife. This plan was thwarted, and both the father and the son were jailed.[16] For Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad, this was the end of the line: he died in prison in 1086/1675. But Ibn Maʿṣūm managed to appeal to the Mughal emperor Awrangzēb for release, after which he traveled to the central court. He spent nearly three productive decades in Awrangzēb's service. This might appear surprising at first glance, given Ibn Maʿṣūm's Shiʿi leanings and the ruler's famous concern for Sunni orthodoxy. In reality, the oft-misunderstood Awrangzēb was willing to employ a substantial number of Shiʿi bureaucrats and intellectuals at his court. Ibn Maʿṣūm may also have benefited from his status as a *sayyid* from the Ḥijāz. Finally, in 1114/1702–3, Ibn Maʿṣūm felt that his position at the Mughal court was deteriorating, so he took the excuse of a pilgrimage trip to return home. He then tried to establish himself in various other places, including at the Safavid court in Iṣfahān, before settling at last in Shīrāz. He spent a few years teaching at the Manṣūriyya madrasa and died in 1120/1709.

We have a number of extant works from Ibn Maʿṣūm, in a range of fields. His first book is a stylized travel narrative of his family's move from Medina to Golconda, completed in 1075/1665, when he was in his early twenties. It appears that he was almost continuously producing something new from this point until his death, with the exception of his period of imprisonment. The text that is of relevance here is a literary anthology titled *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*, or "The unpressed wine on the distinctions of the notables of the epoch," which Ibn Maʿṣūm finished in 1082/1671.[17] Before proceeding any further, I must note that there has been a surprising amount of disagreement and confusion about this title. It is often rendered in scholarship (including in Lowry's essay), and even in printings, as *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin al-shuʿarāʾ bi-kull miṣr*, or "The unpressed wine on the distinctions of the poets of every land."[18] This reading is puzzling, since it breaks the rhyming prose (*sajʿ*) of the title, unless *miṣr* were read in the informal manner as *maṣr*. I consulted four manuscripts of the work—the finest of which is MS Petermann I 630 at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, copied in 1212/1798—and all of them have *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin aʿyān al-ʿaṣr* or a close variant thereof, such as *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr min maḥāsin aʿyān*

15. On this dynasty and its regional competitors, see Carl W. Ernst, "Deccan i. Political and Literary History," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

16. A fuller version of the story is given in Lowry, "Ibn Maʿṣūm."

17. The completion of the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, according to the colophons of several copies that I consulted (see below for details), took place on a Thursday with seven days remaining in the month of Rabīʿ al-Ākhir 1082. This would correspond to late August 1671.

18. See, for example, the printing of Aḥmad Nājī al-Jamālī and Muḥammad Amīn al-Khānjī (Egypt, 1324/1906).

al-ʿaṣr.[19] This is not simply a matter of comparing title pages; Ibn Maʿṣūm describes his naming of the work in the preface (fol. 6r in the Berlin manuscript). Another problem with changing the title to *al-shuʿarāʾ bi-kull miṣr* is that it spoils Ibn Maʿṣūm's wordplay. The repetition of *al-ʿaṣr* is deliberate, denoting the pressing of wine in the first instance and "epoch" in the second.[20]

In any event, the author explains that he was motivated to write this work after receiving a copy of an earlier anthology, the *Rayḥānat al-alibbā wa-zahrat al-ḥayāt al-dunyā* ("The sweet basil of the intelligent and the flower of worldly life") of Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Khafājī, an Egyptian who died in 1069/1658.[21] This is an interesting point, since, as we will see below, al-Muḥibbī was likewise inspired by the *Rayḥānat al-alibbā*. It bears emphasizing that Ibn Maʿṣūm, then living in Golconda or Hyderabad, was sent a copy of al-Khafājī's work (which had been written in Egypt) by an unnamed acquaintance in Mecca. This shows an impressive degree of interconnectedness across the Dār al-Islām and fits with El-Rouayheb's identification of a vibrant intellectual culture in the eleventh/seventeenth century.

The *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr* is divided into five main chapters on the basis of geography. This is a common organizational scheme, used also by al-Khafājī and al-Muḥibbī. The first chapter is devoted to Mecca and Medina; the second, to Egypt and the Levant; the third, to Yemen; the fourth, to Iraq, Bahrain, and Iran (*al-ʿAjam*); and the fifth, to the Maghrib.[22] The focus throughout is on recent and contemporary figures, which is in keeping with the tendency in the Arabic anthological tradition to produce an update or continuation of what prior authors have established. Ibn Maʿṣūm aims to address some of al-Khafājī's omissions and to pick up where he left off. Unlike al-Muḥibbī (discussed below), however, Ibn Maʿṣūm does not give his new work a title that clearly references that of the text that inspired it.

The part of the fourth chapter that addresses the notables of al-ʿAjam is fairly short and, for a Persianist, perhaps not entirely satisfying.[23] There are only four dedicated notices, on the following individuals: Muḥammad Bāqir "al-Dāmād al-Ḥusaynī," that is, Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631); al-Mīrzā Ibrāhīm b. al-Mīrzā al-Hamadānī (d. ca. 1025/1616); Abū al-Ḥusayn b. Ibrāhīm "al-Ṭabīb al-Shīrāzī" (d. after 1075/1664–65); and Mullā Faraj Allāh al-Shūshtarī. The first two figures are better known—especially Mīr Dāmād, of course. By contrast, it is

---

19. In addition to the Berlin manuscript, I saw three copies that are held at the Kitāb-khāna-yi Majlīs-i Shūrā-yi Millī in Tehran, under the numbers 2279 (or 404), 5799, and 9372.

20. The edition of the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr* used for references in this paper (along with the Berlin manuscript) is that of Maḥmūd Khalaf al-Bādī.

21. The *Rayḥānat al-alibbā* has been edited by ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw in two volumes (Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1967). This is the same scholar responsible for the edition of al-Muḥibbī's *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* (discussed below). Note that the word *alibbāʾ*—presumably of the pattern *afʿilāʾ*, adjusted for the geminate root—has a final *hamza*, but it may be left out in this title to help the rhyme with *dunyā*.

22. In the edition of al-Bādī, these chapters begin, respectively, on pp. 39, 483, 685, 773, and 899. It is clear from the page numbers—and unsurprising, given Ibn Maʿṣūm's background—that the first chapter is by far the largest.

23. *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, ed. al-Bādī, 775–96.

difficult to find further information about the latter two.[24] It seems clear that the common thread in all four cases, and a connection between them and Ibn Maʿṣūm, is their Shiʿism. The author also indicates that he had some interaction with al-Shīrāzī and al-Shūshtarī; for example, he describes an exchange of poetry by correspondence with the former.[25] Perhaps the most striking aspect of this section in the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr* is that it contains little Persian. Ibn Maʿṣūm focuses on the Arabic poetry of Iranian Shiʿi intellectuals.

The one exception occurs in the notice on al-Hamadānī, in which the author quotes a few snippets of Persian verse by "people of understanding" (*dhawī al-albāb*) to emphasize points that he has raised in his discussion. These poems are unattributed, but I was able to trace one line to a *ghazal* by ʿUrfī Shīrāzī (d. 999/1591). It goes as follows: "Except in time of calamity, congratulation is a vice among us, a vice; in our city, Eid has no custom of felicitation" (*tahniyat juz dar muṣībat pīsh-i mā ʿayb ast, ʿayb; ʿīd rā dar shahr-i mā rasm-i mubārak-bād nīst*).[26] Apart from these "outside quotations," Ibn Maʿṣūm cites no Persian (as far as I could determine). In fact, he closes the section on al-ʿAjam by explaining that there have been numerous eminent Iranians in the past century, "but most of them did not occupy themselves with Arabic verse, focusing rather on more important matters" (*ghayr anna aktharahum lam yataʿāṭa al-naẓm al-ʿarabī, ihtimāman bi-mā huwa ahamm minhu*).[27] And he follows this note with a list of further ʿAjamī notables that he did not manage to address in detail. The focus remains on Shiʿi scholars; two of the figures included in this list are Mullā Ṣadrā (d. ca. 1050/1640–41) and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680).[28]

It would certainly be worth pursuing a thorough study of this subchapter in the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, and I hope to do so. For the purposes of the present paper, however, this source is not as immediately attractive as is the anthology of al-Muḥibbī. Ibn Maʿṣūm shows a preference for limiting his discussion to Arabic authors, even when considering Iranians. This may come as a disappointment, since he obviously knew Persian and spent the bulk of his career in India, where he would have had limitless exposure to poetry in that language. I do not mean to downplay the importance of the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*; it is a valuable work that seems to have received little attention from Arabists and perhaps none from Persianists. As we will see below, however, al-Muḥibbī takes a different and more striking approach, keeping his text in Arabic by *translating* samples of Persian poetry.

---

24. Ibrāhīm Hamadānī was a prominent Shiʿi scholar and jurist who was shown favor by Shah ʿAbbās. See Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 178.

25. *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, ed. al-Bādī, 783.

26. Ibid., 781. The full Persian text of the poem can be found in the online corpus Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/orfi/ghazalor/sh137/. The meter is *ramal*. Alternatively, see the edition of ʿUrfī's *kulliyyāt* by Ghulām Ḥusayn Javāhirī Vajdī (Tehran: Kitāb-khāna-yi Sanāʾī, 1357/1978), 249; or the edition of Muḥammad Valī al-Ḥaqq Anṣārī, 3 vols. in 2 (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 1378/1999), 1:216. (This *ghazal* is numbered 137 by Ganjoor and 256 by Anṣārī; it is unnumbered in Javāhirī's edition.) At several points in this paper, I provide links to Ganjoor, since it is universally accessible, while also citing scholarly editions that may be more difficult to find.

27. *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, ed. al-Bādī, 794.

28. Ibid., 795. In the Berlin manuscript, this is found on fol. 424v.

Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī was born in Damascus in 1061/1651 into a prominent family of intellectuals that had roots in Hama.[29] His grandfather served a long tenure as a judge (*qāḍī*) in Damascus. Muḥammad Amīn's father (b. 1031/1621–22, d. 1082/1671) was similarly well educated, and he was appointed to a range of administrative and judicial posts throughout the Ottoman lands, including in Istanbul, Āmid (i.e., Diyār Bakr), and Beirut. This meant that the younger al-Muḥibbī was often apart from his father during his childhood, but he received a comprehensive education with the leading scholars in Damascus. In the 1670s, after his father's death, Muḥammad Amīn embarked on a period of itinerancy of his own. He spent a substantial amount of time in Istanbul, where he continued his studies.

At some point after he turned thirty—around the early 1090s/1680s—al-Muḥibbī returned to Damascus and wrote the work to be discussed in this paper.[30] It is a literary anthology titled *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna wa-rashḥat ṭilāʾ al-ḥāna*, or "The scent of sweet basil and the flowing wine of the tavern." We do not know when exactly al-Muḥibbī completed this text. Neither the preface nor the conclusion mentions a specific date, and in all of the references that I have seen to the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* in scholarship, the year that is cited (1111/1699) pertains to the author's death. Nevertheless, it appears that the anthology is linked to the earlier part of al-Muḥibbī's authorly career and that it predates his more famous book in the same genre, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar* ("The essence of the legacy of the notables of the eleventh century").[31] The *Khulāṣat al-athar* has references to events that took place as late as 1101/1690, which provides a *terminus post quem*. It is also worth noting that al-Muḥibbī began work on a continuation (*dhayl*) of the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, which remained incomplete at the time of his death in 1111/1699.[32] So it seems plausible that he wrote the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* and then the *Khulāṣat al-athar*, then returned to the former to add a *dhayl*, but died before it was finished. (More could be done to confirm this sequence of events.) Among the other extant works by al-Muḥibbī are several treatises on linguistic and grammatical topics. One of these, *Qaṣd al-sabīl fīmā fī lughat al-ʿArab min dakhīl*, is described by El-Rouayheb as among "the most extensive premodern works on foreign loanwords in Arabic."[33]

The concept of the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* is to collect information about noteworthy individuals whose lives overlapped with that of al-Muḥibbī. As is customary in anthological texts (often called *ṭabaqāt* or *tarājim* in Arabic), the content is presented in a series of notices (*tarājim*), each devoted to a specific person. In a given notice, discussion of the

---

29. On al-Muḥibbī's biography, see the introduction of ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw in his edition of *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna wa-rashḥat ṭilāʾ al-ḥāna*, 6 vols. (Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1967–71), starting at 1:4. Another helpful overview is provided by Muḥammad Zāhid Abū Ghudda in "al-ʿAllāma al-muʾarrikh al-adīb al-shāʿir Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī," website of Rābiṭat al-ʿUlamāʾ al-Sūriyyīn, March 1, 2016, https://islamsyria. com/site/show_articles/7939/.

30. These events are described by al-Muḥibbī in the preface to the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, starting at 1:9.

31. See the four-volume Beirut printing of the work by Maktabat Khayyāṭ in 1966. I believe this is a reproduction of the version that was published in Cairo by al-Maṭbaʿa al-Wahbiyya in 1284/1867–68.

32. The incomplete *dhayl* has also been edited by al-Ḥulw; it is included as the sixth volume in his edition of the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*.

33. El-Rouayheb, "Opening the Gate," 276.

biography of the figure in question—his family background, teachers, students, and works, with perhaps a few anecdotes—is followed by selections of poetry. The organization of this anthology is again based on geography: there are eight chapters, for the eight regions whose notables al-Muḥibbī covers. The first chapter addresses Damascus and its environs,[34] and, for obvious reasons, it is the longest section of the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, with the author discussing many of his personal connections. The second chapter is devoted to Aleppo, and the third to al-Rūm, i.e., the Ottoman heartland.[35] Significantly, al-Muḥibbī presents some of his own Arabic translations of Turkic poetry written by the individuals treated in the third chapter, which parallels his treatment of Persian poets later in the text.[36] The fourth chapter addresses Iraq and Bahrain,[37] and at the end of it, al-Muḥibbī adds a brief section on the notables of Iran (*al-ʿAjam*)—though this would be easy to miss in a survey of the anthology's contents, since it is not given a proper heading.[38] This passage contains only five notices, of which the first two seem to have been sourced from the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*. The paucity of content does not, however, diminish the section's thought-provoking nature. I will review al-Muḥibbī's treatment of the ʿAjamīs in greater detail below, with particular attention to his notice on Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī.

The fifth chapter of the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* is on Yemen; the sixth, on the Ḥijāz; the seventh, on Egypt; and the eighth, on the Maghrib.[39] The work is of considerable magnitude: in the edition of ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw, it runs to five full volumes (with most of the fifth devoted to indexes). The same edition includes a sixth volume containing the extant material from al-Muḥibbī's incomplete *dhayl*. The length of notices in this anthology ranges from a couple of pages for individuals whom the author deems relatively less important, to around twenty pages for especially distinguished figures or those who were close to al-Muḥibbī. In the larger notices, extensive quotation of poetry tends to account for most of the space.

A final general point to emphasize about the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* is that the entire work is intended as a kind of continuation of an earlier text, al-Khafājī's abovementioned *Rayḥānat al-alibbā*. The title of al-Muḥibbī's book encodes a reference to that of al-Khafājī, and in the preface of the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, al-Muḥibbī explains that he read the *Rayḥānat al-alibbā* and wanted to extend its approach to cover the prominent individuals of his own time. The practice of authoring an update to a prior work and giving it a title to indicate the connection was common in the Arabic anthological tradition. It can be traced to the *Yatīmat al-dahr fī maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr* ("The peerless of the age on the distinctions of the people of the epoch") of Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī (d. ca. 429/1038) and the texts that took up its

---

34. In al-Ḥulw's edition of the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, this chapter takes up all of the first volume and most of the second.

35. These chapters start, respectively, at 2:429 and 3:3 in al-Ḥulw's edition.

36. For example, all of the last eight notices in this chapter include lines of poetry that al-Muḥibbī claims to have "Arabized" (*ʿarrabtu*). See *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 3:129–38.

37. This chapter begins at 3:139.

38. *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 3:213–38.

39. These chapters start, respectively, at 3:239, 4:3, 4:391, and 5:3 in al-Ḥulw's edition.

mantle, most importantly the *Dumyat al-qaṣr wa-ʿuṣrat ahl al-ʿaṣr* ("The palace statue and the refuge of the people of the epoch") of Abū al-Qāsim ʿAlī al-Bākharzī (d. 467/1075) and the *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat al-ʿaṣr* ("The palace pearl and the record of the epoch") of ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 597/1201).[40]

The Treatment of Persian by al-Muḥibbī

Now that we have a general sense of these two works, we can look more closely at the passage concerning ʿAjamī figures in the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*. As was noted above, al-Muḥibbī provides only five dedicated notices. They pertain to the following individuals, in order: al-Ṭabīb al-Shīrāzī; Mullā Faraj Allāh al-Shūshtarī; ʿUrfī al-Shīrāzī (d. 999/1591); Ṭālib al-Āmulī (d. 1036/1626–27); and Ṣāʾib (d. ca. 1087/1676).[41] It is plain that the first two notices are based on the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*—a work that al-Muḥibbī cites at several points.[42] Less clear is how al-Muḥibbī came into possession of a copy of Ibn Maʿṣūm's anthology, which was completed perhaps a decade before the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* was started. In any case, the discussion of al-Ṭabīb al-Shīrāzī and Faraj Allāh al-Shūshtarī is of relatively little interest, compared to the original material that follows.

The notices on ʿUrfī, Ṭālib, and Ṣāʾib are brief; none of them takes up more than a page. In his biographical comments on ʿUrfī, al-Muḥibbī explains that the poet moved to India—we know from other sources that this occurred in 992/1584—and that "he roamed around that country and filled it with his sublimity" (*wa-kāna dakhala al-Hind fa-jāsa khilālahu, wa-malaʾa bilādahu jalālatahu*).[43] The author then reports that ʿUrfī died in India after "setting loose what was in his quiver of secrets" (*fa-nashala mā fī kinānatihi min al-maknūnāt*) and "scattering what was in his treasury of riches" (*wa-nathara mā fī dhakhāʾirihi min al-makhzūnāt*). At this point in the notice, al-Muḥibbī wishes to transition to quoting ʿUrfī's poetry, but he remarks that he "did not come upon any Arabic poem by him that has been conveyed by transmitters" (*lam aqif lahu ʿalā shiʿr ʿarabī tanquluhu al-ruwāt*). And so, he explains, he translated a few lines himself (*fa-ʿarrabtu mufradāt*). It should be noted that al-Muḥibbī consistently uses the verb *ʿarraba* (of the second *wazn*) and its derivatives in this anthology when referring to poetry that he has "Arabized."[44]

From ʿUrfī, he offers a total of five lines, evidently taken from three poems. I have not yet been able to identify the original Persian for any of these lines, despite spending a fair amount of time searching; but it ought to be possible. In one of the excerpts, ʿUrfī complains of having become an old man before experiencing middle age. There are poems in his *dīvān* that express similar ideas, though none appears to be a close match. Two other general features of al-Muḥibbī's translation practice should be mentioned. First, he never quotes

---

40. A valuable introduction to this genre in Arabic literature is given in Bilal Orfali, *The Anthologist's Art: Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī and His "Yatīmat al-dahr"* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1–33 (i.e., chap. 1).

41. In the edition of al-Ḥulw, at least, the heading for the notice on Ṣāʾib—unlike the others in this section—does not include his *nisba* (Tabrīzī) or any other part of his name.

42. For a list of these citations, see *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 5:634.

43. Ibid., 3:225.

44. This includes al-Muḥibbī's translations from Turkic.

the Persian directly, making it necessary to "reverse-engineer" his lines to uncover the source poems. Second, al-Muḥibbī is strict in rendering the Persian verse into Arabic verse that follows the standard rules of prosody. He does not keep the *same* meter and rhyme as those used in the original poems—Persian is such a different language from Arabic, anyway, that its implementation of the Khalīlian system is effectively a new creation—but there is always *some* meter and rhyme.

Ṭālib Āmulī receives the least discussion of any figure in this section.[45] Al-Muḥibbī praises the quality of his poetry in conventional terms and then provides two lines (apparently from a single poem) that he has translated. In this case, also, I have not managed to find a match in Ṭālib's Persian *dīvān*. It is a frustrating task to attempt to pick distinctive words in the Arabic and search for possible equivalents in Persian, with no other clues. There is, furthermore, the chance that al-Muḥibbī produced a free or inaccurate translation, which would doom the effort.

The entry on Ṣāʾib is where we are fortunate enough to achieve a true result.[46] And this is ideal, since Ṣāʾib is by far the latest of the three poets. Both ʿUrfī and Ṭālib, in fact, died before al-Muḥibbī was born, which makes their inclusion in the anthology somewhat atypical. (Had they been Arabic poets, they likely would have been covered by al-Khafājī.) Ṣāʾib, on the other hand, may have been alive until just four or five years before al-Muḥibbī began writing the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*. The praise for Ṣāʾib at the beginning of the notice is also more hyperbolic than what we find with ʿUrfī and Ṭālib. Al-Muḥibbī describes him as "one worth a thousand" (*wāḥid maʿdūd bi-alf*) and states that "all who preceded him among the poets [of the Persians] lag behind him, along with his followers" (*jamīʿ man taqaddamahu min shuʿarāʾihim mutaʾakhkhir maʿa al-khalaf*). In a nice turn of phrase, al-Muḥibbī adds that Ṣāʾib "played with meanings as the east wind plays with the ben tree, and as maidenhood [plays] with the desirous lover" (*wa-qad talāʿaba bi-l-maʿānī talāʿub al-ṣabā bi-l-bāna, wa-l-ṣibā bi-l-ʿāshiq dhī al-lubāna*). Note the use of words derived from the root ṣ-b-w, close to ṣ-w-b, the source of the name Ṣāʾib.

At the transition to the poetry portion of the notice, al-Muḥibbī explains that he "has brought forth of his Arabized [selections] that which the mind cannot imagine" (*wa-qad awradtu min muʿarrabātihi mā taṭīshu ʿinda takhayyulihi al-adhhān*). This is slightly confusing, as it seems to leave open the possibility that the author is presenting someone else's translations of Ṣāʾib. But it remains most probable that al-Muḥibbī made his own Arabic versions, as in the prior entries. He quotes four lines drawn from two of Ṣāʾib's poems (two lines from each). The second excerpt contains a phrase that is sufficiently uncommon that I hoped it might occur in the same form in the original Persian. It goes as follows: "Kingship lies not in wealth / nor in horses or armor; the Alexander of the age is a youth / who possesses bare sustenance" (*mā al-mulk bi-l-māl wa-lā / bi-l-khayl wa-lā bi-l-daraq; Iskandar al-dahr fatan / yamliku sadd al-ramaq*).[47] The term used for "bare

---

45. *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 3:226.

46. Ibid., 3:227.

47. The meter appears to be a variant of *rajaz*. The following transcription better represents the way that these lines would be read: *maʾl-mulku biʾl-māli wa-lā / biʾl-khayli wa-lā biʾd-daraqi; Iskandaruʾd-dahri fatan /*

sustenance" is *sadd al-ramaq*, which may require explanation. *Sadd* can refer to a dam, or to the stopping up or blocking of something (among other senses, depending on the context). And *ramaq* refers to the spark or breath of life. The compound *sadd al-ramaq*, then, can be translated as "stopping up the breath of life," that is, the minimum amount of sustenance required to keep a person alive. In modern Arabic, it is more common to see a verbal form such as *sadda ramaqahu*, "he had just enough to keep body and soul together."[48]

A perceptive reader may already notice the connection between the mention of *sadd al-ramaq* and the invocation of Alexander the Great in this poem. There is an implicit reference to the *sadd* of Alexander—the barrier built by the character Dhū al-Qarnayn (identified with Alexander) in the Qurʾan to protect humanity from the hordes of Gog and Magog.[49] In the relevant verse, *al-Kahf* 94, the word employed is indeed *sadd*. This context allows for a deeper reading of Ṣāʾib's poetry fragment. Kingship is not defined by worldly possessions, we are told; rather, whoever is living on the edge, just barely subsisting, is the Alexander of his age—with the stopping up of his breath of life equivalent to the wall of Dhū al-Qarnayn.

Before I describe the results of searching for *sadd al-ramaq* in Ṣāʾib's *dīvān*, it should be noted that al-Muḥibbī's treatment of Persian poetry does not end completely with this notice. This is followed by yet another short section (*faṣl*), which the author reports that he "assembled from Arabic translations old and new" (*jaʿaltuhu li-l-muʿarrabāt qadīman wa-ḥadīthan*).[50] Here al-Muḥibbī quotes numerous excerpts of verse that he identifies as having been translated from Persian, drawing on a variety of sources. The first several examples are from the *Dumyat al-qaṣr* of al-Bākharzī (d. 467/1075). Several others are attributed to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī (whom al-Muḥibbī calls "al-Shihāb"), including one that is apparently found in his work titled *Ṭirāz al-majālis* ("Ornament of the symposia").[51] In another case, there are two lines that the Syrian-Palestinian scholar Ḥasan al-Būrīnī (d. 1024/1615) purportedly translated from the poet Vaḥshī Bāfqī (d. 991/1583).[52] (I have tried to identify the original Persian, so far without success.) And al-Muḥibbī mentions Ibn Maʿṣūm as the source of one excerpt, though it is not drawn from the section on al-ʿAjam in the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*. This passage in the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* is fascinating in its own right and merits careful study. In fact, not all of the material assembled here is poetry; there are also

---

yamliku sadda'r-ramaqi. Please note, additionally, that my general practice when quoting poetry in this paper is to separate hemistichs with a semicolon. I have made an exception in this case, owing to the brevity of the meter.

48. This verbal construct is mentioned under the definition of *ramaq* in Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 4th ed. (Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1994), 417.

49. See William L. Hanaway, "Eskandar-nāma," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

50. *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 3:228. The section continues through 3:238.

51. *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, 3:231. The *Ṭirāz al-majālis* is little known, but it has been published (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Wahbiyya, 1284/1867–68).

52. On this author, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, "Al-Burini, Hasan b. Muhammad," *Historians of the Ottoman Empire* website, September 2008, https://ottomanhistorians.uchicago.edu/en/historian/al-burini-hasan-b-muhammad/.

a few proverbs (*amthāl*) said to be of Persian origin. But any further investigation will need to wait for a different paper.

A Distinctive Image in Ṣāʾib's Poetry

As far as I have been able to establish, the term *sadd-i ramaq* (with the Persian *iżāfa*) is used in seven of Ṣāʾib's *ghazal*s, as well as in one of his "scattered snippets." The latter is a category of poetry with formal similarities to *qiṭʿa*s, labeled *mutafarriqāt* in copies of Ṣāʾib's *dīvān*. In three of the *ghazal*s, *sadd-i ramaq* occurs in the opening line, or *maṭlaʿ*. I will review each instance, but we should begin with that which appears closest to the translation of al-Muḥibbī: *ghazal* no. 3,439. Its first line goes as follows: "Kingship lies not in silver and gold and jewels; whoever has bare sustenance is Alexander" (*pādshāhī na bih sīm u zar u gawhar bāshad; har-kih rā sadd-i ramaq hast, Sikandar bāshad*).[53] This is an almost perfect match, considering the degree of license required to transform Persian verse into Arabic verse. It may also be significant that it is a *maṭlaʿ*, since opening lines are disproportionately quoted in anthologies. The next closest occurrence is in the ninth line (of eleven) in *ghazal* no. 969: "The king is not the one who has a limitless treasure of jewels; whoever has just enough to subsist in the world is Alexander" (*nīst shāh ān kas kih dārad ganj-i gawhar bī-shumār; har-kih rā sadd-i ramaq hast az jahān Iskandar ast*).[54] Even this is similar enough to al-Muḥibbī's version to be a plausible source.

Moving on, we find similar phrases in the following locations. The ninth line (of ten) in *ghazal* no. 1,832: "Make do with whatever sustenance you receive; since the one who survives on the bare minimum becomes Alexander" (*bih har-chih mī-rasad az rizq sāzgārī kun; kih har-kih sākht bih sadd-i ramaq Sikandar gasht*).[55] The first line of *ghazal* no. 1,887: "For us, the cap of poverty is equal to the crown; bare sustenance is equal to the kingdom of Alexander" (*mā rā kulāh-i faqr bih afsar barābar ast; sadd-i ramaq bih mulk-i Sikandar barābar ast*).[56] The eleventh line (of twelve) in *ghazal* no. 3,430: "That day I was among the people of noble souls; when minimal sustenance became for me the Wall of Alexander" (*būdam ān rūz man az jumla-yi āzāda-ravān; kih marā sadd-i ramaq sadd-i Sikandar mī-shud*).[57] The opening line of *ghazal* no. 4,884: "If you have a golden face, refuse the treasury of gold; if you have bare sustenance, refuse the Wall of Alexander" (*chihra-yi*

---

53. The full text of the poem can be found in the online corpus Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh3439/. The meter is *ramal*. Among printed versions of Ṣāʾib's poetry, the edition of his *dīvān* by Muḥammad Qahramān in six volumes (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī va Farhangī, 1985–91) is generally preferred. In that edition, *ghazal* no. 3,439 (per Ganjoor) is numbered 3,443 and is found at 4:1662–63.

54. See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh969/ and the Qahramān edition of Ṣāʾib's *dīvān*, 2:491 (*ghazal* no. 969). The meter is *ramal*.

55. See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh1832/ and the Qahramān edition of Ṣāʾib's *dīvān*, 2:901–2 (*ghazal* no. 1,832). The meter is *mujtaṡṡ*.

56. See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh1887/ and the Qahramān edition of Ṣāʾib's *dīvān*, 2:927 (*ghazal* no. 1,887). The meter is *mużāriʿ*.

57. See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh3430/ and the Qahramān edition of Ṣāʾib's *dīvān*, 4:1658–59 (*ghazal* no. 3,434). The meter is *ramal*.

zarrīn chu bāshad, makhzan-i zar gū mabāsh; hast chūn sadd-i ramaq, sadd-i Sikandar gū mabāsh).[58] The fourth line (of seventeen) in *ghazal* no. 6,714: "Until he blocks for himself the path of desire at the point of bare subsistence; a man will not be compared to Alexander" (*tā na-bandad rāh-i khwāhish bar khud az sadd-i ramaq; dar naẓar-hā shaʾn-i Iskandar na-dārad ādamī).*[59] And, finally, the second line (of three) in no. 388 of the *mutafarriqāt*: "He is Alexander, even if he is in the garb of poverty; whoever restricts himself to bare sustenance" (*Iskandar ast agar-chih buvad dar libās-i faqr; har kas kih ikhtiṣār bih sadd-i ramaq kunad).*[60]

Taken together, these appearances of the phrase *sadd-i ramaq* constitute a significant result. They are also reflective of Ṣāʾib's œuvre. He composed around seven thousand *ghazal*s over the course of a career that lasted at least five decades (even if we set as the starting point his departure for Kabul in 1034/1624–25). Ṣāʾib was not only prolific but also inventive, striving to develop new poetic images. He could take a peculiar, mundane term and construct an intricate field of meaning around it.[61] Given his corpus of thousands of poems, if one notices an interesting choice of words in a given *ghazal* and searches for it elsewhere, one is likely to find numerous examples. In fact, *sadd-i ramaq*, with (it seems) fewer than ten occurrences, is probably among the rarer images deployed by Ṣāʾib. It is all the more remarkable, then, that one of these poems found its way to Damascus and struck the fancy of al-Muḥibbī. It may have been relevant that *sadd-i ramaq* is such an Arabic-sounding turn of phrase, even when employed in Persian.

A final question here is whether Ṣāʾib's way of using *sadd-i ramaq* is actually uncommon. The answer is that it appears to be unique. It is rare to come upon this phrase in Persian poetry in any context. I found only two *ghazal*s by Bēdil of Lahore (d. 1133/1720)—who lived after Ṣāʾib, of course—and neither includes the connection to Alexander.[62] For Bēdil, in both instances, the relevant idea is the virtue of contentment (*qanāʿat*). Even in prose literature, there are few occurrences of *sadd-i ramaq.* It appears once in the *Gulistān* of Saʿdī and twice

58. See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh4884/ and the Qahramān edition of Ṣāʾib's *dīvān*, 5:2360 (*ghazal* no. 4,888). The meter is *ramal*.

59. See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/ghazalkasa/sh6714/. The meter is *ramal*. The copy of the Qahramān edition of Ṣāʾib's *dīvān* that I was able to access lacked the sixth volume, in which this and the next reference would fall. For the final two Ṣāʾib references, therefore, I consulted a different edition, carried out by Sīrūs Shamīsā (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mustawfī and Intishārāt-i Bihzād, 1373/1994) on the basis of a manuscript held at the National Museum of Pakistan. In the Shamīsā edition, this *ghazal* is numbered 1,848 and is found on p. 712.

60. See Ganjoor at https://ganjoor.net/saeb/divan-saeb/motefarreghat/sh388/ and the Shamīsā edition of Ṣāʾib's *dīvān*, 822 (in which the *mutafarriqāt* are unnumbered). The meter is *muẓāriʿ*.

61. I recall a paper that Paul Losensky delivered at the ASPS conference in Sarajevo in 2013, focusing on Ṣāʾib's figurative use of the term *shīrāza*, which refers to the thread that stitches together a bookbinding. There is a seemingly inexhaustible supply of such linguistic treasures in Ṣāʾib's *dīvān*.

62. In the online corpus Ganjoor, these are *ghazal*s 1,213 and 2,065 from Bēdil. In the former, it is in the fifth line (out of ten); in the latter, also on the fifth line (out of nine). The meters are *ramal* and *hazaj*, respectively. For printed versions of these poems, see the edition of Bēdil's *kulliyyāt* by Akbar Bihdārvand and Parvīz ʿAbbāsī Dākānī, 3 vols. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ilhām, 1376/1997), 177, 492. The *ghazal*s are not numbered in this edition.

in Naṣr Allāh Munshī's version of *Kalīla va Dimna*.[63] There is again no mention of Alexander. Unless I have overlooked something, within the Persian tradition this metaphor belongs to Ṣāʾib.

Conclusions

This paper has drawn attention to the fact that there are at least two Arabic anthologies of the eleventh/seventeenth century that incorporate some treatment of then-recent Persian poets. The second of these sources, the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna* of al-Muḥibbī, is further distinguished by its notices on poets who are major figures in Persian literary history, and by the inclusion of Arabic verse translations from their works. It is exciting to be able to follow one of al-Muḥibbī's renditions to the original *ghazal*(s) in the *dīvān* of Ṣāʾib and, in the process, to discover a highly original motif.

A great deal remains to be done to contextualize these findings. To what extent, for example, do other anthologies from the Ottoman Arab sphere engage with the works of Iranian or Persian authors? Can more be determined about the role of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Khafājī and his *Rayḥanat al-alibbā*, given the clear influence that the text exerted on both Ibn Maʿṣūm and al-Muḥibbī? (Did al-Khafājī also know Persian?) Are there other snippets of translated Arabic poetry in the *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna*, or quotations of Persian poetry in the *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr*, that could be traced to their sources with sufficient effort? These are a few of the questions that I intend to pursue in my ongoing research into early modern anthological sources. On a broader level, I would like to emphasize again the need for Persianists and Arabists who study this period to collaborate in order to enhance our understanding of the ties between literary traditions that have often been viewed in isolation. The time is ripe to pursue more thorough dialogue across the field. The *inḥiṭāṭ* paradigm has been challenged; works under the rubric of *ṭabaqāt*, *tarājim*, and *taẕkira*s are studied more intensively than ever; and the term "Indian style" (*sabk-i Hindī*) has all but lost its pejorative connotation. Is there yet a wider cultural world of the Ottoman-Safavid-Mughal era for us to rediscover?

---

63. In Wheeler M. Thackston's bilingual edition of the *Gulistān* (Bethesda, MD: Ibex, 2008), the relevant passage is at 158–59. In Mujtabā Mīnuvī's edition of *Kalīla va Dimna* (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1343/1964), see 83, 109.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Bēdil, ʿAbd al-Qādir. *Kulliyyāt-i Bēdil*. Edited by Akbar Bihdārvand and Parvīz ʿAbbāsī Dākānī. 3 vols. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ilhām, 1376/1997.

Dawlatshāh Samarqandī. *Tazkirat al-shuʿarāʾ*. Edited by Fāṭima ʿAlāqa. Tehran: Pizhūhishgāh-i ʿUlūm-i Insānī va Muṭālaʿāt-i Farhangī, 2007.

Ibn Maʿṣūm. *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr*. Edited by Maḥmūd Khalaf al-Bādī. 2 vols. Damascus: Dār Kinān, 1430/2009.

———. *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin al-shuʿarāʾ bi-kull Miṣr*. Egypt [probably Cairo]: Aḥmad Nājī al-Jamālī and Muḥammad Amīn al-Khānjī, 1324/1906.

———. *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*. MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Petermann I 630.

———. *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr fī maḥāsin aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*. MS Tehran, Kitāb-khāna-yi Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī, no. 9372.

———. *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr min maḥāsin aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*. MS Tehran, Kitāb-khāna-yi Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī, no. 2279 [old] / 404 [new].

———. *Sulāfat al-ʿaṣr min maḥāsin aʿyān al-ʿaṣr*. MS Tehran, Kitāb-khāna-yi Majlis-i Shūrā-yi Millī, no. 5799.

Al-Khafājī, Shihāb al-Dīn. *Rayḥānat al-alibbā wa-zahrat al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*. Edited by ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw. 2 vols. Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1967.

———. *Ṭirāz al-majālis*. Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al Wahbiyya, 1284/1867–68.

Al-Muḥibbī, Muḥammad Amīn. *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar*. 4 vols. Beirut: Maktabat Khayyāṭ, 1966.

———. *Nafḥat al-rayḥāna wa-rashḥat ṭilāʾ al-ḥāna*. Edited by ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥulw. 6 vols. Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1967–71.

Naṣr Allāh Munshī, Abū al-Maʿālī. *Kalīla va Dimna*. Edited by Mujtabā Mīnuvī. Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1343/1964.

Saʿdī Shīrāzī. *The Gulistan of Saʿdi: Bilingual English and Persian Edition with Vocabulary*. Translated by Wheeler M. Thackston. Bethesda, MD: Ibex, 2008.

Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī. *Dīvān-i Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī*. Edited by Muḥammad Qahramān. 6 vols. Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī va Farhangī, 1985–91.

———. *Dīvān-i Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī, bar asās-i nuskha-yi Mūza-yi Millī-i Pākistān*. Edited by Sīrūs Shamīsā. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mustawfī and Intishārāt-i Bihzād, 1373/1994.

ʿUrfī Shīrāzī. *Kulliyyāt-i ʿUrfī Shīrāzī, mushtamil bar qaṣīda-hā, tarkīb-band-hā, tarjīʿ-band-hā, qiṭaʿāt, bar asās-i nuskha-hā-yi Abū al-Qāsim Sirājā Iṣfahānī va Muḥammad Ṣādiq Nāẓim Tabrīzī*. Edited by Muḥammad Valī al-Ḥaqq Anṣārī. 3 vols. in 2. Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 1378/1999.

———. *Kulliyyāt-i ʿUrfī Shīrāzī, shāmil-i risāla-yi nafsiyya, qaṣāʾid, tarjīʿ-band, tarkīb-band, ghazaliyyāt, rubāʿiyyāt, sāqī-nāma, maṡnaviyyāt*. Edited by Ghulām Ḥusayn Javāhirī Vajdī. Tehran: Kitāb-khāna-yi Sanāʾī, 1357/1978.

Secondary Literature

Abisaab, Rula Jurdi. "Jabal ʿĀmel." In *Encyclopædia Iranica.* https://iranicaonline.org/articles/jabal-amel-2.

Abū Ghudda, Muḥammad Zāhid. "Al-ʿAllāma al-muʾarrikh al-adīb al-shāʿir Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī." Website of Rābiṭat al-ʿUlamāʾ al-Sūriyyīn. March 1, 2016. https://islamsyria.com/site/show_articles/7939/.

Āẕarnūsh, Āẕartāsh. *Chālish-i miyān-i Fārsī va ʿArabī: Sada-hā-yi nukhust*. Tehran: Nashr-i Nay, 2008.

Bauer, Thomas. "Vom Sinn der Zeit: Aus der Geschichte des arabischen Chronogramms." *Arabica* 50, no. 4 (2003): 501–31.

Beers, Theodore S. "*Taẕkirah-i Khayr al-Bayān*: The Earliest Source on the Career and Poetry of Ṣāʾib Tabrīzī (d. *ca.* 1087/1676)." *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 24 (2016): 114–38.

Durand-Guédy, David. "Al-Bundārī, al-Fatḥ b. ʿAlī." In *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 3rd ed. https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_25422.

El-Rouayheb, Khaled. "Al-Burini, Hasan b. Muhammad." *Historians of the Ottoman Empire* website, September 2008. https://ottomanhistorians.uchicago.edu/en/historian/al-burini-hasan-b-muhammad/.

———. "Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Florescence of the 17th Century." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 2 (May 2006): 263–81.

Ernst, Carl W. "Deccan i. Political and Literary History." In *Encyclopædia Iranica.* https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/deccan.

Fleischer, Cornell H. *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Âli (1541–1600)*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Gulchīn-i Maʿānī, Aḥmad. *Kārvān-i Hind: Dar aḥvāl va āṡār-i shāʿirān-i ʿaṣr-i Ṣafavī kih bih Hindūstān rafta-and*. 2 vols. Mashhad: Āstān-i Quds-i Rażavī, 1369/1990–91.

Hanaway, William L. "Eskandar-nāma." In *Encyclopædia Iranica.* https://iranicaonline.org/articles/eskandar-nama.

Key, Alexander. "Moving from Persian to Arabic." In *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, edited by William Granara, Alireza Korangy, and Roy Mottahedeh, 93–140. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016.

———. "Translation of Poetry from Persian to Arabic: ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī and Others." *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 5 (2018): 146–76.

Kohlberg, Etan. "Bahāʾ-al-Din ʿĀmeli." In *Encyclopædia Iranica*. https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/baha-al-din-ameli-shaikh-mohammad-b.

Losensky, Paul E. "Ṣāʾeb Tabrizi." In *Encyclopædia Iranica*. https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/saeb-tabrizi.

Lowry, Joseph E. "Ibn Maʿṣūm." In *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography, 1350–1850*, edited by Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart, 174–84. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009.

Newman, Andrew J. *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*. London: I. B.Tauris, 2006.

Orfali, Bilal. *The Anthologist's Art: Abū Manṣūr al Thaʿālibī and His "Yatīmat al-dahr."* Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Riedel, Dagmar. "Kalila wa Demna i. Redactions and Circulation." In *Encyclopædia Iranica*. https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kalila-demna-i.

Roemer, H. R. "The Safavid Period." In *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, edited by Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart, 189–350. Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Sharma, Sunil. *Mughal Arcadia: Persian Literature in an Indian Court*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Talib, Adam. *How Do You Say "Epigram" in Arabic? Literary History at the Limits of Comparison*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Wehr, Hans. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. 4th ed. Edited by J. Milton Cowan. Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1994.

Dans le ventre de l'histoire :
Sindbad le marin ou la satire du glouton ?

Sébastien Garnier

EHESS, Paris

(sebastiengarnier@hotmail.fr)

Abstract

Le cycle des sept voyages de Sindbad le marin comprend un grand nombre d'actes diégétiques relevant du manger. Plus profondément, nous soutenons ici que la progression même de chaque péripétie s'appuie sur une forme de repas. À bien y regarder, les intrigues, plus ou moins complexes, comportent toutes une ou plusieurs scènes dans lesquelles se nourrir détermine la suite des événements. Nous croyons que les narrèmes mobilisés servent un projet qui ressortit à l'adab : montrer jusqu'à quelles extrémités l'accumulation pousse les hommes. Le motif alimentaire au cœur de ce dispositif relève alors de la métaphore, celle du glouton.

The story cycle of Sindbad the Sailor's seven travelogues contains many diegetic acts related to eating. I will argue that on each journey, the narrative relies on the form of a meal. Furthermore, on closer inspection, the plots, whether complex or not, all contain one or more scenes in which feeding determines the sequence of events. I contend that the underlying narremes serve a purpose pertaining to the axiological adab *system: to show to what extremes accumulation can drive people. From this perspective, the food motif at the heart of this literary device falls under the metaphor of a glutton.*

> « Nulle île n'est une île. »
> — Carlo Ginzburg

Introduction

Lors du dernier séminaire Holberg, qui s'était tenu en juin 2018, Michael Cook avait partagé avec son auditoire plusieurs de ses questionnements relatifs à l'océan Indien. Nous lui proposons de poursuivre l'échange en empruntant le sentier de la fiction.

Cette contribution[1] relit[2] le parcours de *Sindbād al-baḥrī* dans une perspective satirique[3]. *Primo*, chaque *riḥla* s'avère fondamentalement alimentaire. *Secundo*, nous assistons au fil du feuilleton à une déchéance morale. *Tertio*, son histoire globale exprime le malaise attaché à la chrématistique.

Le cycle des sept voyages de Sindbad le marin[4] comprend un grand nombre d'actes diégétiques relevant du *manger*. Plus profondément, nous soutenons ici que la progression même de chaque péripétie passe par une forme de *repas* (ou d'ingestion). Certes, le déclenchement du départ réside dans une promesse non tenue — celle de ne pas reprendre

1. Nous remercions chaleureusement les rapporteurs anonymes pour leurs nombreuses critiques, références et suggestions qui ont incontestablement étoffé le présent travail.

2. Toute étude sur les *Voyages* se heurte à la question des sources, de leurs éditions et traductions. Nous avons opté pour celle, fidèle et élégante, de la Pléiade : *Les mille et une nuits*, trad. Jamal Eddine Bencheikh et André Miquel (Paris : Gallimard, 2006). Elle figure également dans : *Les mille et une nuits IV. Sindbâd de la mer et autres contes*, trad. Jamal Eddine Bencheikh (Paris : Gallimard, 2001), 341–466. Nous avons également consulté François Pétis de la Croix, trad., *Sindabad le marin. Traduction inédite de 1701*, éd. Aboubakr Chraïbi et Ulrich Marzolph (Paris : espaces&signes, 2016). Cet ouvrage n'a malheureusement pas bénéficié du texte trilingue — arabe [recension aleppine de 1672], interligne en latin, français — princeps du même auteur (achevé en 1713), *Histoire arabe de Sindabad le marin*, ms. W 385.3A-P445h, conservé à Cleveland Public Library. Langlès en possédait un exemplaire dans sa bibliothèque ; voir Francesca Bellino, « Another Manuscript of Pétis de la Croix's *Histoire arabe de Sindabad le marin*. A Possible Sub-family in the Fluid Transmission of the Story », *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, n.s., 12 (2017) : 103–32. Les divergences textuelles — nous signalons les principales en synthèse — n'affectent globalement pas l'inventaire des motifs mobilisés pour la démonstration. C'est à la fin du sixième voyage que s'opère une disjonction notable ; voir Mia I. Gerhardt, *Les voyages de Sindbad le marin* (Utrecht : Kemink en Zoon, 1957), 20 *sq.* Nous en rendons compte plus loin. À cela, il conviendrait d'ajouter les versions en turc ottoman, *karšūnī* et *ṭurōyo*, lesquelles débordent notre cadre ; voir Francesca Bellino, « I viaggi di Sindbād tra Oriente e Occidente, medioevo e modernità. Materiali inediti e nuove prospettive di ricerca », dans *Linee storiografiche e nuove prospettive di ricerca. XI Colloquio Internazionale Medioevo romanzo e orientale*, éd. Francesca Bellino, Eliana Creazzo et Antonio Pioletti, 141–67 (Soveria Mannelli : Rubbettino Editore, 2019), qui traite aussi de l'intertextualité.

3. En cela, nous nous inscrivons notamment dans les pas de deux devanciers. D'une part Peter D. Molan, « Sinbad the Sailor. A Commentary on the Ethics of Violence », *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 98, n° 3 (1978) : 237–47 [réimpr. dans *The Arabian Nights Reader*, éd. Ulrich Marzolph (Détroit : Wayne State University Press, 2006), 327–46], rejette la lecture de Mia Gerhardt et le postulat d'une adhésion qu'éprouverait un public conquis (« The *Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor* become a veritable glorification of navigation and maritime commerce; and Sindbad as a model set up for the admiration of a sympathetic public, is the proper symbol of the sailor's profession [. . .] », *ibid.*, 237–38) et lui oppose qu'au contraire « an ironic disparity exists between the protagonist's actions and his ethical stance » (*ibid.*, 237). D'autre part Jean-Claude Garcin, « Le passage des anciennes à de nouvelles *Mille et une nuits* au xvᵉ siècle », *Médiévales* 64 (2013) : 74–90, « Le Sindbād le Marin que nous connaissons est un conte du xvᵉ siècle, littéraire et parodique, où l'auteur exerce son ironie sur les voyages d'Ibn Baṭṭūṭa autant que sur ceux de Bulūqiyā » (*ibid.*, 82).

4. Pour un aperçu académique de ce récit, nous renvoyons aux entrées : U. Marzolph, « Sindbād », *EI²* ; coll., « Sindbâd the Seaman and Sindbâd the Landman, 179 (Burton from the Calcutta II Edition) », dans *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, éd. Ulrich Marzolph et Richard van Leeuwen, 383–89 (Santa Barbara, CA : ABC-CLIO, 2004) ; ainsi qu'aux articles et chapitres suivants : Paul Casanova, « Notes sur les voyages de Sindbâd le marin », *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 20 (1920) : 113–99 ; André Miquel, *Sept contes des Mille et une nuits ou Il n'y a pas de conte innocent* (Paris : Sindbad, 1981), 79–109, « Les voyages de Sindbad le marin » ; Jean-Pierre Picot, « Dynamique et répétitivité dans les *Mille et une nuits* ou les *Sept voyages de Sindbad le Marin* ont-ils un "sens" ? », *Littératures* 23 (1990) : 33–46 ; Jean-Claude Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique des Mille et une*

la mer — comme pour signifier l'expédition de trop. Si c'est dans l'excès, voire l'acrasie[5], que réside sa faute, c'est dans son dépassement que s'origine sa récompense, sous la forme d'un enrichissement matériel[6].

Notre héros échoue systématiquement[7] sur une île, seul ou accompagné, victime d'un revers de fortune. Il s'efforce alors de regagner la civilisation, épreuve qu'il parvient à surmonter par une ruse. Néanmoins, à bien y regarder, les intrigues, plus ou moins complexes, comportent toutes une ou plusieurs scènes dans lesquelles *se nourrir* détermine la *suite* des événements.

Dire que l'alimentation joue un rôle moteur dans l'enchaînement des tableaux nous amène à préciser cette intuition : il convient de distinguer deux groupes de situations[8]. Une ligne démarque en effet un Sindbad qui mange d'un Sindbad qui risque d'être mangé, plus ou moins directement. Naviguant entre nécessité et danger, il se gare de la faim comme des prédateurs. Puis il regagne ses pénates[9], à Bassora. Gardons ce point à l'esprit.

Si nous nous plaçons à présent dans la perspective du mécanisme narratif, nous pensons pouvoir opérer une tripartition des *voyages*[10], lesquels s'avèrent fonctionner par *paires* successives[11]. Celles-ci s'articulent, selon nous, à travers une involution du personnage principal en trois étapes, une dynamique qui dicte le plan de notre propos. Dans un premier

---

nuits. *Essai sur l'édition de Būlāq (1835)* (Arles : Actes Sud, 2013), 259–80, « Sindbād » ; Francesca Bellino, « I sette viaggi di Sindbād il marinaio. Un romanzo arabo nelle *Mille e una notte* », dans *Paradossi delle Notti. Dieci studi su* Le mille e una notte, éd. Leonardo Capezzone et Elisabetta Benigni, 101–29 (Pise : Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2015) ; Emanuela Braida, « Christian Arabic and Garšūnī Versions of *Sindbad* the Sailor. An Overview », *Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture*, n.s., 3, nº 1 (2016) : 7–28.

5. L'incontinence qui obscurcit le jugement.

6. En outre, on reconnaît le genre du *faraj baʿda al-šidda* ; voir Hakan Özkan, *Narrativität im Kitāb al-Faraǧ baʿda š-šidda des Abū ʿAlī al-Muḥassin at-Tanūḫī. Eine literaturwissenschaftliche Studie abbasidischer Prosa* (Berlin : Klaus Schwarz, 2008).

7. Sauf au septième et dernier périple, « l'ambassade », si singulier dans son déroulement. Pour une approche structuraliste d'envergure et pionnière en son temps, voir Mia Irene Gerhardt, *The Art of Story-Telling. A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights* (Leyde : Brill, 1963). Elle avait schématisé la séquence répétitive : départ — malheur — aventure(s) — merveille(s) — retour, conforme au modèle de Propp, à l'exception du quatrième maillon, lié aux ʿajāʾib et aux *masālik*.

8. On pourrait y ajouter l'opposition anthropologique du cru et du cuit, laquelle dessine respectivement la barbarie et la culture.

9. Les Pénates étaient les gardiennes du feu et, par extension, de la nourriture cuite. Livré à la sauvagerie, Sindbad ne connaît que le cru, des fruits pour l'essentiel.

10. On considérera par ailleurs que plusieurs voyages s'apparentent à des dyptiques et qu'ils peuvent avoir résulté de l'assemblages d'unités narratives — *i.e.* dotées d'une intrigue propre. Le deuxième comme le troisième combinent deux scènes insulaires, la seconde s'avérant pire que la première ; le quatrième et le cinquième articulent une action en milieu sauvage à une autre en milieu citadin, le septième s'y laisse apparenter (version du Caire).

11. Sans ouvrir outre mesure la jarre de Pandore du comparatisme, cela nous évoque assez nettement le principe de symétrie mis au jour dans les travaux sur la rhétorique sémitique. La revue *Studia Rhetorica Biblica e Semitica* accueille les publications de ce courant d'analyse : https://www.retoricabiblicaesemitica.org/Studia_Rhetorica_fr.php. Ici, nous parlerions de parallélisme. Ainsi, une première partie traite-t-elle des voyages 1 & 2, une deuxième partie des voyages 3 & 4, une troisième partie des voyages 5 & 6.

moment, il pèche par *oubli*[12]. Cela rompt son lien de sociabilité, coupé qu'il est de ses compagnons. Dans un deuxième temps, il régresse vers l'*animalité*, dégradé au rang de bétail. Dans une troisième phase, il enfreint des tabous majeurs et atteint les *limites* de sa condition. Ce « *decrescendo* dramatique » assure à l'ensemble un suspens efficace. Il permet de surcroît d'agencer une critique en creux.

Le mouvement — oubli, animalité et limites — nous apparaît essentiel. Nous croyons que le canevas sous-jacent sert un projet qui ressortit à l'*adab* : montrer jusqu'à quelles condamnables extrémités l'accumulation pousse les hommes. Le motif alimentaire au cœur de ce dispositif relève alors de la métaphore, celle du glouton. Amasser des biens *plus que de raison* — exécrable obsession, il n'en a jamais assez ! — reviendrait à laisser libre cours à son *hybris*, c'est-à-dire à s'empiffrer — à « vivre pour manger ». Une caricature s'esquisse.

À travers les lignes qui suivent, nous examinerons le détail et les variations de la chute qui entraîne notre anti-héros insatiable, mais avant d'entrer dans le vif du sujet, il nous faut débuter par le conte cadre, puisque c'est lui qui libère la parole de Sindbad.

Le banquet

Une histoire tient à peu de choses. Il aura suffi d'un vers [mètre *mutaqārib*] pour provoquer la confession fleuve des Voyages :

> *Wa-ġayrī saʿIdun bi-lā šaqwatin*
>   *wa-mā ḥamala l-dahru yawman ka-ḥimlī*[13]

> D'autres sont bienheureux loin de toute misère
>   qui jamais ne portèrent de pareils fardeaux[14]

Un portefaix[15] se lamente sur son sort et interroge le passé du riche marchand dont il contemple l'opulente demeure. On ne s'y trompera pas : non seulement le *ḥammāl*, ce sosie

---

12. Sur ce thème, Abdelfattah Kilito, *L'œil et l'aiguille. Essais sur les* Mille et une nuits (Paris : La Découverte, 1992), chap. 5, « Le sourire de Sindbâd », 62–85 qui s'ouvre ainsi : « Sindbâd est un homme de l'oubli ».

13. Nous nous référons pour le texte arabe à : *Alf layla wa-layla* (Beyrouth : Dār Ṣādir, 1999). Les Voyages figurent au 2 : 1–39.

14. Bencheikh, *Sindbâd de la mer*, 351.

15. Quasi-homophone du héros, il se prénomme Hindbād dans plusieurs manuscrits de cette histoire autonome : mss Ar 3645, 3646, 3649, 3667 et 5176 BnF, ou encore Gotha orient. 2651 et Diez A oct. 185 (= 9181) Berlin. C'est également le cas dans les traductions de Pétis de La Croix (Hindabad, 1701) et Galland (Hindbad, 1705), mais aussi dans l'édition bilingue *Les voyages de Sind-Bâd le marin et Les ruses des femmes*, éd. et trad. Louis Langlès (Paris : Imprimerie royale, 1814) et dans *Alf Layla wa-Layla or The Arabian Nights Entertainments, in the Original Arabic*, éd. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Yamanī al-Širwānī (Calcutta : Pereira, 1814) [= Calcutta I]. Cela correspond à la version A (plus ancienne) identifiée par Michael Jan de Goeje, « De Reizen van Sindebaad », *De Gids* 53 (1889) : 278–312, part. 280. Il s'appelle en revanche Sindbād de la Terre (*al-barrī*), double lexical de Sindbād de la Mer (*al-baḥrī*) dans les mss Ar 3648 BnF ou encore Gotha orient. 2650 — qui lisent Sindbāḏ —, ainsi que dans maintes éditions imprimées : *Alf layla wa-layla*, éd. William Hay Macnaghten (Calcutta, 1840) [= Calcutta II], 3 : 4–82 ; *Alf layla wa-layla*, éd. Saʿīd ʿAlī al-Ḫuṣūṣī (Būlāq, 1280/1863 ; réimpr. Le Caire, 1935), 3 : 81–122. Cela correspond à la version B (postérieure) identifiée par de Goeje, « Reizen ». Il est *Sindbād al-ḥammāl* dans le

onomastique, s'avère l'auxiliaire économiquement indispensable du commerçant — il irrigue par son travail les canaux de l'échange et ses bras *réalisent* la valeur des biens charriés —, mais il remplit aussi la fonction d'auditeur-déclencheur[16]. Visé par cette apostrophe amère, Sindbad va l'inviter à entendre, au milieu d'une riche assemblée, le récit de ses aventures.

Il régale ses convives d'un banquet[17] quotidien et s'assure que, rassasiés, ils seront tout ouïe. C'est le prix à payer pour se justifier, voire alléger sa conscience. Ce *symposium* consiste en un discours attablé. Il pourrait représenter l'idéal-type : des égaux conversant autour d'un repas, quoiqu'il confine ici au monologue. Le rituel se répète chaque jour et, en l'espace d'une semaine, l'amphitryon a narré ses exploits qui pourront ensuite être diffusés (de bouche à oreille) dans Bassorah.

Face à son public, Sindbad rend des comptes et défend sa position :

Sache que j'ai derrière moi une histoire merveilleuse. Je t'en raconterai toutes les péripéties. Je n'ai atteint au bonheur dans cette maison où tu me vois qu'après d'innombrables épreuves et d'immenses peines et non sans avoir échappé à de terrifiants dangers. Que de fatigues et de périls n'ai-je pas affrontés jadis au cours de mon existence. J'ai fait sept voyages aussi extraordinaires les uns que les autres[18].

Il entend démontrer par ses mémoires l'utilité de son métier, *il n'est pas un profiteur*, ainsi que le mérite de ses actes, *il n'est pas un héritier*[19]. En investissant le hiatus auteur-narrateur, nous pouvons nous demander si un second niveau de lecture ne doit pas être envisagé, celui d'une critique de la classe marchande. Une tension existe de fait entre l'éthique — système d'interdits et de prescriptions — de la formation médiévale considérée, d'une part, et le stimulant de l'intérêt individuel — mesuré à l'aune du profit retiré d'une somme de comportements —, d'autre part. C'est dans cet écart que nous allons bâtir notre thèse.

Nous montrerons que le narrème de l'ingestion articule chaque voyage dans une descente aux enfers. Nous synthétiserons ensuite les occurrences relevées pour les placer en regard de ce que Sindbad dit de sa compulsion au départ et de ce qu'il perçoit avant de rentrer.

Passons maintenant à l' « odyssée sindbadienne[20] » à proprement parler.

---

ms. Ar 3615 BnF (f° 210r). Les mss Ar 3647 BnF et We 1730 (= 9182) Berlin comportent la déformation Sindbān/Hindbān. Est-ce un glissement graphique du *nūn* au *ḏāl* ? Le premier cité donne par la suite aux deux hommes le même nom, Sindbān. Nous n'insistons pas sur la préfixation ou non de l'article défini à ces patronymes. Enfin, il pourrait tirer son nom de Sindbad le Sage (*al-ḥakīm*) dont le Livre éponyme accouche de la délivrance du prince injustement incriminé, au terme d'une narration de sept jours et sept nuits ; il est déjà mentionné par al-Masʿūdī (m. 345/956) et Ibn al-Nadīm (m. 385/995), voir J.-P. Guillaume, « Sindbād al-Ḥakīm », *EI*² et Bellino, « I sette viaggi », 103. Retenons de ce qui précède la mise en abyme du porteur qui tend le miroir à son alter ego.

16. Si Dounyazade/Dinarzade aide sa sœur Schéhérazade à s'emparer du verbe salvateur, la nuit, Hindbad force Sindbad à se livrer, le jour.

17. Voir G. J. van Gelder, « Banquet », *EI*³.

18. Bencheikh, *Sindbâd de la mer*, 353–54.

19. Il dilapida la fortune léguée par son père et dut faire ses armes « seul ».

20. Les séances puisent indiscutablement à des fonds divers (Bellino, « I sette viaggi »). Le remaniement de matériaux issus de traditions diverses et leurs différents agencements en un tout cohérent et indépendant

L'ingestion motrice

Nous nous appuierons sur le schéma actanciel élaboré par Greimas[21]. C'est le ventre des actants qui guide la narration, qu'il s'agisse du sujet, de l'adjuvant ou de l'opposant.

Oubli (V1 & V2)[22]

Dans le premier et le deuxième voyages, Sindbad est victime de négligence. À deux reprises, l'inattention lui vaut d'être abandonné, comme conséquence d'une restauration insouciante. D'abord (V1[23]) pour s'être attardé sur le dos d'un grand animal marin — pris par erreur pour une île —, où l'on avait chauffé un déjeuner. Ensuite (V2) pour s'être assoupi à l'écart après un bon repas, le bateau ayant levé l'ancre sans lui. Esseulé, il se nourrit d'herbes, comme une bête.

À deux reprises, il risque d'être dévoré par un animal (fabuleux). D'abord (V1), il aperçoit un cheval marin sortir des flots et se livrer à un bien étrange manège, à l'instar d'une mante religieuse[24]. Ensuite (V2), il doit réchapper aux serpents qui pullulent dans la forêt où il a débarqué. Dans ce dernier cas, c'est en s'enroulant dans un morceau de viande qu'il parvient à quitter le piège mortel auquel il ne voyait pas d'issue, emporté dans les airs par des aigles géants qui l'ont pris, ainsi déguisé en appât, pour leur pitance.

Jamais ses robinsonnades ne durent et jamais il n'essaie de s'adapter à la vie sauvage. De retour à la civilisation, il peut faire bombance, servi par les palefreniers du roi Mihrage (V1). Dans cette phase « apéritive », il demeure dans un cadre vertueux et irréprochable, ne causant aucun tort à ses congénères. Ces deux voyages symbolisent un état « témoin » auquel le lecteur ne manquera pas de comparer les voyages suivants afin de mesurer la *dégradation* morale du principal protagoniste. Néanmoins, ils sonnent d'ores et déjà un avertissement primordial, un rappel à l'ordre. S'oublier c'est encourir une certaine déshumanisation[25].

Animalité (V3 & V4)[26]

Dans le troisième et le quatrième voyages, Sindbad déchoit, ravalé au règne animal, assimilé à du vulgaire bétail. Ces épisodes se dédoublent par ailleurs en tableaux distincts.

---

forment le corpus auquel nous adossons notre étude. Ici, il ne sera pas question de diachronie ; voir Bellino, « *I viaggi di Sindbād* ».

21. Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Sémantique structurale* (Paris : Larousse, 1966), en particulier 172–91, « Réflexions sur les modèles actanciels », et 192–221, « À la recherche des modèles de transformation ».

22. Cet « homme de l'oubli » court après son identité perdue à chaque voyage ; Kilito, *L'œil et l'aiguille*, chap. 5.

23. Par commodité, nous abrégeons dans le corps du texte la référence au voyage considéré d'un V suivi du numéro dudit voyage.

24. Deux variantes coexistent : il la couvre puis essaie de l'entraîner dans la mer (*yurīdu aḫḏahā maʿahu*, Le Caire) ou de la tuer (Pétis de la Croix, *Sindabad*, 32 ; Langlès, *Sind-Bâd*, 12 [ar.], *yurīdu qatlahā*).

25. La plante *lotos* efface les souvenirs, au chant IX de l'*Odyssée*.

26. Un possible devancier persan est aussi à envisager : Ulrich Marzolph, « An Early Persian Precursor to the Tales of Sindbād the Seafaring Merchant », *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 167, nᵒ 1 (2017) : 127–41, pour V3 et V4.

À deux reprises, notre marin est destiné à satisfaire l'appétit d'un ogre. D'abord (V3), c'est le sosie de Polyphème qu'il parvient à terrasser en usant de la métis bien connue du Chant IX : il aveugle l'ennemi endormi en transperçant ses yeux au moyen d'une broche incandescente. Avec ses deux camarades rescapés, il survit grâce à des fruits cueillis sur l'île où ils se sont échoués. Hélas, il est tombé de Charybde en Scylla ! C'est *in extremis* — et seul — qu'il échappe aux crocs d'un terrible serpent, avant d'être récupéré par un bateau qui croisait par chance au large. On le régale, il revit. Ensuite (V4), une île le sauve, avec les autres passagers, d'une tempête dévastatrice. Des anthropophages les surprennent et les capturent. Ils droguent les mets qu'ils leur servent pour les engraisser en vue d'un festin cannibale. Une prescience bienvenue évite à notre personnage ce sort funeste. Se méfiant de ses hôtes, il se sort sain et sauf des griffes d'une sorte de Circé[27].

Il n'en a pas pour autant terminé car sa condition humaine va être soumise à l'épreuve de la mort. En effet, il gagne une contrée civilisée et là, son intelligence du commerce — il y introduit avec succès la selle à cheval — l'élève socialement. Une nouvelle tragédie s'abat sur lui. Le décès subit de son épouse lui vaut, selon la coutume locale, d'être emmuré dans la nécropole, à ses côtés (une forme de mort d'accompagnement). Une fois son viatique funéraire (prévu pour une semaine) épuisé, il se comporte en charognard[28] et dépouille les autres malheureuses victimes de ladite coutume des provisions avec lesquelles elles rejoignent tragiquement le sépulcre collectif. Il tue ses semblables pour ne pas périr affamé.

> C'est alors que j'entendis le bruit que faisait la dalle lorsqu'on la tirait de la margelle du puits qui donnait accès à la caverne. Un rayon de lumière apparut. « Que se passe-t-il ? », me dis-je. Eh bien c'était que des hommes, assemblés en grand nombre, faisaient glisser dans la caverne une civière portant le cadavre d'un homme. Son épouse, encore en vie, pleurant et gémissant, fut descendue à sa suite, suspendue à une corde. On l'avait munie de galettes et d'eau.
>
> Je l'observai à son insu alors que la dalle avait été remise en place et que le cortège s'était éloigné. Elle ne pouvait me voir dans le noir. Je me saisis du tibia d'un cadavre d'homme, m'approchai de la femme et lui assenai sur le sommet du crâne un coup qui l'assomma. Elle tomba au sol évanouie. Je la frappai une deuxième puis une troisième fois, elle en mourut. Je vis qu'elle portait vêtements de prix, bijoux d'or et d'argent, colliers de perles, joyaux, pendentifs. Je m'emparai de tout cela. Je pris les galettes et l'eau dont on l'avait munie puis revins à l'emplacement que je m'étais ménagé au

---

27. Cette magicienne ensorcèle les compagnons d'Ulysse puis les métamorphose en porcs au chant X.

28. C'est d'ailleurs en suivant une bête qui fréquente la grotte-tombeau pour y manger les défunts — un régime qui fait écho à son propre comportement — que Sindbad trouve le chemin de la sortie. En cela, l'issue diffère d'une histoire tramée sur le même motif mais dotée d'une fin plus civilisée : la jeune femme se réveille, parvient à s'extraire de sa prison grâce à un seau puis fait délivrer son mari, Qubāṯ b. Razīn ; voir al-Tanūḫī, *Kitāb al-Faraj baʿda al-šidda*, éd. ʿAbbūd al-Šālǧī (Beyrouth : Dār Ṣādir, 1987), 2 : 201–2, # 197, « Asarahu al-Rūm fī ayyām Muʿāwiya wa-aṭlaqūhu fī ayyām ʿAbd al-Malik », et son analyse dans Marius Canard, « Les aventures d'un prisonnier arabe et d'un patrice byzantin à l'époque des guerres bulgaro-byzantines », *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9/10 (1956) : 49–72. Sur ce thème, l'étude suivante fournit de lumineuses parentés : Maurice A. Pomerantz, « Tales from the Crypt. On Some Uncharted Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor », *Narrative Culture* 2, nᵒ 2 (2015) : 250–69, en particulier le tableau comparatiste, 159.

fond de la caverne pour y dormir. Je mangeai et bus parcimonieusement afin de ne pas épuiser trop vite mes provisions, évitant ainsi de mourir de faim et de soif. C'est ainsi que je pus survivre dans la caverne un certain temps, tuant au fur et à mesure toute personne jetée vivante avec le cadavre de son conjoint pour me saisir de la nourriture et de l'eau dont on l'avait munie[29].

Ceci constitue un véritable basculement moral. *Homo homini lupus est*. À partir de cet instant, Sindbad a commis un meurtre. Son crime ouvre la voie à une série de péripéties liées à l'idée de justice.

Limites (V5 & V6)

Dans le cinquième et le sixième voyages, Sindbad tutoie la transgression. D'abord (V5), c'est parce que certains de ses collègues ont rôti — malgré les mises en garde de notre Bassorien avisé — un jeune *ruḫḫ*[30], que son navire sombre sous le bombardement vengeur des deux parents ayant découvert le meurtre de leur progéniture. Revenu à lui sur une île édénique où les fruits abondent, il se retrouve littéralement *monté* par le Vieillard de la mer, alors qu'il lui avait rendu service[31]. Il s'en débarrasse en le saoulant d'un vin de vigueur qu'il a tiré d'une calebasse de raisins fermentés, puis en tuant son « cavalier » ainsi enivré. Ce passage interpelle le concept de *bonne action* : il est puni de sa charité et se libère en usant d'une boisson à laquelle s'attache une prohibition[32]. C'est quelque part un monde à l'envers. Plus prosaïquement dirons-nous avec l'adage que « nécessité fait loi »[33].

Ensuite (V6), il atteint bien involontairement son propre enfer. Jeté avec sa compagnie sur un rivage insulaire par un courant hostile, il découvre à sa grande terreur une Arcadie funeste : tout y est richesse — pierres et bois précieux y foisonnent naturellement, trésors et cargaisons s'y sont échoués par le passé — et désolation : aucune nourriture ne s'y devine.

---

29. Bencheikh, *Sindbâd de la mer*, 414–15.

30. Sa chair représente *de facto* un tabou. Le respect de l'interdit alimentaire peut *a contrario* sauver la vie, telle celle de Jaʿfar al-Ḫuldī qu'un éléphant épargna parce que, à la différence de ses camarades d'infortune, il n'avait pas mangé son petit ; al-Tanūḫī, *Faraj*, 4 : 129–32, # 409 « Āla ʿalā nafsihi an lā yaʾkula laḥm fīl abadan ». Cette parabole du *tawakkul*, en circulation chez de nombreux auteurs, a été étudiée dans Geert Jan van Gelder, « To Eat or Not to Eat Elephant. A Travelling Story in Arabic and Persian Literature », *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66, nᵒ 3 (2003) : 419–30.

31. Ce monstre — une manière de centaure — connote également le parasite (*ṭufaylī*), un être à la polarité négative qui hante la littérature d'*adab*. C'est l'intrus que l'on n'a pas invité et dont l'intérêt personnel viole les convenances sans éprouver la moindre honte.

32. Sur les interprétations des quatre passages coraniques et les positions des *madhhab*s à ce sujet, nous renvoyons à A. J. Wensinck et J. Sadan, « Khamr », *EI²*. Tout au plus dirait-on ici que Sindbad agit en Koufien hanéfite — c'est le seul courant légal qui tolère l'alcool —, produisant du vin comme arme, afin de quitter sa servitude. À la fin de V5, il fustige les habitants mécréants d'une île parce qu'ils « s'adonnent à la débauche et à la boisson » (*yuḥibbūn al-fasād wa-šarb al-ḫumūr*). Est-ce là une sentence insérée pour lever l'ambiguïté ?

33. En écho, il arrive dans la Ville des singes où la multitude simiesque contraint la population à s'exiler la nuit. Néanmoins, c'est en provoquant ces mêmes animaux qu'il se procure quantité de noix de coco et réalise des affaires florissantes.

Cette montagne dominait une grande île sur le rivage de laquelle gisaient de nombreuses carcasses de vaisseaux fracassés. Le sable était jonché de cargaisons éparpillées là par les flots après que les bateaux qui les transportaient eurent fait naufrage et que leurs passagers se furent noyés. Il y avait là un nombre incroyable et inimaginable de marchandises et de richesses que les tempêtes jetaient sur l'île.

Je pris pied et me mis à marcher. Je trouvai, au centre de l'île, une source dont l'eau douce jaillissait, élargissait son courant et disparaissait sous la montagne. Tous nos rescapés s'étaient répandus ici et là. Ils semblaient avoir perdu la raison, devenus comme fous au spectacle des biens et des richesses qui jonchaient le rivage. [. . .]

Nous ne cessâmes de parcourir cette île, émerveillés par les richesses exceptionnelles dont le Seigneur, exalté soit-Il, l'avait pourvue, mais fort inquiets pour notre avenir et saisis d'une grande crainte à regarder ce qui nous environnait[34].

Voilà où l'a mené sa soif inextinguible, *auri sacra fames* ! Il n'a jamais été aussi riche mais il n'y a [plus] rien à monnayer : le luxe ne peut ici pourvoir aux besoins primaires. Le commerce est mort. Paradoxe du marchand ou malédiction de Midas ? Le lecteur aura reconnu l'anathème antique à peine voilé lancé contre la chrématistique[35].

Sindbad aurait dissimulé aux autres naufragés ses dernières réserves, tandis que la famine les décime. Il ne partage pas avec ses semblables, alors que la fin approche :

Pour moi, je restai en vie un peu plus longtemps que les autres ; n'ayant que fort peu de vivres que j'avais cachés sous terre, de peur de mes camarades[36].

Il largue pragmatiquement les amarres de l'humanité. C'est donc seul qu'il va renaître.

Les lieux opèrent telle une *camera oscura* : il embarque sur un radeau qu'il a confectionné et s'engouffre dans le ventre périlleux du Tartare montagneux, emporté par une rivière souterraine. Il débouche dans le royaume de Serendib. Il y demeure quelque temps à la cour où on lui témoigne grand respect. Désireux de revoir les siens, il fait voile vers l'Irak, porteur de cadeaux du souverain à l'attention du calife Hārūn al-Rašīd[37].

Manger ou être mangé

Nous synthétisons ici les éléments précédents puis les commentons. Le tableau ci-après résume les dangers auxquels Sindbad est exposé, en proie tantôt à la faim (c'est lui qui cherche à ingérer activement), tantôt à un opposant carnivore (il se trouve passivement sous la menace d'une ingestion).

---

34. Bencheikh, *Sindbâd de la mer*, 438–39.

35. On se référera à la *Politique* d'Aristote, en ce qu'il y distingue l'économique (ou chrématistique naturelle) — soit l'entretien de la maison (*oïkos*), une administration domestique — de la chrématistique [commerciale] — soit la maximisation sans limite de la richesse. Sur l'aporie d'une monnaie-étalon sans échange — c'est-à-dire d'un argent sans bien —, on lira *L'éthique à Nicomaque*.

36. Une mention qui se trouve chez Pétis de la Croix, *Sindabad*, 75 ; ms. Cleveland, *ḥikāya* 6, fº 4.

37. Dans le texte de Pétis de la Croix, la lettre déploie une incroyable majesté quand le présent n'est pas détaillé. Dans l'édition du Caire, c'est rigoureusement l'inverse.

Figure 1. Manger ou être mangé

voyage	faim	prédateur[38]
V1 « De l'île-baleine au royaume des cavales »	Sindbad n'a que fruits et eau douce.	
V2 « L'oiseau *ruḫḫ* et la vallée aux diamants »	Sindbad n'a que fruits et eau douce.	
	Sur la seconde île, il n'a plus rien à manger.	Sur la seconde île, des serpents menacent de le dévorer. Il réchappe au danger en se déguisant en appât pour transformer un opposant (rapace géant) en adjuvant (moyen de locomotion).
V3 « Les singes et le monstre noir »		Sur la première île, le monstre géant dévore la compagnie.
		Sur la seconde île, un serpent géant dévore les rescapés.
V4 « Dans la caverne des mourants »		Un roi-ogre fait engraisser la compagnie pour la dévorer lors d'un festin.
	Sindbad tue les malheureux descendus dans la nécropole aux côtés des défunts pour voler leur viatique.	
V5 « Le vieillard satanique et l'île aux singes »		Sindbad enivre le vieillard pour se défaire de sa servitude[39].
V6 « La rivière aux trésors »	L'île est dépourvue de toute nourriture.	
V7 « La mer du bout du monde[40] »		Trois monstres marins menacent d'engloutir le navire.
		Un lion menace de le dévorer dans une mosquée de nuit[41].

---

38. Un prédateur est un opposant qui cherche à ingérer Sindbad.

39. Ici le vieillard relève plus du parasite que du prédateur.

40. Dans la traduction de Bencheikh. Il s'écarte ici de l'édition du Caire, celle-ci ne faisant état d'aucune ambassade en retour. Voir *e.g.* ms. Ar 3648 BnF, fᵒˢ 43v *sq.*

41. Dans la version de Pétis de la Croix.

Selon que le narrème de l'ingestion est interne (faim) ou externe (prédation), on obtient la répartition schématique suivante :

Figure 2. Répartition des narrèmes au prisme de l'ingestion

voyage	1		2		3		4	5	6	7
faim	+	+					+		+	
prédation			+	+	+	+		(+)		+

Si l'objet initial est le profit, il s'avère rapidement qu'un second objet s'y enchâsse, celui de la plus élémentaire des survies : manger ou être mangé. La quête du gain engage directement son intégrité physique.

Nous commençons par quelques remarques de cadrage. Un repas malheureux amorce la paire V1-V2, tandis qu'un repas tabou (la consommation de la chair d'un jeune *ruḫḫ*) cause la perdition du V5. Sindbad voit ses compagnons (adjuvants) dévorés dans la paire V3-V4, ou mourir de faim, l'un après l'autre, au V6 : pareil spectacle accroît la dimension dramatique. Les lieux se distinguent par l'alimentation qui s'y rattache : ainsi, aux V1, V2 (première île), V3 (sur les deux îles) et V7, Sindbad n'a que fruits[42] et eau douce pour se sustenter, sans oublier qu'au V4, il refuse les mets *empoisonnés* et se contente d'herbes et de plantes : l'île héberge un monde *transitionnel* du cru, entre les pôles de la faim et du cuit.

Le passage de la paire V1-V2 à la paire V3-V4 correspond à un basculement, de la faim vers la dévoration. Elle culmine avec l'enterrement vivant de Sindbad. Dans l'hypogée, il ne peut plus compter sur les aliments crus qu'offre, selon le topos du *locus amoenus*, toute île au naufragé (en V1 et V2). Revenu à la vie, il joue avec les codes au V5 puisque c'est en *piégeant* son opposant, le Vieillard de la mer, — il le saoule, c'est-à-dire qu'il lui fait avaler une substance dérèglante — qu'il élimine ce corps étranger. L'île au trésor (V6) fausse à son tour les attentes du lecteur : il est immensément riche, mais n'a rien à manger. Là encore (cf. V4), c'est en s'enfonçant sous la terre qu'il renaît.

Enfin, le signal du salut — il est alors hors de danger — intervient sous la forme d'un rassasiement : « Il [. . .] me servit un repas auquel je fis honneur car j'étais affamé. Une fois repu et rassuré, . . . » (V1) ; « Ils m'offrirent aussi quelques provisions et je pus manger à ma faim et étancher ma soif à de l'eau pure et fraîche » (V3) ; « [. . .] ils me prièrent de prendre place parmi eux et m'offrirent un repas auquel je fis honneur car j'avais grand-faim » (V4) ; « Ils me donnèrent de la nourriture et je mangeai à ma faim » (V5) ; « "Je t'en conjure par Dieu, ami, apporte-moi d'abord à manger, je suis affamé, je répondrai ensuite aux questions qu'il te plaira de poser." Il s'empressa de me servir un peu de nourriture que je dévorai. Rassasié, je me reposai, ma frayeur s'apaisa et je recouvrai mes esprits. » (V6) ; « Le vieillard [. . .] fit servir un repas très recherché. Je me régalai et, une fois rassasié, remerciai Dieu [. . .]. À bien manger, boire agréablement [. . .] je repris mes esprits, oubliai mes angoisses et retrouvai quiétude et sérénité. » (V7).

---

42. Des légumes aussi aux V3 et V4.

L'appétit vient en partant

Il nous faut maintenant lier ingestion et accumulation. Nous postulons que le ventre sert de métaphore à l'absorption vorace : il représente le mécanisme dénoncé à chacun des voyages, une manière d'indigestion. Une formule s'impose : Sindbad est puni par là où il a péché. Il sait qu'il ne doit pas s'absenter de chez lui, car nulle indigence ne l'y contraint *plus*. L'inventaire récurrent — alors qu'il navigue vers Bassora — de ce qu'il a amassé confirme l'inutilité de repartir.

C'est donc une fort mauvaise manie qui se répète *ad nauseam* : « Mais me revint en l'âme [. . .] le désir [. . .] de me livrer au négoce [. . .] et d'accroître mes richesses » (*ištāqat nafsī ilā al-tijāra [. . .] wa-ktisāb al-maʿāš*, V2) ; « Mais j'éprouvais bientôt le besoin [. . .] de reprendre une activité lucrative. J'étais en effet — tant il est vrai que "*l'âme incite au mal*" (Coran XII/53) — poussé par un appétit insatiable du gain et l'espoir de réaliser des bénéfices substantiels » (*wa-tašawwaqtu ilā al-matjar wa-l-kasb wa-l-fawāʾid wa-l-nafs ammāra bi-l-sūʾ*, V3) ; « Mais ma vilaine âme m'incita à [. . .] m'adonner à un commerce lucratif » (*fa-ḥaddatatnī nafsī al-ḫabīta [. . .] wa-štaqtu ilā [. . .] al-bayʿ wa-l-maksib*, V4) ; « [. . .] au comble de la joie d'avoir réuni tant de richesses, fait de si nombreux gains et profits. Mais le démon du voyage me reprit » ([. . .] *min šiddat farḥī bi-l-maksib wa-l-ribḥ wa-l-fawāʾid fa-ḥaddatatnī nafsī bi-l-safar*, V5) ; « [. . .] je me surpris à rêver encore à de nouveaux voyages qui permettraient de commercer (*fa-štāqat nafsī bi-l-safar wa-l-tijāra*, V6[43]).

Il est vrai au demeurant que la réprobation verbale proférée par Sindbad (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi-l-sūʾ* ou *nafsī al-ḫabīta*) se prolonge dans ses actes *possiblement criminels*, alors même qu'il rapporte avoir tué, volé et menti pour accaparer :

> En attendant, je me constituais un véritable trésor avec les bijoux dont je dépouillais les cadavres. Je les enveloppais dans leurs propres vêtements et les remontais avec moi. [. . .]

> [Au capitaine qui l'a recueilli, il explique :]
> — Je suis un marchand. Je voyageais sur un grand navire qui s'est brisé et a coulé par le fond. Toutes mes marchandises sont tombées à la mer. Elles étaient faites de ces étoffes et de ces vêtements que tu peux voir autour de mes ballots. J'ai pu les placer sur une grande poutre arrachée à la coque du bateau [. . .][44].

Écoutons Sindbad, le plus lucide sur le cercle vicieux dont il peine à se déprendre (au V4) :

> *laʿana Llāh nafsī iḏ* ramānī al-ṭamʿ bi-hāḏihi al-mawta *baʿdamā laqītu tilka al-šadāʾid wa-ḫalaṣtu minhā, iʿtabartu* wa-mā qanaʿtu[45]

---

43. Ici, c'est précisément en voyant passer « des négociants marqués par les fatigues du voyages » que son mal ressurgit.

44. Bencheikh, *Sindbâd de la mer*, 417.

45. Ms. Cleveland, *ḥikāya* 4, fᵒ 9 (nos soulignés).

La malédiction de Dieu soit sur ma convoitise. Car c'est l'avidité qui m'a jeté dans cette mort, après avoir souffert de tant de calamités et m'en être délivré. J'ai fait des réflexions, et je ne me suis pas contenté[46].

Pareilles pensées l'avaient déjà assailli (V2). Elles le taraudent encore au dernier voyage *rémunérateur* (V6) :

N'étais-je pas tranquille chez moi, dans un pays où je vivais heureux, jouissant de bien manger, bien boire et de me bien vêtir ? Et je ne manquais de rien : argent et marchandise. Qu'avais-je eu à quitter Bagdad et à reprendre la mer [...][47] ?

[...] Je n'avais pourtant aucun besoin, ma fortune était telle que je n'aurais pu l'épuiser ou même arriver à en dépenser la moitié tout le restant de ma vie. J'en avais suffisance et plus encore[48].

Au dernier voyage, il exprime sans ambages l'impérieuse nécessité du repentir et de l'abstinence dans une contrition de circonstance :

Tu mérites, continuais-je de me dire, tout ce qui t'arrive. C'est le décret prononcé contre toi par Dieu, le Très Haut, jusqu'à ce qu'enfin tu te corriges de ton avidité au gain. Car c'est bien de cela qu'il s'agit. Je cours après la fortune alors que j'ai des biens considérables[49].

Chacune des paires (V1 et V2, V3 et V4, V5 et V6) le voit blâmer sa compulsion cupide. Pourquoi aspirer à toujours plus ? Il lui faut un dénouement.

Épilogue : servir pour briser l'addiction

Si Schéhérazade a guéri son roi et époux de la folie, ici c'est le roi de Serendib qui enclenche la cure de Sindbad : « Il me confia une somptueuse offrande et une lettre pour le calife Hârûn ar-Rashîd, maître de Bagdad[50] ».

Son septième et ultime voyage serait une ambassade[51]. Le calife de Bagdad l'y contraint — comment refuser ? —, obligé qu'il est lui-même de *rendre le don* au monarque

---

46. Pétis de la Croix, *Sindabad*, 59 (nos soulignés). Cette mention figure aussi chez Galland.

47. Bencheikh, *Sindbâd de la mer*, 371.

48. Bencheikh, *Sindbâd de la mer*, 441.

49. Bencheikh, *Sindbâd de la mer*, 455 (nos soulignés).

50. Bencheikh, *Sindbâd de la mer*, 446.

51. La version A chez Gerhardt, *Voyages*, 22 pour son analyse du lien entre V6 et V7. Des discordances existent, mais elles n'influencent pas ce qui suit. Il n'est pas à exclure que nous soyons en présence d'un ajout, un genre de *post scriptum* qui signifie à l'auditoire que ces débordements sont terminés et que tout est définitivement rentré dans l'ordre moral. Son statut diffère des couples V1-V2, V3-V4 et V5-V6. Cela a amené les traducteurs à modifier leurs sources manuscrites : Littmann « ajoute, à titre de variante importante, la version A pour la fin du VIme et le VIIme voyage » (*ibid.*, 23–24) ; Lane « a également combiné les deux versions [...] Le VIIme voyage de B est ajouté en note » (*ibid.*, 25). Bencheikh procède à une fusion analogue : ambassade califale (A) et monstres marin (B).

de Serendib. Deux variantes parallèles viennent clore six journées passées à raconter. La première le voit s'enrichir par la découverte d'un cimetière d'éléphants : la mort des pachydermes le couvre d'or[52]. La seconde[53], plus élaborée[54], le rejette sur une énième plage où il se ravitaille en fruits. Il rallie ensuite une mystérieuse communauté de créatures lucifériennes, au sein de laquelle il passe de longues et prospères années, avant que sa femme ne le décide à regagner son Irak natal.

L'intervention d'un tiers — l'autorité politique — le sort de cette spirale vicieuse. En sa qualité d'émissaire, il ne voyage plus pour satisfaire sa névrose mais pour *servir* diplomatiquement deux monarques. Il n'est donc plus seulement mû par l'intérêt personnel mais par la raison d'État. Sous l'angle psychanalytique, nous dirions qu'il a dépassé l'instance du Moi pour la coiffer d'un Surmoi. L'enchaînement diabolique est rompu et la morale est sauve. Cet *explicit* permet de rendre la totalité du récit acceptable. Et pourtant . . .

La « faim » justifie-t-elle les moyens ? Quel a pu être l'accueil réservé à ce cycle ? Quel « héros » est-ce là ? C'est un *caractère*. Sindbad a menti. Sindbad a volé. Sindbad a tué — des coupables comme des innocents. Jamais il ne se repent. Jamais il n'est condamné. Tout au plus promet-il de ne plus recommencer et . . . se parjure. Il n'exprime aucun regret en narrant ses aventures à une élite citadine ? Évoluant dans une trame qui s'apparente à l'*adab*, il y développe une fonction éducative, non pour transmettre un *ethos* mais en vue d'instruire sur le succès[55].

« Réussir, se tirer d'affaire, aller plus loin »[56]. Ne faudrait-il pas alors voir en lui une satire de ces parvenus capables de tout pour se hisser toujours plus haut[57] ? Dans ce cas, il incarnerait un anti-héros dissimulé sous les habits de la chance — sa bonne étoile ne le quitte pas — et de la malice. Ce point demeure délicat. Les belles-lettres moquent explicitement le vice, à l'instar des avares[58], tandis que notre interprétation traque l'implicite tapi dans

---

52. De nouveau il s'en lit un écho *plus moral* chez al-Tanūḫī, *Faraj*, 4 : 174–76, # 424, « Aʿāna al-fīl ʿalā qatl ṯuʿbān fa-kāfaʾūhu bi-mā aġnāhu » où c'est en récompense pour les avoir débarrassés d'un serpent que le protagoniste est conduit audit cimetière.

53. C'est notamment le texte traduit par Bencheikh.

54. Elle remploie et combine des narrèmes déjà employés : le radeau entraîné par un fleuve sous terre (V6), le mariage local (V4), ainsi qu'un serpent prédateur (V2 & V3).

55. « Ce faisant, le conte suit la règle de la culture générale du temps, de l'*adab* [. . .] "Instruisez-vous à l'image de Sindbâd", disait la calife. Mais s'instruire de quoi ? [. . .] tout le comportement de Sindbâd vise à nous présenter à travers lui, non pas un juste qui raisonne, mais un homme qui agit, mieux : un paragon de l'efficacité. » Miquel, *Sept contes*, 82–84.

56. Miquel, *Sept contes*, 85.

57. « It is that greed [for surplus wealth] that speeds Sinbad on his voyages for, as he points out in introducing each of his tales, he undertakes his voyages not out of need but for the desire for adventure which is subsumed under and intimately related to the desire to buy and sell: the desire for profitable commercial ventures— greed » ; Molan, « Sinbad », 246. « But the story has become, "not a veritable glorification of navigation and maritime commerce," but a critique of the disparity between ethics and action. For, the audience, including Shahrazad's king, is aware of the cost of Sinbad's success: the suppression of the merchant's ethical sensibility in his pursuit of material gain » ; *ibid.*, 247, à un bémol près : le cycle peut avoir précédé le conte cadre.

58. « They are featured in anecdotes and short stories, whose tone is often comic or grotesque » ; A. Ghersetti, « Avarice, in Premodern Literature », *EI*³. Elles raillent tout autant le *ṭufaylī* pour son abus d'hospitalité,

des *conduites.* Sindbad n'est pas ridiculisé mais il partage avec les *bukhalāʾ* une pathologie accumulatrice assumée qui génère un comportement blâmable en le poussant à transgresser limite après limite.

De plus, véritable tour de force littéraire — c'est une autobiographie —, il se confie sans remords. Il livre le mobile, un irrépressible appétit de richesses, mais aucun des convives ne rit de lui ni ne le désavoue : bien au contraire, l'émerveillement domine[59]. Son commensal-homonyme a le mot de la fin :

> Ô Sindbâd, ô terrien, considère ce qui m'est advenu, ce qui s'est passé, ce qui en a été de mon destin. Certes, comme tu l'as dit dans tes vers, tu es pauvre et moi riche, mais à quel prix !
>
> — Que Dieu te garde, répondit Sindbâd le portefaix. Ne me tiens pas rigueur de ce que j'ai pu penser injustement de toi[60].

Cela interroge l'audience même. La réception fictive, pour ne pas dire factice, représente-t-elle un contexte réaliste ? La morale conclusive fut-elle partagée par ceux qui entendirent la fin du cycle en d'autres époques ? Furent-ils convaincus par ces paroles ? Nous ne pouvons juger sur pièces. Néanmoins, nous pensons avoir mis au jour un faisceau de propriétés narratives qui esquissent un horizon critique. C'est dans le silence qui retombe une fois la séance levée, après le *ʿajab*, que s'insinue le doute : la folle course des *Voyages* ne reflète-t-elle pas les angoisses suscitées par les dangers que cèle l'argent, ce corrosif social omnipotent ?

---

tout en lui ménageant un droit de réponse, une justification rhétorique, F. Malti-Douglas, « Ṭufaylī », *EI*[2].

59. Ainsi réagit le *ḥammāl* : « . . . plongé qu'il était dans le plus grand étonnement » (*wa-yataʿajjabu ġāyat al-ʿajab*, V1) ; « [. . .] Il songeait aux stupéfiants dangers » (*wa-huwa yataʿajjabu mimmā qāsāhu*, V2) ; « [. . .] encore sous le coup du récit » (*wa-huwa mutaʿajjib mimmā samiʿahu*, V3) ; non traduit (*wa-huwa mutaʿajjib*, V4) ; « émerveillé de ce qu'il venait d'entendre » (*wa-huwa mutaʿajjib min ḏālika al-amr*, V5). Ainsi réagissent les autres invités : « . . . au grand émerveillement de ses amis » (*taʿajjabū min ḏālika*, V2) ; « [. . .] à l'assemblée émerveillée par ce qu'elle avait entendu » (*wa-hum yataʿajjabūn min tilka al-ḥikāya*, V3) ; « [. . .] la tête pleine des aventures — aussi étranges les unes que les autres — » (*wa-hum mutaʿajjibūn ġāyat al-ʿajab*, V4) ; « Tous étaient au comble de l'émerveillement » (*wa-hum mutaʿajjibūn min ḏālika ġāyat al-ʿajab*, V6).

60. Bencheikh, *Sindbâd de la mer*, 466.

Bibliographie

Manuscrits consultés

Bayerische Staatsbibliothek : François Pétis de la Croix (trad.), *Histoire arabe de Sindbad le marin*, ms. BSB-Hss Cod. Gall. 799.

Bibliothèque nationale de France : mss Ar 3615, 3645, 3646, 3647, 3648, 3649, 3667 et 5176.

Cleveland Public Library : François Pétis de la Croix (trad.), *Histoire arabe de Sindabad le marin* (texte arabe, interligne en latin et traduction en français, avec index lexical), ms. W 385.3A-P445h.

Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin : mss Gotha orient. 2650, 2651, Diez A oct. 185 (= 9181)] et We 1730 (= 9182).

Sources primaires

Alf layla wa-layla. Beyrouth : Dār Ṣādir, 1999.

Alf Layla wa-Layla or The Arabian Nights Entertainments, in the Original Arabic. Édité par Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Yamanī al-Širwānī. Calcutta : Pereira, 1814 [= Calcutta I].

Alf layla wa-layla. Édité par William Hay Macnaghten. Calcutta : Thacker and Co, 1840 [= Calcutta II].

Alf layla wa-layla. Édité par Saʿīd ʿAlī l-Ḫuṣūṣī. Būlāq, 1280/1863. Réimprimé : Le Caire : al-Maṭbaʿa wa-l-maktaba al-saʿīdiyya, 1935.

Bencheikh, Jamal Eddine, et André Miquel, trad. *Les mille et une nuits*. Paris : Gallimard, 2006. Voir aussi : Jamal Eddine Bencheikh, trad. *Les mille et une nuits IV. Sindbâd de la mer et autres contes*. Paris : Gallimard, 2001.

Langlès, Louis, éd. et trad. *Les voyages de Sind-Bâd le marin et Les ruses des femmes*. Paris : Imprimerie royale, 1814.

Pétis de la Croix, François, trad. *Sindabad le marin. Traduction inédite de 1701*. Édité par Aboubakr Chraïbi et Ulrich Marzolph. Paris : espaces&signes, 2016.

Al-Tanūḫī. *Kitāb al-Faraj baʿda al-šidda*. Édité par ʿAbbūd al-Šāljī. Beyrouth : Dār Ṣādir, 1987.

Littérature secondaire

Bellino, Francesca. « Another Manuscript of Pétis de la Croix's *Histoire arabe de Sindabad le marin.* A Possible Sub-family in the Fluid Transmission of the Story ». *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, n.s., 12 (2017) : 103–32.

———. « I sette viaggi di Sindbād il marinaio. Un romanzo arabo nelle *Mille e una notte* ». Dans *Paradossi delle Notti. Dieci studi su* Le mille e una notte, édité par Leonardo Capezzone et Elisabetta Benigni, 101–29. Pise : Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2015.

———. « *I viaggi di Sindbād* tra Oriente e Occidente, medioevo et modernità. Materiali inediti e nuove prospettive di ricerca ». (éds), *Linee storiografiche e nuove prospettive di ricerca. XI Colloquio Internazionale Medioevo romanzo e orientale*, édité par Francesca Bellino, Eliana Creazzo et Antonio Pioletti, 141–67. Soveria Mannelli : Rubbettino Editore, 2019.

Braida, Emanuela. « Christian Arabic and Garšūnī Versions of *Sindbad* the Sailor. An Overview ». *Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture*, n.s., 3, nᵒ 1 (2016) : 7–28.

Canard, Marius. « Les aventures d'un prisonnier arabe et d'un patrice byzantin à l'époque des guerres bulgaro-byzantines ». *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9/10 (1956) : 49–72.

Casanova, Paul. « Notes sur les voyages de Sindbâd le marin ». *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 20 (1920) : 113–99.

Collectif. « Sindbâd the Seaman and Sindbâd the Landman, 179 (Burton from the Calcutta II edition) ». Dans *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, édité par Ulrich Marzolph et Richard van Leeuwen, 383–89. Santa Barbara, CA : ABC-CLIO, 2004.

Goeje, Michael Jan de. « De Reizen van Sindebaad ». *De Gids* 53 (1889) : 278–312.

Garcin, Jean-Claude. « Le passage des anciennes à de nouvelles *Mille et une nuits* au xvᵉ siècle ». *Médiévales* 64 (2013) : 74–90.

———. *Pour une lecture historique des* Mille et une nuits. *Essai sur l'édition de Būlāq (1835)*. Arles : Actes Sud, 2013.

Gerhardt, Mia Irene. *The Art of Story-Telling. A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights*. Leyde : Brill, 1963.

———. *Les voyages de Sindbad le marin*. Utrecht : Kemink en Zoon, 1957.

Ghersetti, Antonella. « Avarice, in Premodern Literature ». *EI*[3].

Greimas, Algirdas Julien. *Sémantique structurale*. Paris : Larousse, 1966.

Guillaume, Jean-Patrick. « Sindbād al-Ḥakīm ». *EI*[2].

Kilito, Abdelfattah. *L'œil et l'aiguille. Essais sur les* Mille et une nuits. Paris : La Découverte, 1992.

Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. « Ṭufaylī ». *EI*[2].

Marzolph, Ulrich. « An Early Persian Precursor to the Tales of Sindbād the Seafaring Merchant ». *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 167, nᵒ 1 (2017) : 127–41.

———. « Sindbād ». *EI²* .

Miquel, André. *Sept contes des* Mille et une nuits *ou Il n'y a pas de conte innocent*. Paris : Sindbad, 1981.

Molan, Peter D. « Sinbad the Sailor. A Commentary on the Ethics of Violence ». *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 98, nᵒ 3 (1978) : 237–47. Réimprimé dans *The Arabian Nights Reader*, édité par Ulrich Marzolph, 327–46. Détroit : Wayne State University Press, 2006.

Özkan, Hakan. *Narrativität im Kitāb al-Faraǧ baʿda š-šidda des Abū ʿAlī al-Muḥassin at-Tanūḫī. Eine literaturwissenschaftliche Studie abbasidischer Prosa*. Berlin : Klaus Schwarz, 2008.

Picot, Jean-Pierre. « Dynamique et répétitivité dans les *Mille et une nuits* ou les *Sept voyages de Sindbad le Marin* ont-ils un "sens" ? ». *Littératures* 23 (1990) : 33–46.

Pomerantz, Maurice A. « Tales from the Crypt. On Some Uncharted Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor ». *Narrative Culture* 2, nᵒ 2 (2015) : 250–69.

Van Gelder, Geert Jan. « Banquet ». *EI³*.

———. « To Eat or Not to Eat Elephant. A Travelling Story in Arabic and Persian Literature ». *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 66, nᵒ 3 (2003) : 419–30.

Wensinck, Arent Jan, et Joseph Sadan. « Khamr ». *EI²*.

Adab without the Crusades:
The Inebriated Solidarity of a Young Officer's Hunting Epistle*

Matthew L. Keegan

Barnard College of Columbia University,
New York

(mlkeegan@barnard.edu)

Abstract

The adab *of the sixth/twelfth century is most often viewed through the lens of the counter-Crusade and the "Sunni revival." It is generally assumed that Muslim solidarity was constructed through shared piety and an evocation of the pristine Islamic past. The hunting epistle of Yaghmur b. ʿĪsā al-ʿUkbarī (d. ca. 558/1163) offers a different perspective on how solidarity was imagined. It depicts a drunken feast, followed by a multiday hunting expedition, followed by a second drunken feast. Whereas these inebriated activities are full of fellowship, the return to God-fearing piety at the end of the epistle is marked by loneliness and alienation. Reading* adab *without the framework of the Crusades offers an opportunity to rethink the sensibilities of the period while contributing to our knowledge of* adab *texts written by authors whose works usually do not survive. Yaghmur's epistle is preserved in the* adab *anthology of ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī and attributed to an Arabized Turkish military officer who is otherwise unknown, but the anthologist claims to have edited the epistle, which suggests that Yaghmur is actually a coauthor.*

> We turned against passion and swore ourselves to God-fearing devotion. We took refuge in the realm of right conduct and donned the armor of good behavior. We rectified our past faults and dreaded useless activity. We were afflicted with parting from that company and were driven to estrangement from those companions. . . . This is the story of the Passing Days (*al-ayyām*) among humankind and their effects on both elites and common folk. Their pleasures are like dreams and their wakefulness is like sleep. May God make us among those who triumph with everlasting Paradise.
>
> —Yaghmur b. ʿĪsā, *Risāla ṭardiyya*, in *Kharīdat al-qaṣr*[1]

Thus ends the hunting epistle (*risāla ṭardiyya*) attributed to a young military officer in Damascus named Yaghmur b. ʿĪsā al-ʿUkbarī (d. ca. 558/1163).[2] The epistle, whose problematic authorship is discussed below and which comes to thirty-six pages in print, is an account of a drinking party and a wine-soaked ten-day hunting expedition, followed by a second drinking party that lasts several days. The epistle's turn to God-fearing devotion and good behavior in its final passage evokes in the narrator a sense of loneliness, nostalgia, and estrangement (*ghurba*). Although the inebriated activities of hunting and feasting are described in the final lines of the epistle as "useless activity" (*ḥābiṭ al-ʿamal*), they are nevertheless considered occasions of solidarity throughout the rest of the epistle. Ascetic piety, by contrast, appears in the passage quoted above as something that leads to a breakdown in companionship. At the same time, Yaghmur portrays the period of fellowship, drinking, hunting, and dispersal as an "account of the Passing Days among humankind" (*sīrat al-ayyām fī al-anām*). It is therefore not simply a story of Yaghmur's personal experience but a more general account of fleeting pleasures in the face of the terrible triumvirate of Time (*al-zamān*), Fickle Fortune (*al-dahr*), and the Passing Days (*al-ayyām*).[3] Yaghmur's epistle begins by urging the reader to face the uncertainties of Fate (*al-qadar*) by seizing the day (*ightinām al-ʿumr*), but it ends with the recognition that all

---

1. ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat ahl al-ʿaṣr* (Levant), ed. S. Fayṣal (Damascus: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Hāshimiyya, 1955), 1:389. The *Kharīda* is modeled on earlier, geographically organized *adab* anthologies and is divided into four unequal sections by ʿImād al-Dīn himself: (1) Baghdad and its environs, (2) the Persian East, including Iṣfahān and Khurāsān, (3) the Levant (*al-Shām*), which includes Mosul and the Arabian Peninsula, and (4) Egypt and the West (*al-Maghrib*), including Sicily. Teams from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Egypt, and Tunisia have edited the anthology piecemeal over the course of decades, between 1951 and 1999, each addressing the portion of the anthology that covers their own region. I cite the *Kharīda* throughout the article by noting the region of the edition in parentheses (Iraq, Levant, East, Egypt, or West). For the geographically organized anthology of al-Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1039) and the history of *adab* anthologies more generally, see B. Orfali, *The Anthologist's Art: Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī and His "Yatīmat al-Dahr"* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

2. Although the edition of the text has ʿImād al-Dīn say that Yaghmur's death took place in 508 or 509, this is impossible. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:354. ʿImād al-Dīn met Yaghmur when he visited Damascus in 562/1166–67 or 571/1175–76, and he apparently completed the *Kharīda* in 572/1176–77. Thus, as Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila has pointed out, Yaghmur must have died either in 568–69/1172–74 or in 558–59/1162–64. J. Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama: A History of a Genre* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 214.

3. I use capitalized translations in instances in which I take the words to be personified.

things come to an end and that the pleasures of this earthly life are as though they were in a dream.

At first glance, Yaghmur's epistle seems to be negotiating two diametrically opposed responses to the shortness of human life: one can either seize the day or turn to asceticism in hope for the next life. On closer inspection, however, the two responses are not truly opposed to one another in the epistle but rather temporally mediated. There is a time to seize the day and enjoy the pleasures of life with one's companions, and there is a time for turning to righteous conduct. The loneliness that comes along with asceticism and good behavior suggests that social solidarity is undergirded by shared pleasures rather than shared piety. At the same time, the concern for Islam and the next life is never truly absent, even as the characters in the epistle indulge in earthly pleasures, which are described as a kind of earthly version of Islamic paradise.

Yaghmur's epistle was written sometime in the latter half of what I call the "long sixth/twelfth century," a term that I have coined to refer to the century and a half between the Frankish conquest of Jerusalem in 492/1099 and the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 656/1258. The history of this period is well known because it is the era of the Crusades. By contrast, the *adab* of the long sixth/twelfth century has received scant attention, perhaps because it sits awkwardly between the lifetime of al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122) and the Mamluk period.[4] Al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* were once the boundary beyond which scholars of Classical Arabic literature deigned not to tread because of the supposed decadence and dullness of the material found in the later, "postclassical" period. Although scholars of Mamluk-era *adab* have successfully revitalized interest in the so-called decadent period, the long sixth/twelfth century remains largely unstudied.[5] The major exception to this trend is the *adab* (both poetry and prose) written about the Crusades. For example, the *Kitāb al-Iʿtibār* (*Book of Contemplation*) of Usāma b. Munqidh (d. 584/1188) has been translated into English twice in the past century precisely because it is a source for the Muslim response to the Crusades, but major *adab* figures such as al-Wahrānī (d. 565/1179) and Bulbul al-Gharām al-Ḥājirī (d. 632/1235) are scarcely recognizable, even among specialists in Classical Arabic.[6]

---

4. S. von Hees, ed., *Inḥiṭāṭ—The Decline Paradigm: Its Influence and Persistence in the Writing of Arab Cultural History* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2017); M. Cooperson, "The Abbasid 'Golden Age': An Excavation," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 25 (2017): 41–65. These two recent sources and the bibliographies they supply suggest the fruitfulness of this reevaluation.

5. T. Bauer, "'Ayna hādhā min al-Mutanabbī!': Toward an Aesthetic of Mamluk Literature," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17 (2013): 5–22.

6. Nizar Hermes has made a similar point regarding Ibn al-Qaysarānī (d. 548/1153), whom modern scholars tend not to recognize even though he was one of the most famous and important poets of his era. N. Hermes, "The Poet(ry) of Frankish Enchantment: The *Ifranjiyyāt* of Ibn Qaysarānī," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20 (2017): 267–87. The translations of Usāma b. Munqidh are *The Book of Contemplation*, trans. P. Cobb (London: Penguin Books, 2008), and *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades*, trans. P. K. Hitti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), reprinted several times. A small amount of work has been done on al-Wahrānī; e.g., E. K. Rowson, "Parody in Arabic *Adab*: The *Rasāʾil* of al-Wahrānī" (unpublished paper); H. Fähndrich, "Parodie im 'Mittelalter': Aus einem Werk des M. B. Muḥriz al-Wahrānī (gest. 1179–80)," in *Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. W. Heinrichs and G. Schoeler, 439–46 (Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1994); al-Wahrānī, *Manāmāt al-Wahrānī wa-maqāmātuhu wa-rasāʾiluhu*, ed. I. Shaʿlān and M. Naghash (Köln:

The Euro-American fixation with the Crusades creates both a selection bias in favor of Crusade-related material and an incitement to a particular mode of discourse about the Crusades to the exclusion of other cultural and political concerns. One of the assumptions underpinning the modern discourse on the long sixth/twelfth century is that Islamic political ideology in this period was constructed and reinforced through a commitment to ascetic piety and to an imagined community rooted in the early Islamic past. Summing up several scholarly contributions on this topic, Daniella Talmon-Heller states that scholars have established "a firm link between personal piety and enlistment to the defense of Dar al-Islam."[7] Solidarity in the era of the Crusades has thus generally been imagined as a kind of "moralistic community" that was established through "propaganda" focused on "asceticism, humility . . . and sincere personal religiosity."[8]

Given these assumptions about the centrality of personal piety in the counter-Crusade, there is a tendency to read the *adab* of the period either as propaganda or as an expression of the "Sunni revival." Although the framework of the Sunni revival has been called into question, there remains a tendency to see the long sixth/twelfth century as an age of religious fervor.[9] In particular, scholars have trained their attention on texts that urge ascetic piety and seek to portray counter-Crusading heroes such as Saladin as ascetic warriors. I have argued against using the term "propaganda" and its conceptual apparatus in a companion article entitled "Rethinking Poetry as (Anti-Crusader) Propaganda." Propaganda and related terms like censorship do not effectively capture the ways in which poetry circulated as an elite discourse during this period, and they do not take account of the wide variety of topics addressed in *adab*. A survey of the era's poetry suggests that this was not an age that was single-mindedly focused on the counter-Crusade and the Sunni revival but one that was full of Shiʿite poets, cross-confessional patronage networks, and licentious poetry.[10]

Yaghmur's epistle represents a further opportunity to rethink the *adab* production of this period because Yaghmur foregrounds the rather un-ascetic behaviors of drinking and hunting. The epistle is preserved in ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 597/1201) massive *adab* anthology, *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat ahl al-ʿaṣr* (The palace's perfect pearl and the register

---

Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 1998). It should be noted that the date of the author's death on the cover of this edition is given as 1575 CE, which is incorrect.

7. D. Talmon-Heller, "Historical Motifs in the Writing of Muslim Authors of the Crusading Era," in *The Crusader World*, ed. A. Boas, 378–90 (New York: Routledge, 2016), 378. Surveys of this material can also be found in O. Latiff, *The Cutting Edge of the Poet's Sword: Muslim Poetic Responses to the Crusades* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

8. Talmon-Heller, "Historical Motifs," 385. For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Keegan, "Rethinking Poetry."

9. A. C. S. Peacock summarizes this brand of revisionist scholarship and demonstrates that the Seljuks were pragmatists who, whatever their personal feelings, did not seek to enforce religious conformity. Sunni factionalism seems to have presented a bigger problem than sectarian disputes did. Peacock, *The Great Seljuk Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 247–85. Stephennie Mulder has offered a cogent critique of a sectarian paradigm for reading ʿAlid shrines in the long sixth/twelfth century, but due to her focus on certain kinds of sources and materials, she characterizes the atmosphere of the age as one of religious excitement. Mulder, *Shrines of the ʿAlids in Medieval Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 3–4.

10. Keegan, "Rethinking Poetry."

of the people of the present age), which covers sixteen volumes in print and is devoted almost exclusively to poetry. ʿImād al-Dīn calls Yaghmur an "Arabized Turk (*min muwalladī al-atrāk*) and one of Damascus's well-known military men (*umarāʾihā al-maʿrūfīn*)."[11] What this epistle apparently represents is a text originally composed by someone who was part of a broader military elite but who was marginal to the world of *adab* and Arabic scholarship. We seem to have no other record of this Yaghmur, a level of obscurity to which I will return below.[12]

Of course, one can easily find medieval sources that laud the ascetic piety of Muslim warriors or of counter-Crusaders like Saladin (d. 589/1193) and Nūr al-Dīn (d. 569/1174). A chronicle like Abū Shāma's (d. 665/1268) *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn al-Nūriyya wa-l-Ṣalāḥiyya* portrays these two rulers as entirely devoted to austere piety and the pursuit of jihad. For example, Abū Shāma relates the story of a certain pious recluse who asked Nūr al-Dīn why he played polo, saying, "I did not think that you would engage in frivolity and play, and torture your horses without some religious benefit (*fāʾida dīniyya*)."[13] Nūr al-Dīn explains that in the seasons when they are not actively waging jihad, the horses become listless and lose the ability to charge and retreat in battle unless they are made to exercise. Through this anecdote, the historian Abū Shāma cultivates an image of Nūr al-Dīn in which activities that might be associated with rest, amusement, and pleasure are all inscribed within an economy of the *fāʾida dīniyya*. ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, the anthologist who included Yaghmur's epistle in his *Kharīda*, also participated in this form of ascetic image cultivation on behalf of his patrons. For instance, ʿImād al-Dīn composed the following quatrain in the voice of his patron Nūr al-Dīn upon the latter's request:

> I vow that I have no goal except jihad.
> Repose in anything else is burden for me.
> Striving achieves nothing without seriousness (*jidd*).
> Life without the seriousness of jihad is a [mere] game.[14]

These snapshots of ascetic fervor insist upon subordinating amusement, idleness, and pleasure to the goals of jihad. By stark contrast, Yaghmur's epistle considers pleasure and piety to be compatible impulses that are suitable for different moments or stages of life. Hunting and drinking with one's companions are not conceived of as part of a

---

11. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:354.

12. Hämeen-Anttila also discusses the tantalizing possibility of identifying this Yaghmur with another Yaghmur who died around the same time and whom Ibn ʿAsākir calls *al-faqīh al-muqriʾ*. Were such an identification confirmed, it would shed yet further light on the mock-asceticism of this epistle. Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*, 214.

13. Abū Shāma, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn al-Nūriyya wa-l-Ṣalāḥiyya*, ed. I. al-Zaybaq (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1998), 1:35.

14. Abū Shāma, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn*, 2:242. Translated somewhat differently in C. Hillenbrand, "Jihad Poetry in the Age of the Crusades," in *Crusades: Medieval Worlds in Conflict*, ed. T.F. Madden, J.L. Naus, and V. Ryan, 9-24 (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 14. The ideal of the chivalric Muslim warrior who is both brave and chaste is also a feature of the *futuwwa* and *ʿayyārī* ideologies discussed in D. Tor, *Violent Order: Warfare, Chivalry, and the ʿAyyār Phenomenon in the Medieval Islamic World* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2007), 246–51.

fāʾida dīniyya, either as military exercises that support jihad or as a way of reinforcing the solidarity needed for the battlefield. Instead, Yaghmur's hunting epistle portrays pleasure and solidarity as virtues in themselves. In Yaghmur's epistle, companionship and social solidarity are ideals that are best achieved through imbibing wine, inebriation, licentiousness (*khalāʿa*), homoerotic liaisons, and hunting. In the remainder of this article, I offer a brief introduction to Yaghmur's identity and a few preliminary remarks on the place of this epistle in the history of *adab*, followed by an exposition and analysis of this remarkable and moving epistle.

Yaghmur and the Coauthored Epistle

Everything we know for certain about Yaghmur's life is derived from ʿImād al-Dīn's biographical entry, which precedes the epistle. ʿImād al-Dīn tells us that he met the young man in Damascus and praises him for his bravery and his intellect, while mourning the fact that he died so young.[15] ʿImād al-Dīn says that he came across an autograph copy of the hunting epistle after Yaghmur's death, and he lists the epistle's themes to introduce the text to the reader. ʿImād al-Dīn also states that he revised the text before including it in the anthology:

وجدتُ رسالةً له بخطه ذكر فيها ما يتضمن مُعاشرة الإخوان وتعب الزمان والحثَّ على اغتنام الفُرَص
ووصف الصيد والقنص وشُرب المُدام وتقلب الأيام. ونقّحناها وصححناها وحذفنا منها وأصلحناها وكلّلناها
ورصّعناها وأوردنا منها ما وقع الاختيار عليه نظماً ونثرًا وأحيينا له بإيرادها ذكرا.

I found his epistle, written in his hand, in which he discusses what pertains to brotherly fellowship, weariness of the age, incitement to seize opportunities, descriptions of the hunt and setting snares, drinking wine, and the fickleness of the Passing Days. I revised it, corrected it, shortened it, set it right, crowned it, and adorned it [with rhyming prose]. I presented its prose and its poetry according to what suited my choice and revived his memory by presenting it.[16]

ʿImād al-Dīn's discussion of his extensive revisions, abridgments, and emendations calls into question the extent to which Yaghmur can be considered the "author" of the epistle. At the very least, we must consider it coauthored, since Yaghmur's original composition has been reshaped to some unknown degree by ʿImād al-Dīn. It may be that Yaghmur originally wrote the epistle in so-called Middle Arabic, a register of language that does not follows all the grammatical conventions of the high Qurʾānic or Classical Arabic. His status as a non-Arab who had achieved some level of assimilation into Arabic culture is marked by his identification as a *muwallad*, and thus he might not (at least in ʿImād al-Dīn's view) have been a true master of Arabic.[17] Alternatively, the epistle may have been written in a plain style of Classical Arabic that lacked the level of rhyming prose (*sajʿ*) that was in fashion at

---

15. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:354.

16. Ibid.

17. My thanks are due to Rachel Schine for her insights on the meaning of this term.

the time. When ʿImād al-Dīn states that he "adorned" the epistle (*raṣṣaʿnāhā*), he is likely referring to his use of the intricate form of rhyming prose known as *sajʿ muraṣṣaʿ* in which entire phrases are quantitatively paralleled. Ordinary *sajʿ* could be limited to rhyming words at the end of each phrase.[18]

It is also worth considering the possibility that Yaghmur was not a real person at all but simply someone whom ʿImād al-Dīn invented in order to compose an epistle of his own invention. The trope of a "found text" is well known from cases like *Don Quixote* by Cervantes (d. 1616 CE), and it is also found in Arabic literature in, for example, the *Risālat al-qiyān* (Epistle on the singing girls) of al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868) and in an epistle entitled *Waqʿat al-aṭibbāʾ* (The battle of the physicians) by Ibn Buṭlān (d. 458/1066), an edition of which is currently being prepared for publication by Ignacio Sánchez.[19] If ʿImād al-Dīn did invent the epistle and its author, then what we have is an author imagining himself as an Arabized Turkish officer through pseudepigraphy, but he does not give any hint of this fabrication. The *Kharīda*'s explicit aim of compilation and memorialization suggests that when ʿImād al-Dīn says he met the author and found an autograph manuscript of the epistle, he really means it. He regularly informs the reader of how and in what form he encountered the texts he anthologizes, and he also includes some details about his personal encounters with the authors, as he does here. In this sense, ʿImād al-Dīn is a distinct and frequent presence in his anthology and does not disappear behind the material he anthologizes, as many anthologizers seem to do.[20] The fact that Yaghmur's biography was not included in other biographical compendia or anthologies is hardly proof that he did not exist, given that ʿImād al-Dīn anthologizes several authors who are otherwise unknown and who belong to social classes whose discursive production would not have been preserved as part of *adab* in earlier eras. For example, the *Kharīda* contains poems by an unnamed love-poet (*ghazzāl*) who is described as a member of the sub-elites (*ʿawāmm*) of Baghdad, and by a one-eyed Damascene hawker of goods (*bāʾiʿ*) who writes a poem about wanting to be left alone.[21] Yaghmur's inclusion in the anthology can be seen as part of the widening purview of *adab* anthologies in this period, which reflected the proclivities of the anthologizers.

In fact, Yaghmur's epistle is not the only example in the *Kharīda* of the anthologizer engaging in abridgment and emendation of a longer prose work. The entry that precedes Yaghmur's contains an epistle that ʿImād al-Dīn claims to have abridged (*ikhtaṣartuhā*), although he does not say that he corrected or upgraded the language. This other epistle, entitled *al-Nasr wa-l-bulbul* (The eagle and the nightingale), is a kind of pious allegory by

18. D. Stewart, "*Sajʿ* in the Qurʾān: Prosody and Structure," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21 (1990): 101–39, at 131–32.

19. H. Mancing, "Cide Hamete Benengeli vs. Migue de Cervantes: The Metafictional Dialectic of Don Quixote," *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 1 (1981): 63–81. J. E. Montgomery, "Beeston and the Singing-Girls," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 36 (2006): 17–24, at 20. I am grateful to Ignacio Sánchez for bringing this epistle to my attention and for sharing a preliminary draft of his edition.

20. On this question, see A. Ghersetti, "A Pre-modern Anthologist at Work: The Case of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Waṭwāṭ (d. 718/1318)," in *Concepts of Authorship in Pre-modern Arabic Texts*, ed. L. Behzadi and J. Hämeen-Anttila, 23–46 (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2015), 27–30.

21. *Kharīda* (Iraq), 2:323; *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:271–72.

al-Muhadhdhib al-Dimashqī, a Damascene preacher of the sixth/twelfth century.[22] At the end of the allegorical epistle, ʿImād al-Dīn seems almost apologetic about its hortatory quality, saying: "This epistle ends with a sermonizing section (*faṣl waʿẓī*), which is not the task of the book (*laysa min sharṭ al-kitāb*)."[23] This comment sheds light on how ʿImād al-Dīn conceived of his *Kharīda* and tells us something of his editorial practice. Apparently, the *Kharīda* was not designed to be a sermonizing work. However, ʿImād al-Dīn is willing to leave intact a sermonizing section in *al-Nasr wa-l-bulbul*, even as he abridges that same epistle in other ways. In other words, the act of anthologizing includes editing but not eliminating material that is deemed to lie outside the boundaries of the book's tone, task, or genre.

If we take ʿImād al-Dīn at his word, Yaghmur's epistle is a coauthored text. It is impossible to know how much each coauthor contributed to the version we have in the *Kharīda*, although ʿImād al-Dīn's comments suggest that he has mainly altered the formal aspects of the text while maintaining (if sometimes rearranging) the plot and thematic content set down by Yaghmur. If I am right in supposing that the epistle is not ʿImād al-Dīn's pseudepigraphic forgery, what we have is a remarkable example of *adab* composed by a military man whose participation in *adab* was of the more amateur variety, rather than that of an *adīb*. The epistle is likely just a tiny drop in a boundless ocean of *adab* that did not survive because it was not written by the elite producers of *adab*. The *Kharīda* thus marks an early phase in an ongoing trend in which anthologies expanded their scope. A similar process can be seen in Konrad Hirschler's study of reading certificates (*samāʿāt*), and these certificates reveal an increasing interest in documenting readers with nonscholarly backgrounds.[24] Although there is certainly evidence of hostility to the entry of sub-elites into elite spheres such as *adab*, these polemics had little impact on the practice of including nonscholarly readers in *samāʿāt*. In a similar fashion, the *Kharīda* includes a wider range of voices than earlier anthologies do, which seems to reflect a growing elite interest in the discursive participation of previously invisible authors.[25] The social transformations of education and *adab* in this period thus led to the blurring and intermingling of elites and literate sub-elites in the *samāʿāt* and the anthology.

It seems likely that authors who were not specialists in the *adab* tradition also produced and circulated their works in earlier periods but that much of it did not survive. As Adam Talib has argued with reference to poetry, the past preserved by *adab* anthologies is a "gilded cage" that can be deceptive, a point that is equally applicable to prose:

---

22. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:340.

23. Ibid., 1:353.

24. K. Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 60–70.

25. T. Bauer, "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 105–32, at 109–11; T. Herzog, "Composition and Worldview of Some *Bourgeois* and *Petit-Bourgeois* Mamluk *Adab*-Encyclopedias," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17 (2013): 100–129, at 105–6. The normative reaction against including nonscholarly readers in reading certificates "had little influence on the praxis of knowledge transmission," but elite hostility to certain genres of writing that were seen as non-elite persisted. Hirschler, *Written Word*, 68 and 164–93.

We must not allow the colossal volume of anthologized material to dupe us into thinking that it is everything. . . . If ours is an anthological literary history, then it is also true that for the study of Classical Arabic poetry, the extra-anthological has been irrevocably lost. Whatever texts and whichever poets failed to make it aboard these anthological arks—whether because they were deliberately excluded or because they inhabited literary worlds that were for all intents and purposes sealed off from what we have to presume were the more elite worlds in which anthologists circulated—that extra-anthological past is undiscoverable today.[26]

Perhaps Yaghmur's epistle represents a fragment of a more widespread kind of *adab* that is otherwise lost, or perhaps this very notion that we have evidence of lost *adab* is a case of the anthology duping us into thinking we can see beyond the gilded cage. In either case, it should be remembered that our encounter with Yaghmur's epistle is at least doubly mediated. It is mediated firstly by ʿImād al-Dīn's editorial interventions and secondly by the framework of the Crusades that overwhelms the modern study of the long sixth/twelfth century. Although it is impossible to recover the extra-anthological past, the study of a text that seems to have just barely made it aboard the anthological ark can perhaps shed light on some overlooked aspects of *adab*'s history. For example, Yaghmur's identity as an "Arabized Turk" and as one of the "well-known military men" of Damascus puts his work into a category of *adab* produced by the Turkic military elite.[27] The role of this "non-Arab" group in the production of *adab* and the role of courts dominated by a non-Arab elite have often been dismissed or diminished.[28] Yaghmur's epistle may have had a very limited circulation, given that ʿImād al-Dīn found it in what may have always been a unique manuscript, written in the author's own hand. The text is not known to survive independently of the *Kharīda*, which means that it would have probably flickered out of existence without ʿImād al-Dīn's intervention. However, it is likely part of a broader phenomenon of ephemeral texts by nonscholarly and non-Arab authors.

In spite of Yaghmur's status as a marginal participant in *adab*, this elite soldier's epistle clearly draws in sophisticated and original ways on both the poetic tradition of hunting odes (*qaṣāʾid ṭardiyya*) and the narrative *maqāma* tradition. The poet Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī (d. 357/968) experimented with lengthening and narrativizing the hunting ode when he composed a 136-line *urjūza muzdawija* (a poem in rhyming couplets in the looser metrical

---

26. A. Talib, review of *The Anthologist's Art: Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī and His "Yatīmat al-Dahr"* by Bilal Orfali, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139 (2019): 251–53, at 253.

27. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:354.

28. The major exceptions are B. Flemming, "Literary Activities in Mamluk Halls and Barracks," *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet,* ed. M. Rosen-Ayalon, 249–60 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977); U. Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Language: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33 (1988): 81–114; J. Van Steenbergen, "Qalāwūnid Discourse, Elite Communication, and the Mamluk Cultural Matrix: Interpreting a 14th-Century Panegyric," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 1–28; C. Mauder, *Gelehrte Krieger: Die Mamluken als Träger arabischsprachiger Bildung nach al-Ṣafadī, al-Maqrīzī und weiteren Quellen* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2012); C. Mauder and C. Markiewicz, "A New Source on the Social Gatherings (*Majālis*) of the Mamluk Sulṭān Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 24 (2016): 145–48.

form of *rajaz*), which describes a single day's hunt in elaborate detail. Al-Ḥamdānī's poem begins by referring to the treachery of the Passing Days and Fickle Fortune, and it ends with a seven-day-long feast of wine and meat.[29] These are also themes that Yaghmur's rhyming prose epistle includes and dwells on at greater length. Abū Firās's *muzdawija ṭardiyya* was therefore not, as Jaroslav Stetkevych has suggested, a "historical non sequitur—a never repeated formal curiosity."[30] In fact, the *muzdawija ṭardiyya* found fertile ground in the Mamluk period, as Thomas Bauer's study of Ibn Faḍl Allāh's (d. 749/1349) *muzdawija* has shown. Furthermore, the cognate narrative genre of the *risāla ṭardiyya* seems to have thrived both in the long sixth/twelfth century and in the Mamluk period.[31] At the same time, Yaghmur's narrative bears certain similarities to the *maqāma* genre. As Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila has pointed out regarding Yaghmur's epistle, "had it been written some five centuries later, it would probably have been called *maqāmat al-ṭard*."[32] Its protagonists are, after all, the elegant and eloquent men who are so familiar from the *maqāma* tradition, but the narrative here is longer than in a typical *maqāma* and revolves around the themes of hunting and inebriated solidarity in the face of fickle fortune. It is to this narrative itself that we now turn.

Yaghmur's Epistle: Inebriated Solidarity

Yaghmur's prosimetric hunting epistle begins with a nonnarrative prologue and then launches into the story of a group of companions who engage in a drinking party and then set off on a multiday hunt that also involves a good deal of drinking. At the end of the hunt, they indulge in a second bout of drunken revelry. The epistle can usefully be divided into five unequal movements: (1) the nonnarrative encomium to youth and wine; (2) the narrator's companions introduced; (3) the drinking party and a mock sermon; (4) the journey, the hunt, and the second revel; (5) the repentance. The repentance and the mock sermon during the drinking party mark intrusions of ascetic piety into a world of dissolute behavior, but they also mark the moments in which group solidarity breaks down. The vocabulary of Islam (but not of asceticism) appears elsewhere, too, but it is less disruptive to group solidarity.

In the opening movement, the first-person narrator and persona of the author praises youth (*ṣibā*) as the soul of companionship. He describes the ideal brother-companion as someone who is generous, intelligent, powerful, possessed of youthful passion (*ṣabwa*), and slow to anger. The narrator says that youth itself urges us to "seize the day" (*ightinām al-ʿumr*)

29. J. Stetkevych, *The Hunt in Arabic Poetry: From Heroic to Lyric to Metapoetic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 205–22.

30. Stetkevych, *Hunt in Arabic Poetry*, 185.

31. T. Bauer, "The Dawādār's Hunting Party: A Mamluk *Muzdawija Ṭardiyya*, Probably by Shihāb al-Dīn ibn Faḍl Allāh," in *O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk*, ed. A. Vrolijk and J. P. Hogendijk, 291–312 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

32. Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*, 215.

because this world is fickle and inconstant.[33] Wine—and lots of it—is the appropriate response to and revenge against the vicissitudes of this world.

وليس للمُقيم بها مُقام ولا للمنتقم من صَرْفها انتقام إلا بمداومة الصهباء في الإصباح والإمساء لصَرف الهمّ عن قلبه بصِرْف الراح وجعْل قدحه الكبير من الأقداح ومباكرة دنّه وخمّارة ومُراوحة عُوده ومزماره.

The one who resides in [this world (*al-dunyā*)] has no abode, and there is no revenge for anyone against its vicissitudes except passing around the ruddy red drink at dawn and at dusk to rid his heart of care with the purity of wine, making his goblet the largest one, hastening in the morning to his wine jug and his wine merchant, and turning in the evening to his oud and his flute.[34]

Rather than waiting for the next world (*al-ākhira*), Yaghmur urges his reader: *Carpe diem*! The poignancy of this introduction is heightened by the fact that the author died so young. As ʿImād al-Dīn says of Yaghmur, "Fate (*al-qadar*) brought about the waning of his brilliant star and the stumbling of his galloping steed."[35] The awful consequences wrought by the vicissitudes of Fate and the inconstancy of Time are therefore brought into stark relief in the *Kharīda* by the reader's foreknowledge of the author's early demise.

In the epistle's second movement, the narrator introduces his companions and their habits. He tells us that God granted him noble companions (*fataḥa Allāhu lī bi-sāda umarāʾ*).[36] These generous companions act as a bulwark against the vagaries of Time, "granting sanctuary when the Passing Days are unjust (*yujīrūn idhā jārat al-ayyām*)."[37] Their friendship is based on an intimacy that allows for indulgence in licentiousness and iniquity:

فلما اتفقت الشَهَوات وزالت الشُبُهات شرعنا في استدامة المُدام وأتبعنا الليالي فيها والأيام لا نُفيق من صَبوح وغَبوق ولا نسأم من خلاعة وفسوق ما بين نغم أوتارٍ ودَلْف راووق مستوطنين منزلًا للخلوة وارتشاف القهوة فاقتضى ما بيننا من اقتراح الألفة والتألُّف واطِّراح الكُلفة والتكلُّف أن قسمنا الأيام والليالي بيننا أقسامًا.

When our passions aligned and our doubts dissipated, we began to pass around the wine. We followed nights of revelry with days, not recovering from the morning draught or the evening draught. We had no loathing for licentiousness or iniquities among the melody of stringed instruments and the heavily laden wine jugs, as we settled down in a secluded spot to sip wine. The easy flow of affection and concord among us and the casting aside of discomfort and formality led us to distribute our nights and days among ourselves.[38]

---

33. *Kharīda (Levant)*, 1:355.

34. Ibid., 1:356.

35. Ibid., 1:354.

36. Ibid., 1:357.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 1:358.

Friendship and solidarity with one's fellows are presented here as a way of protecting oneself from the vicissitudes of Time and the injustice of Fate. This form of solidarity is based not on a shared religious sensibility but on communal vice and a willingness to engage in licentiousness (*khalāʿa*) and iniquities (*fusūq*) together.

In contrast to this social protection against injustice, the rogue-tricksters of the classical *maqāma* protect themselves against the injustices of the world by relying on their own wits. In the *maqāma*s of al-Hamadhānī (d. 395/1008) and al-Ḥarīrī, the rogue-trickster often excuses his deceptions with reference to the injustices of Time. For example, in al-Hamadhānī's *al-Maqāma al-qirdiyya* (The imposture of the monkey), the narrator witnesses a man putting on a show with a dancing monkey. When he finds that the monkey trainer is none other than his old friend, the rogue Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī, he asks, "What is all this baseness? Shame on you!" Al-Iskandarī replies:

<div dir="rtl">

فاعتب على صرف الليالي   الذنب للأيام لا لي

ورفلت في حلل الجمال   بالحمق ادركت المنى

</div>

> The fault belongs to the Passing Days and not to me,
>> so censure the calamitous nights.
> With foolishness I gained what I desired,
>> and I swaggered along in my lovely garments.[39]

In al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāma* collection, the eloquent rogue Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī sometimes makes more explicit reference to the problem of politics, noting that Fickle Fortune (*al-dahr*) has given power to deficient people (*ahl al-naqīṣa*).[40] His response to this unjust political environment is to use his eloquence and erudition to trick the ignorant and relieve them of their money. The success of his tricks is predicated upon adjusting his discourse to the context of the performance:

<div dir="rtl">

ولابستُ صَرْفَيهِ نُعمَى وبُؤْسا   لبستُ لكل زمان لَبُوسا

يلائمه لأُروق الجليسا   وعاشرتُ كُلَّ جليسٍ بما

وبين السُقاة أدير الكُؤُوسا   فعند الرُواة أدير الكَلام

وطورًا بلَهوي أسُرّ النفوسا   وطورًا بوعظي أسيل الدموع

</div>

> I wore attire appropriate for every Time
>> and was on intimate terms with its alternating states—happiness and misery.
> I dealt with each companion according
>> to what suited him to give my companion pleasure.
> With the transmitters of tales, I pass 'round speech,
>> and among those who pour out wine, I pass 'round the cups.

---

39. Al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt Abī al-Faḍl al-Hamadhānī*, ed. Y. al-Nabhānī (Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat al-Jawāʾib, 1881 [1298]), 32.

40. Al-Ḥarīrī, *Kitāb al-Maqāmāt li-l-shaykh al-ʿālim Abī Muḥammad al-Qāsim b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-Ḥarīrī maʿa sharḥ mukhtār taʾlīf al-ʿabd al-ḥaqīr aṣghar ʿibād Allāh Silwistarā Disāsī*, ed. A. I. Silvestre de Sacy, rev. M. Reinaud and M. Derenbourg, 2nd ed. (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1847), 1:21.

> Sometimes, with my exhortation, I make tears flow,
>   and sometimes, with my playfulness, I make souls rejoice.[41]

In the *maqāma*s of al-Ḥarīrī and al-Hamadhānī, the passage of time leads to the alternation between the two states of happiness and misery. The trickster is able to preserve his own safety and comfort in spite of this uncertainty only by taking advantage of the gullibility of others and by adjusting his own comportment to fit the context. The "companion" (*jalīs*) to whom Abū Zayd refers in the lines quoted above is both his audience and his victim.

Whereas the *maqāma*'s trickster skillfully manages to thrive in an uncertain world, Yaghmur's narrator finds refuge from Time and its vicissitudes in his companions, who revel in licentiousness and frivolity. Their refusal to consider the economy of the *fāʾida dīniyya* is the condition of possibility for their solidarity. The aim of the narrator and his companions in Yaghmur's epistle is not to take advantage of the ignorant in society but to surround themselves with like-minded fellows whose mutual generosity protects each from hardship. A further difference with the *maqāma*s of al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī can be found in the role of the narrators. In the *maqāma*s, ʿĪsā b. Hishām and al-Ḥārith b. Hammām occasionally express shock and dismay at the tricksters' dissolute behavior, even as they also travel with them and participate in their ruses. In Yaghmur's epistle, the first-person narrator is the one who expresses his sincere admiration for the licentious life. One does not get the sense that licentiousness is a subversive anti-norm that is being presented to the reader so that it can be condemned. Nor does this licentious behavior situate the epistle outside of Islam, as shall be seen below. The licentious and iniquitous behavior of this intimate group of Muslim gentlemen is put forward as the highest ideal of fellowship, and each member takes a turn to put on a lavish feast, suggesting a high level of material wealth.

The matter of feasting brings us to the third movement in the epistle: the Islamic drinking party in which a certain nameless, generous gentleman in the group takes his turn to host his comrades. The party begins with a heavenly scene full of boys, women, and wine, all of which evokes the imagery of Paradise. The pleasures of the hereafter become part of the here and now. A beautiful slave boy (*ghulām*) invites the guests into the house, and a second slave boy, even more beautiful than the first, invites them to drink. The second boy declares himself the messenger (*rasūl*) from the daughter of the vine, the bringer of happiness that is found in goblets. In other words, he is wine's prophet.[42] Drinking and music follow, and the guests are surrounded by "the houris and the boys" of paradise, suggestive of the erotic potential of both the male and the female companions of the afterlife.[43] The activities described are quite distinct from the ascetic notions of how to be Islamic, but this drinking party is a thoroughly Islamic one in Shahab Ahmed's sense. That is, it is a hermeneutical engagement in Islamic meaning-making that explores paradox and contradiction within the textual and contextual expressions of Muslims' lived realities.[44]

---

41. Ibid., 420.

42. *Kharīda (Levant)*, 1:360.

43. Ibid., 1:361.

44. S. Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 165 and 409.

As the night goes on and the wine takes its hold on the guests, a pleasurable languor sets in, with poetry and stories being recalled and recited. Suddenly the leader of the group—perhaps the generous host himself—stands up and acts as a preacher (*qāma fīnā sayyid al-qawm khaṭīban*). He begins to reproach the others for "taking pleasure in what the miserly hand of Time has granted you and delighting in this [earthly] abode before the departure [of death]."[45] This preacher is not a pious gate-crasher reminding the assembled guests of their religious duties. Rather, he is quite drunk and having a bit of fun by pretending asceticism. Having confused his friends, he pauses and takes a large tankard in his hand, looking askance at it. He contemplates it for a moment, prolonging his audience's bewildered anticipation. The drunk preacher then changes his tune and launches into a short poem in praise of wine. He urges his friends to "seize life and drink it up like aged wine." Then, with a tongue that has been loosened by intoxication (*bi-lisān qad aṭlaqathu al-nashwa*), he harangues the crowd to stop chattering and drink: "Busy yourselves with wine instead of reciting poetry!"[46]

The character of the preacher-host who turns quickly from asceticism to revelry recalls the figure of the gate-crasher in the *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī* of Abū al-Muṭahhar al-Azdī (fl. late fourth/tenth century). Al-Azdī's main protagonist is called Abū al-Qāsim, giving the name to the text itself, and he begins by pretending to be an ascetic lecturing the revelers at a party. Like the preacher in Yaghmur's epistle, Abū al-Qāsim takes long breaks in his harangue, making people think that he has finished. Unlike Yaghmur's preacher, Abū al-Qāsim resumes his preaching over and over again until one of the braver revelers addresses him: "O Abū al-Qāsim! That is all fine and good, but everyone in the group drinks and fucks (*mā fī al-qawm illā man yashrab wa-yanīk*)!"[47] Abū al-Qāsim smiles when he hears this and quickly changes his tune from asceticism to obscenity (*mujūn*): "You swear by God it is the truth? [You are] cuckolds and slapstick jesters? Sons of coitus and pillow-play? Followers of the grilled [foods] and the baked? Worshippers of the wine cup and the goblet?"[48] Abū al-Qāsim then acts as the evening's entertainment, regaling the revelers with entertaining and licentious discourse that is full of insults, jest, and obscenity. He gets increasingly drunk over the course of the evening and eventually passes out. By contrast, Yaghmur's preacher pretends asceticism *after he has already become drunk*, and the ascetic performance seems to be part of the evening's entertainment. The sermon itself operates as a kind of prank. It is clear that Yaghmur's epistle draws on the tropes and themes of previous works of *adab*, such as the *maqāma* and the *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim*, all the while creatively recasting them to fit within the narrative hunting epistle.

Yaghmur's drunk preacher, having given up his momentary performance of piety, encourages his guests to relax, drink, and stay the night. His sudden reversal indexes the

---

45. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:362.

46. Ibid., 1:363.

47. Al-Azdī, *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī*, ed. A. Mez (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1902), 6. For a slightly different translation, see E. Selove, *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim: A Literary Banquet* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 36.

48. Al-Azdī, *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim*, 6.

two possible ethical responses to the shortness of life, mentioned earlier. One may respond by seizing the day and living for the moment or by focusing one's mind entirely on the hereafter. An awareness of mortality produces both reactions, and these two reactions coexist unproblematically, as Thomas Bauer has shown.[49] However, it would be hard to consider this inebriated preacher's performance secular or separate from Islam, even if (or precisely because) it would offend the sensibilities of *some* Muslims. Indeed, both the preacher's harangue and the description of the drinking party draw upon an Islamic vocabulary.

When the call to the dawn prayer rings out and the birds begin chirping, the companions are quite hung over. They prepare for breakfast, speaking to one another in gestures to avoid raising their voices and aggravating their hangovers. Then, suddenly, a messenger (*mukhabbir*) arrives and knocks on the door to tell them that a hunt is afoot.[50] Thus begins the fourth movement of the epistle, which consists of the journey to the hunt and the hunt itself. It begins with a parade of horses, followed by a day of travel to seek the hunt, during which they continue drinking so that "our day had not reached its midpoint before we healed our hangovers with wine (*inkasara bi-l-khamr khumārunā*)."[51] When they finally dismount at dusk, a scene of sublimated eroticism unfolds, hinted at in the beginning of the stormy evening and at the end.

When the men dismount from their horses, they "embrace the beloveds" (*muqārafat al-ḥabāʾib*)."[52] According to the *Lisān al-ʿArab* of Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311), the term *muqārafa* refers to sexual intercourse (*jimāʿ*) between a man and a woman, which suggests that there is an overtly sexual component to this evening embrace.[53] The companions eat and go to bed. While they are ostensibly asleep, a storm rolls in, bringing with it wind, rain, thunder, and lightning, all of which are described in exquisite detail. Two details in particular stand out and add complexity to this passionate and euphemistic storm. The first detail is that the narrator describes the plants responding to the life-giving rain as "an indication of the oneness of the Living, the Eternal," referring to names of God, and he later says that the rainwater comes from the river Kawthar in paradise.[54] The second detail worthy of note is a lengthy personification of trees blowing in the wind. The narrator compares the trees to drunkards who cannot stand up straight, saying that they draw near one another as if to hug and kiss, and this description seems to evoke the carousing of the companions themselves. Even more suggestive of the storm's eroticism is how each tree branch (*qaḍīb*) bends toward another branch "like a lover embracing a beloved."[55] The image of the beloved as a slender branch is common, especially in homoerotic poetry, but the word *qaḍīb* can

---

49. T. Bauer, "Raffinement und Frömmigkeit: Säkulare Poesie islamischer Religionsgelehrter der späten Abbasidenzeit," *Asiatische Studien/Études asiatiques* 2 (1996): 275–95.

50. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:364.

51. Ibid., 1:366.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 9:281.

54. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:367–68.

55. Ibid., 1:367.

also refer to the penis. The phallic allusion and the erotic metaphors used to describe the storm accentuate the tempest's sexual potentiality. As a way of concluding the storm, the narrator turns his attention back to his companions, saying: "We spent our night this way, and we obtained our desire" (*fa-bitnā bihā laylatanā wa-nilnā umniyyatanā*).[56] Bookending the storm with these two references to sexual activity and sexual satisfaction suggests that the storm functions as a euphemism for a night of passion. This storm is therefore both a way of expressing the sexual activities taking place and a way of bearing witness to the oneness of the Creator through the spectacle of the creation.

When morning comes, the company is invited to drink once more, but they are impatient for the hunt. They depart for their first day, the account of which includes an intricate description of each kind of prey. These hunting scenes make up by far the longest portion of the work, and they require a more detailed account than can be offered here. The catalogue of hunted animals is clearly a response to the narrative *ṭardiyya* tradition that would also find expression in the Mamluk period. At the same time, it seems likely that the idealized portrayal of hunting found in this epistle was part of a broader ideal of gentlemanly behavior.

Figure 1: The Barberini Vase, Louvre Museum, Paris. (Photo by Matthew L. Keegan, with permission of the Louvre.)

Consider, for example, the Barberini Vase, an Ayyubid-era copper-alloy vase with inscriptions and figural medallions.[57] It was made for an Ayyubid ruler during the last decades of the long sixth/twelfth century and now belongs to the Louvre in Paris. The engraved medallions depict hunting scenes and, in one case, two men practicing swordplay with one another. Geese, rabbits, deer, and a lion are all targets of the hunt, as if the vase

---

56. Ibid., 1:368.

57. For a brief description of the vase, see "Vase with the Name of Ayyubid Sultan Salah al-Din Yusuf, Known as the Barberini Vase," Louvre website, https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/vase-name-ayyubid-sultan-salah-al-din-yusuf-known-%E2%80%9Cbarberini-vase%E2%80%9D (accessed June 29, 2020).

were a hunting poem etched in bronze. The military exercise that is depicted in one roundel might imply that these scenes cast hunting as a militaristic activity that is designed to train soldiers for jihad, but this vessel is likely better contextualized within Yaghmur's world of inebriated solidarity. This supposition is reinforced by the inscription on the base, which reads: "For the wine cellar (*sharābkhāna*) of al-Malik al-Ẓāhir."[58]

Returning to Yaghmur's epistle, the adventure of the drinking and hunting party lasts for ten days.[59] At the end of the first day of hunting, the night is spent with "each lover lying with (*ḍājaʿa*) a beloved," and we are given to believe that the following days and nights are no different.[60] After ten days of hunting and drinking, the narrator informs us that the group has become bored with their activities. They also seem to reflect on the bloodshed they have recently committed.

قلنا: إلى متى سفك الدّما والفتك بالدُمى وحتّام نفرُق بين الأُلّاف ونُفوِّق سهم البين إلى الاحلاف. فهل وثقنا بالأقدار ونسينا تقلُّب الليل والنهار، وهل أَمِنّا أن نُصاب بما أَصَبْنا به، ونُثتاب بظُفُر الزمان ونابه.

We said: How long will bloodshed and the murder of the beautiful beasts last? How long will we sunder beloveds and notch the arrow of separation between allies? Do we trust in the Fates? Have we forgotten the successive turning of nights into days? Are we secure from being stricken by that which we have wrought [on others] and from being afflicted by the talons and teeth of Time?

In this passage, there is a clear sense of regret about the hunting of animals who are referred to as *dumā*, a term that refers to adorned images or idols, but which is also used for beautiful, well-fed animals.[61] Whereas the narrator's companions had been enthusiastic about the hunt earlier in the epistle, they have now soured on the affair through the realization that they, like the animals they have slaughtered, are hunted. The ruthless hunter of humankind is Time, which the narrator describes as an animal with talons and teeth. By imagining Time as an animal who hunts humans, the companions imaginatively reverse the violent slaughter that they have recently carried out and consider the animal experience of loss as if it were their own. In this way, the hunters come to recognize their own mortality with a vividness that the mock sermon could not achieve. With this change of heart, the band of brethren make their way back to settled society (*al-ʿumrān*). They come upon a peaceful garden, which leads them to a beautiful castle where they begin again to drink and enjoy the company of beautiful lads, all of which lasts an undetermined amount of time.[62]

The fifth and final movement of the epistle finds the author and his companions turning to godly piety. The movement consists of only a few short lines. Although I have called it a repentance, it is marked not by the triumph of shared religious solidarity but by a feeling of sadness, nostalgia, and alienation. The end of the inebriated feasting and hunting leads

---

58. "Vase with the Name of Salah al-Din."

59. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:364–88.

60. Ibid., 1:387.

61. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, 14:271.

62. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:387–89.

to the demise of companionship (*ṣuḥba*) and the beginning of estrangement (*ghurba*), as the companions scatter into the countryside. The entire fifth movement, most of which was quoted at the beginning of this article, reads as follows:

وما زلنا على تلك الحال حتى استُهلّت من رجب غرة الهلال فخالفنا الهوى وحالفنا التُقى وانتجعنا صَوْب الصواب وادّرعْنا ثوب الثوّاب واستدركنا فارط الزلل وخِفْنا حابط العمل ومُنينا من تلك الرفقة بالفرقة ودُفعنا من تلك الصحبة إلى الغُربة وتفرّقنا في البلاد وتشتّتنا في الأغوار والأنجاد. وهذه سيرة الأيام في الأنام وفِعالها بالخاص والعام لذتها كالأحلام يقظتها كالمنام جعلنا الله من الفائزين بالخلود في دار السـلام.

We continued on in that way until the new moon of the month of Rajab appeared. We turned against passion and swore ourselves to God-fearing devotion. We took refuge in the realm of right conduct and donned the armor of good behavior. We rectified our past faults and dreaded useless activity. We were afflicted with parting from that company and were driven to estrangement from those companions. We scattered across the lands, dispersing in the valleys and the highlands. This is the story of the Passing Days among humankind and their effects on both elites and common folk. Their pleasures are like dreams and their wakefulness is like sleep. May God make us among those who triumph with everlasting Paradise.[63]

These final sentences of the epistle bring us back to the question of frivolity. Yaghmur describes an abandonment of "useless activity" (*ḥābiṭ al-ʿamal*), which is more or less what Abū Shāma found so objectionable when he transmitted the anecdote about Nūr al-Dīn playing polo. In that case, the subordination of polo to the logic of jihad prevented it from being useless. In Yaghmur's epistle, the hunt is an example of "useless activity" that cannot be incorporated into the economy of the *fāʾida dīniyya* that, Nūr al-Dīn claims, pertains to polo. Yaghmur does not express a single-minded devotion to piety, asceticism, and jihad. Rather, he presents asceticism as a period of life that comes after youthful companionship has faded away. The two impulses of licentiousness and asceticism are mediated temporally, such that there is a time for seizing the day, and there is a time for devoting oneself to the hereafter.

Yaghmur's rather pessimistic view of asceticism complicates the assumption that the fighting men of the Crusader period were driven by ascetic piety and the imagery of a pristine Islamic past. Modern depictions of Islamic politics are haunted by a distinctively Salafi imaginary in which the early Islamic past is the primary basis for solidarity. Although one can certainly find Muslim scholars expressing the idea that all activity ought to be interpreted in light of its *fāʾida dīniyya*, it is far from certain that such ideas roused the sentiments of the men tasked with fighting. Yaghmur's epistle expresses an awareness of the ascetic ideal, but it comes in for mockery and is associated with the breakdown of idealized, inebriated solidarity. An even more sardonic view of asceticism is found in the work of ʿArqala al-Kalbī (d. ca. 567/1171–72), a licentious Shiʿite poet who was a boon companion to Saladin and considered himself the Abū Nuwās (d. ca. 200/815) of his age.[64]

---

63. Ibid., 1:389.

64. Ibid., 1:209. For a fuller treatment of ʿArqala, see Keegan, "Rethinking Poetry."

In one of ʿArqala's poems, he claims that asceticism is inspired not by piety but by a lack of material resources:

<div dir="rtl">

عنك بإكبارٍ وتنزيهِ   جنِّبْ عن الدنيا إذا جنَّبَتْ

إن لم تكنْ قد زهِدتْ فيهِ.   فما ترى فيها فتىً زاهدًا

</div>

> Shun the world if it shuns you,
>   standing haughty and aloof!
> You do not find a youth renouncing worldly pleasures,
>   unless the world has already forsaken him.[65]

Asceticism is, for ʿArqala, a way of dealing with a world that has not provided plentifully. It is also noteworthy that ʿArqala identifies youth as the natural period in which to indulge in enjoyment and pleasure, unless circumstances prevent one from that enjoyment.

Conclusion

The activities of the hunt, the lengthy drinking party, and the homoerotic interludes in Yaghmur's epistle do not participate in the economy of the *fāʾida dīniyya* that Abū Shāma demands but rather uphold the inebriated solidarity of the hunt. It should be emphasized that the activities of this fortnight's bender are not truly "useless," as the epistle's repentant conclusion suggests. Apparently useless activities such as drinking, hunting, and homoerotic activity seem to be a key part of the social glue that holds together this company of elite military men in the hunt and, one imagines, on the battlefield, regardless of the foe. Men such as Yaghmur were, after all, precisely the kind of men one would expect to fight the Franks or rival Muslims. If he or his anthologist-editor had wished to foreground the threat of the Crusaders and the importance of piety for unifying Muslim warriors, then he certainly could have done so. It is, of course, possible that many people were motivated to fight the Franks out of their devotion to Islam, but that does not necessarily entail ascetic piety. We risk projecting a Salafi imaginary onto these Muslims who might have found solidarity in the gentlemanly activities of wine parties and hunting. In the epistle, evocations of ascetic piety are mocked, as in the case of the intoxicated preacher, or they are the cause of disunity, as they are in the fifth movement of the epistle. However, more complex and playful mobilizations of Islamic language take place in the Islamic drinking party and the tempest. The epistle's playful engagements with Islamic norms produce intimate social bonds that would have been crucial in the Zengid and Ayyubid worlds of confederated politics. Thinking about *adab* without insisting on the framework of the Crusades makes visible the complexities of the long sixth/twelfth century through texts like Yaghmur's epistle.

The long sixth/twelfth century was not an era dominated by asceticism and religious fervor but one in which multiple conceptions of normative behavior circulated, often among the same people who portrayed their sovereigns as ascetics and their age as full of pious devotion. For example, ʿImād al-Dīn celebrated Saladin's revival of a pristine past in his

---

65. *Kharīda* (Levant), 1:228.

panegyric poetry and prose, but when it came to the *Kharīda*, he did not see a problem with including Yaghmur's epistle or ʿArqala's poetry. The inclusion in the *Kharīda* of both sorts of material suggests that this epistle does not express the ethos of a "counter-public" that resisted the pietistic discourses of the day. Rather, the scenes of drinking, homoeroticism, and hunting seem to have been part of a normative conception of these behaviors that was Islamic in Shahab Ahmed's sense.[66] Hints of this Muslim warrior ethos that centered on wine and companionship can also be found in portions of Usāma b. Munqidh's *Book of Contemplation*. For example, Usāma mentions a certain ʿAlī b. Faraj who lost a leg to infection, had it amputated, and kept fighting the Franks. In spite of his strength and bravery, Usāma calls this ʿAlī a light-hearted man who invited his friends to his home to eat and drink wine. As a joke, it seems, ʿAlī implied that he had wine and food to offer them, but when they arrived, he told them to go back and bring provisions themselves because, in fact, he had none.[67] A more apt example is that of Najm al-Dīn Īlghāzī (d. 516/1122), the Seljuk governor and warrior who defeated the Franks at Tell ʿAfrīn in 513/1119. Usāma tells us that he would be drunk for twenty days at a time.[68] A Salafi imaginary of the sixth/twelfth century cannot take account of these values without transforming them into subversions of an official ideology. But the elite normative ideas seem to have been much more complex and fragmented than is sometimes appreciated.[69]

If the atmosphere of the age had required asceticism or a direct link between fighting the Franks and a commitment to personal piety, one would imagine that ʿImād al-Dīn would have edited this epistle or removed it entirely. But although he claims to have edited and shortened Yaghmur's epistle to fit with the *linguistic* norms of his day, he appears to have seen no need to remove the rather dim view of austere asceticism expressed in it, much less the drinking and the homoeroticism. Yaghmur and his editor seem comfortable with embracing, within an Islamic framework, the alternation of raucous, wine-soaked solidarity on the one hand and alienated asceticism on the other. There were multiple conceptualizations of the relationship between Islam, austerity, solidarity, and revelry in this period. This epistle expresses one of them.

One may wonder to what extent Yaghmur's epistle reflected his lived experience. Did he thrive in the context of inebriated solidarity, as the narrator of his epistle does? This

---

66. Ahmed, *What is Islam?*

67. Usāma b. Munqidh, *Kitāb al-Iʿtibār*, ed. ʿA. al-Ashtar (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2003), 238. The story differs slightly in the translation, perhaps reflecting a different edition; compare Usāma b. Munqidh, *Book of Contemplation*, 159.

68. Usāma b. Munqidh, *Kitāb al-Iʿtibār*, 203–4; Usāma b. Munqidh, *Book of Contemplation*, 131.

69. The work of Samuli Schielke also discusses (albeit in a modern context) the ambivalence and temporally mediated attitudes toward piety in everyday life. As he points out, "focusing on the very pious in moments when they are being very pious (in mosque study groups, for example) risks taking those moments when people talk about religion as religious persons . . . as the paradigmatic ones, and thus unwittingly reproducing the particular ideological aspiration of Islamist and Islamic revivalist movements: the privileging of Islam as the supreme guideline of all fields of life." S. Schielke, "Second Thoughts about the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life," *ZMO Working Papers* 2 (2010): 1–16, at 2. See also S. Schielke, "Ambivalent Commitments: Troubles of Morality, Religiosity, and Aspiration among Young Egyptians," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39 (2009): 158–85.

coauthored epistle is not, to be sure, straightforwardly autobiographical. It draws on and creatively refigures the tropes of the *maqāma*, the hunting poem, and the stories of false asceticism such as the *Ḥikāyat Abī l-Qāsim al-Baghdādī* and the stories of Abū Nuwās. Even if the epistle that survives in the *Kharīda* is more ʿImād al-Dīn than Yaghmur, its very presence in the *Kharīda* is significant. It shows that *adab*, even though it was an elite discourse, made a show of including new participants who fell outside the typical scholarly classes who produced *adab*.[70] Although Yaghmur's epistle responds to the *adab* tradition, there are certainly features in it that may also have lined up with Yaghmur's lived experience. It is possible to see this epistle as the expression of a young military man's imaginative depiction of elite companionship. It is, like much *adab*, a case of "imaginary gardens with real toads in them," to paraphrase the poet Marianne Moore. And in Yaghmur's imaginary garden, the bonds of elite companionship and solidarity were not based in ascetic piety but were rather rooted in the drinking party, the homoerotic evening, and the hunt.

---

70. Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech"; Flemming, "Literary Activities."

Bibliography

Abū Shāma, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī akhbār al-dawlatayn al-Nūriyya wa-l-Ṣalāḥiyya*. Edited by I. al-Zaybaq. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1998.

Ahmed, S. *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Al-Azdī. *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī*. Edited by A. Mez. Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1902.

Bauer, T. "'Ayna hādhā min al-Mutanabbī!': Toward an Aesthetic of Mamluk Literature." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17 (2013): 5–22.

———. "The Dawādār's Hunting Party: A Mamluk *Muzdawija Ṭardiyya*, Probably by Shihāb al-Dīn ibn Faḍl Allāh." In *O ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture in Honour of Remke Kruk*, edited by A. Vrolijk and J. P. Hogendijk, 291–312. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

———. "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 105–32.

———. "Raffinement und Frömmigkeit: Säkulare Poesie islamischer Religionsgelehrter der späten Abbasidenzeit." *Asiatische Studien/Études asiatiques* 2 (1996): 275–95.

Cooperson, M. "The Abbasid 'Golden Age': An Excavation." *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 25 (2017): 41–65.

Fähndrich, H. "Parodie im 'Mittelalter': Aus einem Werk des M. B. Muḥriz al-Wahrānī (gest. 1179–80)." In *Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by W. Heinrichs and G. Schoeler, 439–46. Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1994.

Flemming, B. "Literary Activities in Mamluk Halls and Barracks." In *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet,* edited by M. Rosen-Ayalon, 249–60. Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977.

Ghersetti, A. "A Pre-modern Anthologist at Work: The Case of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Waṭwāṭ (d. 718/1318)." In *Concepts of Authorship in Pre-modern Arabic Texts*, edited by L. Behzadi and J. Hämeen-Anttila, 23–46. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2015.

Haarmann, U. "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Language: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33 (1988): 81–114.

Al-Hamadhānī. *Maqāmāt Abī al-Faḍl al-Hamadhānī*. Edited by Y. al-Nabhānī. Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat al-Jawāʾib, 1881.

Hämeen-Anttila, J. *Maqama: A History of a Genre*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002.

Al-Ḥarīrī. *Kitāb al-Maqāmāt li-l-Shaykh al-ʿĀlim Abī Muḥammad al-Qāsim b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. ʿUthmān al-Ḥarīrī maʿa sharḥ mukhtār taʾlīf al-ʿabd al-ḥaqīr aṣghar ʿibād Allāh Silwistarā Disāsī*. Edited by A. I. Silvestre de Sacy. Revised by M. Reinaud and M. Derenbourg. 2nd ed. Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1847.

Hermes, N. "The Poet(ry) of Frankish Enchantment: The *Ifranjiyyāt* of Ibn Qaysarānī." *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20 (2017): 267–87.

Herzog, T. "Composition and Worldview of Some *Bourgeois* and *Petit-Bourgeois* Mamluk *Adab*-Encyclopedias." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17 (2013): 100–129.

Hillenbrand, C. "Jihad Poetry in the Age of the Crusades." In *Crusades: Medieval Worlds in Conflict*, edited by T.F. Madden, J.L. Naus, and V. Ryan, 9-24. Surrey: Ashgate, 2010.

Hirschler, K. *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Ibn Manẓūr. *Lisān al-ʿArab.* Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.

ʿImād al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī. *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat ahl al-ʿaṣr: Qism fuḍalāʾ ahl Iṣfahān, Khurāsān, Harāt, wa-Fāris* [East]. Edited by M. al-Ṭuʿma. Tehran: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Irshād al-Islāmī, 1999.

———. *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat ahl al-ʿaṣr: Qism al-ʿIrāq* [Iraq]. Edited by M. B. al-Atharī and J. Saʿīd. Baghdad: al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī, 1955–80.

———. *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat ahl al-ʿaṣr: qism shuʿarāʾ al-Maghrib* [West]. Edited by M. al-Marzūqī, M. al-ʿArūsī al-Maṭwī, and J. b. Ḥ. Yaḥyā. Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li-l-Nashr, 1986.

———. *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat ahl al-ʿaṣr: Qism shuʿarāʾ Miṣr* [Egypt]. Edited by A. Amīn, S. Ḍayf, and I. ʿAbbās. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya, 1951.

———. *Kharīdat al-qaṣr wa-jarīdat ahl al-ʿaṣr: Qism shuʿarāʾ al-Shām* [Levant]. Edited by S. Fayṣal. Damascus: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Hāshimiyya, 1955–68.

Keegan, M. "Rethinking Poetry as (Anti-Crusader) Propaganda: Licentiousness and Cross-Confessional Patronage in the *Ḥarīdat al-Qaṣr*." *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* (forthcoming).

Latiff, O. *The Cutting Edge of the Poet's Sword: Muslim Poetic Responses to the Crusades.* Leiden: Brill, 2017.

Mancing, H. "Cide Hamete Benengeli vs. Migue de Cervantes: The Metafictional Dialectic of Don Quixote." *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 1 (1981): 63–81.

Mauder, C. *Gelehrte Krieger: Die Mamluken als Träger arabischsprachiger Bildung nach al-Ṣafadī, al-Maqrīzī und weiteren Quellen.* Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2012.

———. "A New Source on the Social Gatherings (*Majālis*) of the Mamluk Sulṭān Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī." *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 24 (2016): 145–48.

Montgomery, J. E. "Beeston and the Singing-Girls." *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 36 (2006): 17–24.

Mulder, S. *Shrines of the ʿAlids in Medieval Syria.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Orfali, B. *The Anthologist's Art: Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī and His "Yatīmat al-Dahr."* Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Peacock, A. C. S. *The Great Seljuk Empire.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

Rowson, E. K. "Parody in Arabic *Adab*: The *Rasāʾil* of al-Wahrānī." Unpublished paper.

Schielke, S. "Ambivalent Commitments: Troubles of Morality, Religiosity, and Aspiration among Young Egyptians." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39 (2009): 158–85.

———. "Second Thoughts about the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life." *ZMO Working Papers* 2 (2010): 1–16.

Selove, E. *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim: A Literary Banquet.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.

Stetkevych, J. *The Hunt in Arabic Poetry: From Heroic to Lyric to Metapoetic.* South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015.

Stewart, D. "*Sajʿ* in the Qurʾān: Prosody and Structure." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21 (1990): 101–39.

Talib, A. Review of *The Anthologist's Art: Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī and His "Yatīmat al-Dahr"* by Bilal Orfali. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 139 (2019): 251–53.

Talmon-Heller, D. "Historical Motifs in the Writing of Muslim Authors of the Crusading Era." In *The Crusader World*, edited by A. Boas, 378–90. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Tor, D. *Violent Order: Warfare, Chivalry, and the ʿAyyār Phenomenon in the Medieval Islamic World.* Würzburg: Ergon, 2007.

Usāma b. Munqidh. *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades.* Translated by P. K. Hitti. New York: Columbia University Press, 1929.

———. *The Book of Contemplation.* Translated by P. Cobb. London: Penguin Books, 2008.

———. *Kitāb al-Iʿtibār.* Edited by ʿA. al-Ashtar. Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 2003.

Van Steenbergen, J. "Qalāwūnid Discourse, Elite Communication, and the Mamluk Cultural Matrix: Interpreting a 14th-Century Panegyric." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 1–28.

"Vase with the Name of Ayyubid Sultan Salah al-Din Yusuf, Known as the Barberini Vase." Louvre website. https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/vase-name-ayyubid-sultan-salah-al-din-yusuf-known-%E2%80%9Cbarberini-vase%E2%80%9D. Last accessed June 29, 2020.

Von Hees, S., ed. *Inḥiṭāṭ—The Decline Paradigm: Its Influence and Persistence in the Writing of Arab Cultural History*. Würzburg: Ergon, 2017.

Al-Wahrānī. *Manāmāt al-Wahrānī wa-maqāmātuhu wa-rasāʾiluhu.* Edited by I. Shaʿlān and M. Naghash. Köln: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 1998.

Ḥadīth as Common Discourse:
Reflections on the Intersectarian Dissemination
of the Creation of the Intellect Tradition*

Pamela Klasova
Macalester College

(pklasova@macalester.edu)

Abstract

The ḥadīth *about the creation of the Intellect has enjoyed a high status in the Shīʿī tradition and opens one of the four books of the Shīʿī ḥadīth canon, al-Kulaynī's (d. 329/940)* al-Kāfī*. It appears also in many Sunnī works and has traveled among other Muslim groups, changing its meaning and form over time and generating several commentaries.* Ḥadīths *are usually studied in a jurisprudential context, as forming the basis for legal positions; in this article, I study the* ḥadīth *not as a legal text with a fixed meaning but as a literary text with a meaning that is changeable. First, I revisit previous scholarly views on the provenance of the* ḥadīth*. I argue that it first circulated in Basran society in the late second/eighth century as a popularized version of the Muʿtazilī tenet of obligation (*taklīf*) before being written down as a* ḥadīth*. I then follow its later journey among different groups in the medieval period as it changed forms and meanings and in the early modern period as it became the subject of commentaries by the Shīʿī philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) and by the Sunnī scholar Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791). The translation of the two commentaries can be found in the Appendix. The* ḥadīth's *intersectarian dissemination and fluid nature make it an excellent case study for exploring the literary side of the* ḥadīth *genre, which served as common discourse for different Islamic sects and intellectual and social groups over the centuries.*

Introduction

Muslims have narrated *ḥadīth*s, discussed them, and commented on them since the early days of Islam. As Jonathan Brown has noted, "[O]n controversial issues from jihad and martyrdom to women's rights under Islamic law, *ḥadīth*s always provide key and often

---

determinative evidence."[1] This is how *ḥadīth*s are usually seen: as the basis for Islamic law and the primary sources providing evidence for certain positions in Islam. This image carries with it the idea of unchangeability, connected to an immutable and atemporal legal tradition stretching from the early days of Islam until today.

In this article, I will highlight a different face of *ḥadīth*s—namely, their ability to adapt to new environments and change form and meaning. For this purpose, I will use the case study of a non-legal *ḥadīth* about the creation of the Intellect, which traveled over the course of more than a millennium from sect to sect, shifting in form, function, and meaning along the way. This *ḥadīth* offers an example of a tradition that functioned not as a basis of law but as a manifestation of ideas already circulating in society and as a vehicle of expression for new ideas when it traveled elsewhere.

Western *ḥadīth* scholarship has traditionally focused on issues of dating and authentication, but more recently scholars have explored the literary aspects of the *ḥadīth* genre. Sebastian Günther, for instance, has applied modern literary theory to these traditions and identified some of their fictional elements, such as their ability to reflect the sociocultural world in which they arose and the creativity of the transmitters who gave them their form by selecting, omitting, replacing, and adding material at their disposal.[2] The growing interest in the agency of later compilers who used *ḥadīth*s to participate in the discourses of their time has also driven scholars to look at *ḥadīth* more as a literary practice. Stephen R. Burge has observed the "tense relationship between the *ḥadīth* compilation that is rooted in the temporality of the real world, whilst simultaneously being rooted in the atemporal abstract '*ḥadīth* literature,'"[3] and he argues for reading *ḥadīth* collections as literary works.[4] Another way to understand how *ḥadīth*s participated in later discourses is to study *ḥadīth* commentaries, as Joel Blecher has done in his recent book. Blecher observes that "one set of questions has yet to be fully investigated: How did Muslims interpret and reinterpret the meanings of hadith and hadith collections?. . . When the needs of interpreters' social interests came into conflict with their fidelity to the apparent meanings of the hadith, how did commentators attempt to thread the needle, balancing both sets of concerns?"[5] In this article, I also explore the *ḥadīth* genre's literary possibilities and its participation in temporal debates, but I do so through the study of a single *ḥadīth*, taking a *longue durée* approach to it. In the first part of the article, I revisit previous scholarly views on the origins of the *ḥadīth*, which describes the divine creation

---

1. J. A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (London: Oneworld, 2009), 267.

2. S. Günther, "Modern Literary Theory Applied to Classical Arabic Texts: *Ḥadīth* Revisited," in *The Hadith*, ed. M. Shah, 4:28–33 (London: Routledge, 2010). See also the other studies dealing with the literariness of the *ḥadīth* genre in this volume.

3. S. R. Burge, "The 'Ḥadīṯ Literature': What Is It and Where Is It?," *Arabica* 65, no. 1/2 (2018): 64–83, at 81.

4. S. R. Burge, "Myth, Meaning and the Order of Words: Reading Hadith Collections with Northrop Frye and the Development of Compilation Criticism," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 27, no. 2 (2016): 213–28, at 213.

5. J. Blecher, *Said the Prophet of God: Hadith Commentary across a Millennium* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 2.

of the Intellect. I propose that it emerged as a popular reformulation of a Muʿtazilī tenet in the second/eighth-century Basra, from where it spread among Sunnī and Shīʿī circles.[6] The origin and early dissemination of the ḥadīth illustrate the porousness of the boundaries between these groups, which all dealt with the same material. In the second part of the article, I follow the ḥadīth's later journey. I choose three medieval variants that circulated in different Muʿtazilī and Shīʿī circles to illustrate the different types of treatment that the ḥadīth received. The ḥadīth's changing forms and meanings show that even after the *ahl al-ḥadīth* monopolized the ḥadīth enterprise, other groups were still using ḥadīth material to express and negotiate their ideas about the world. Finally, I discuss two examples of early medieval commentaries on the ḥadīth, one by the Shīʿī philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) and by the Sunnī scholar Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791). These commentaries reveal that even after the ḥadīth (and its variants) could no longer be altered, it continued to spark ideas and to be reinterpreted in order to befit the two thinkers' worldviews. Thus, this case study seeks to highlight that ḥadīths functioned over centuries as a common, intersectarian discourse among different groups of the Islamic society. The existence of this common discourse opens a window onto a world in which the boundaries between sects and intellectual traditions were not set in stone.

At the end of the article, I include the translation of Mullā Ṣadrā's and al-Zabīdī's texts as a sample of the genre of ḥadīth commentary. From a different perspective, the Appendix could be seen as the core of the article, and the study of the Intellect ḥadīth as an extended introduction to it.

1. The Muʿtazilī Origins of the Ḥadīth

The ḥadīth under study talks about the creation of the Intellect (*ʿaql*) and about the Intellect's obedience to God. It opens one of the four books of the Shīʿī ḥadīth canon, *al-Kāfī* ("The sufficient book") by Shaykh al-Kulaynī:[7]

When God created the Intellect, He made it speak and then He told it: "Come forward!" And it came forward. Then He told it: "Go back!" And it went back. Then He said: "By My Might and by My Glory, I have not created a creature dearer to Me than you are. I perfected you only in those I love. It is you whom I order, it is you whom I forbid, it is you whom I punish, and it is you whom I reward."[8]

Lammā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla istanṭaqahu. Thumma qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla lahu: "Wa-ʿizzatī wa-jalālī mā

---

6. The use of the terms "Sunnī" and "Shīʿī" for this early period may be misleading because the groups' identities had not yet been fully formed. As a result, some scholars have opted for the terms "proto-Sunnī" and "proto-Shīʿī." For a nuanced discussion of the terminology see M. Dann, "Contested Boundaries: The Reception of Shīʿite Narrators in the Sunnī Ḥadīth Tradition," (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2015), 5–16.

7. A Hijri date usually spans two consecutive years in the Gregorian calendar. Since many death dates in the first centuries of Islam are not entirely certain anyway, I will give only one Gregorian equivalent for each, corresponding to the Hijri year in the month of Muḥarram.

8. Throughout the article, ḥadīth texts are written in bold.

khalaqtu khalqan huwa aḥabbu ilayya minka. Wa-lā ukammiluka illā fī-man uḥibbu.
Amā innī iyyāka āmuru wa-iyyāka anhī wa-iyyāka uʿāqibu wa-iyyāka uthību."[9]

The *ḥadīth*'s prominent position in al-Kulaynī's compilation mirrors the prominent place that it has held in the Shīʿī tradition. It is followed by thirty-three other reports united by the theme of *ʿaql*, which include some of the *ḥadīth*'s variants. The *ḥadīth* is recorded with almost[10] unblemished chains of transmission (*isnād*s) to the imams Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 114/732) and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765). Sunnī critics have considered it weak, but it is nonetheless recorded in numerous Sunnī compilations with many different *isnād*s. Furthermore, the *ḥadīth* has also found its way to Ṣūfī circles. It constitutes, for instance, an important piece of evidence in Ibn ʿArabī's (d. 638/1240) theosophical Ṣūfism.[11] By contrast, the theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) considered the *ḥadīth* the epitome of a broader conspiracy against Islam that in his eyes was led by the Shīʿīs, the Ṣūfīs, and the philosophers alike. In the early modern period, two prominent Islamic thinkers analyzed the *ḥadīth* closely in their commentaries: the Iranian Shīʿī philosopher and theologian Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) and the Indian Sunnī humanist and polymath Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791). A translation of the two commentary texts, which display the authors' creative incorporation of their Ṣūfī and theosophical ideas, is presented in the appendix to this article.

In modern scholarship, Ignaz Goldziher observed the *ḥadīth*'s importance for esoteric Islamic thought and interpreted it as a Neoplatonic teaching about emanation in the form of a prophetic saying.[12] He noted that the *ḥadīth* reflects the belief that the Intellect is the first and immediate emanation from the primordial existence, a divine substance that links God's transcendence, from which all things emanate, with the corporeal reality of this world.[13]

Douglas S. Crow, in his 1996 dissertation, which centers on this *ḥadīth*, rejected Goldziher's interpretation in favor of a native Islamic context.[14] Having argued that Goldziher incorrectly based his interpretation on a later version of the *ḥadīth* that emphasizes the idea of the Intellect as the *first* creation,[15] Crow placed the origins of the *ḥadīth* in the context of

---

9. Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Fajr, 2007), 1:5, no. 1. Al-Kulaynī took this tradition from al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, ed. M. al-Rajāʾī (Qum: Majmaʿ al-ʿĀlamī li-Ahl al-Bayt, 2011), 1: 306, no. 604. I transliterate Arabic texts on the basis of how they are written (including vowels), not how they are pronounced.

10. To my knowledge, there is one weak transmitter in the Shīʿī *isnād*s, Sahl b. Ziyād, and one *isnād* recorded by al-Ṣaddūq that is questionable. He includes this variant among the *nawādir* (rare variants), and many of the transmitters in the *isnād* are unknown. See nos. 16 and 17 in Shīʿī variants below.

11. Brown, *Hadith*, 194.

12. I. Goldziher, "Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente im Ḥadīṯ," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete* 22 (1908): 317–44, at 318–20.

13. Or better yet, intellects. For instance, the philosopher al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), following earlier Neoplatonic ideas, designed a complex scheme in which ten intellects emanate from the Necessary Being. The lowest of them connects with the sublunar realm.

14. D. S. Crow, "The Role of al-ʿAql in Early Islamic Wisdom with Reference to Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq" (PhD diss., McGill University, 1996).

15. The version of the *ḥadīth* that Goldziher considered primary differs from the version above. What

the first/seventh-century polemics between predestinarians (*jabriyya*) and the proponents of human free will (*qadariyya*).[16] He suggested that the ḥadīth echoed pre-Islamic wisdom material as well as Qurʾānic and Biblical elements.[17] This argument seems to be driven by the old debate over whether the Islamic intellectual tradition was formed through external influences or internal developments.

Differing with both Goldziher and Crow, I argue for a Muʿtazilī origin for the ḥadīth. More precisely, I argue that the ḥadīth emerged in the early second/eighth century in Basra as a popular saying communicating to broader audiences the doctrine of obligation (*taklīf*), which was essential to the Muʿtazilī belief system. This placing of the ḥadīth is most interesting because it brings us to the Basran beginnings of the Muʿtazila in the generation of its founders, such as Wāṣil b. ʿAṭāʾ (d. 131/748) and ʿAmr b. ʿUbayd (d. 144/761), who first formulated these core Muʿtazilī ideas in their public debates. The ḥadīth should be understood as an echo of these debates from a time long before the first systematic Muʿtazilī theologian Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. between 226/840 and 235/849) wrote his treatises; as part of a public oral culture, which existed alongside the traditionist circles and in which ideas were exchanged and shared by people from different sects and social groups, including Muʿtazilīs, Shīʿīs, Sunnīs, and Ṣūfīs.

Before I begin to furnish my claim with evidence, I should make my method and assumptions clear. I limited the texts studied in this part to the ḥadīth's variants recorded in the early sources—up to the fourth/tenth century—and to those with *isnād*s.[18] This does not mean that I consider variants appearing only in later collections forged, but I needed to sift through the sources to produce a dataset of texts (*matn*s) and *isnād*s that we can

---

concerns us here is the beginning, which reads "**The first thing that God created was the Intellect**" (*awwalu mā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqlu*) instead of "**When God created the Intellect**" (*lammā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla*). See Goldziher, "Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente," 318. Although a small difference, it prompted significant conclusions. In Goldziher's scenario, *ahl al-sunna* altered the beginning of the ḥadīth to express a more neutral position focused on the creation of the Intellect, not on the *first* creation of all. Crow has reversed Goldziher's periodization of the two main variants, arguing that the neutral *lammā* version is the original one because it is found in most of the early texts containing the ḥadīth. Crow, "Role of al-ʿAql," 3.

16. A classic study of the *qadar* debate is W. M. Watt, *Free Will and Predestination* (London: Luzac, 1948). Crow has also pointed to a connection with "the first-century views on the divine parceling out of the *ʿuqūl*," which hold that God has distributed *ʿaql* to humans in different measures (*tafāḍul*), and he quotes a saying ascribed to Muʿāwiya b. Qurra al-Muzanī (d. 113/731) to illustrate this belief: "People perform good [deeds]; however, they receive their recompense on Resurrection Day in proportion to the measure of their intelligence (*ʿaql*)." See Crow, "Role of al-ʿAql," 8–9. It is important, however, to distinguish between *ʿaql* as an autonomous entity that acts and speaks (the Intellect), as the ḥadīth conceives of it, and *ʿaql* as the human faculty of intelligence or reason, as it is treated in al-Muzanī's tradition.

17. Crow refers to a report by Wahb b. Munabbih that speaks of God's adorning his rule with *ʿaql*, on the theme of the rejection and vindication of God's wisdom in the Bible (Crow, "Role of al-ʿAql," xxiv, n. 11), and of "pre-creation Wisdom (*hokmah* & *sophia* & Iranian *xrad*)" (p. xxv). He also references (at 39, n. 7) other scholars who have considered the ḥadīth to be inspired by Biblical wisdom literature: I. Eisenberg, "Die Prophetenlegenden des Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Kisāʾī" (PhD diss., University of Bern, 1898), xx f., and T. Fahd, "La naissance du monde selon l'Islam," *Sources Orientales* 1 (1959): 237–77, at 264.

18. I did not duplicate identical variants.

assume with some confidence to have circulated in the early period.[19] I then identified the regional affiliations of the transmitters. As Behnam Sadeghi has noted, regionalism is a prominent feature of early traditions and can be used for dating purposes, and this is also true in the case of this *ḥadīth*.[20] Three assumptions underpin my discussion. First, I consider the main intention of the *ḥadīth* to be an important signpost of its intellectual context. By main intention I mean the core message that the *ḥadīth* conveys in its most basic form.[21] Second, I assume that medieval *ḥadīth* criticism (the biographical *rijāl* works) contains some historical information about the transmitters. In other words, I do not believe that the critics inferred all their information retrospectively from the *ḥadīth*s. And third, I assume that like the *rijāl* works, the *isnād*s—even single strands[22]—were generated during the transmission process more often than they were forged. When tracing the *ḥadīth*'s *isnād*s, I have drawn on Crow's painstaking work, with the difference that I put less emphasis on the ascriptions to the earliest famous narrators and look with more confidence to the following two generations.[23]

Based on my first assumption, I do not find Crow's hypothesis that the *ḥadīth* emerged in debates about predestination (*qadar*) convincing. Let us examine the *ḥadīth*'s content more closely, this time in its simplest variant, which appears in ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's (d. 290/903) *Zawāʾid* ("Additions") to his father's *Kitāb al-Zuhd:* "**When God created the Intellect, He told it: 'Come forward!' And it came forward. Then He told it: 'Go back!' And it went back. So He said: 'I have not created a creature dearer to Me than you are. Through you I take and through you I give.'"**[24]

A closer look at the text of the *ḥadīth* shows that the *qadarī* position cannot be the main intention of the *ḥadīth.* The *qadar* debate was among the first major controversies in Islamic

---

19. Of course, we can never be entirely certain about that, for even the third/ninth- and fourth/tenth-century works have been generally preserved in later manuscripts.

20. B. Sadeghi, "The Traveling Tradition Test: A Method for Dating Traditions," *Der Islam* 85, no. 1 (2010): 203–42, at 204.

21. By most basic form, I mean the parts of the *ḥadīth* that can be found in most of its versions. Intention, which implies authorship, may seem incompatible with the oral aspects of the *ḥadīth*'s emergence; however, this is not necessarily the case. Umberto Eco, for instance, has theorized an intention of art that is public and not in the head of the author. D. Compagno, "Theories of Authorship and Intention in the Twentieth Century: An Overview," *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012): 37–53, at 49.

22. Single-strand *isnād*s are *isnād*s that do not cross others. According to Juynboll, such *isnād*s should be suspected of being fabrications. See H. Motzki, "Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey," *Arabica* 52, no. 2 (2005): 204–53, at 224.

23. Crow takes the presence in the *isnād*s of first/seventh-century figures such as Kurayb (the *mawlā* of Ibn ʿAbbās) or al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. ca. 110/729) as historical data and their *qadarī* loyalties as evidence of the *ḥadīth*'s *qadarī* origins. This is rather problematic, for these figures attained a semilegendary aura and appeal. See, for example, S. Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History: Al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110 H/728 CE) and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 243. The members of the generation of narrators after them, by contrast, are much more marginal figures, which inspires more confidence since later transmitters have little reason to ascribe the *ḥadīth* to them.

24. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, with the *Zawāʾid* of his son ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, ed. Ḥ. al-Basyūnī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2004), 372, no. 1872. For the transliteration, see the section Sunnī *isnād*s and *matn*s below.

theology (*kalām*).[25] The proponents of free will (*qadarī*s) asked how God could reward and punish people in the afterlife for their deeds if those deeds had already been predestined, and they concluded that it was necessary for humans to have free will. Although the *ḥadīth* under study does imply that human acts have intrinsic value (good or evil), it does not present the Intellect as having free will. It can lead to asserting the necessity of free will, but that requires an external premise and a few more logical steps; see Figure 1.
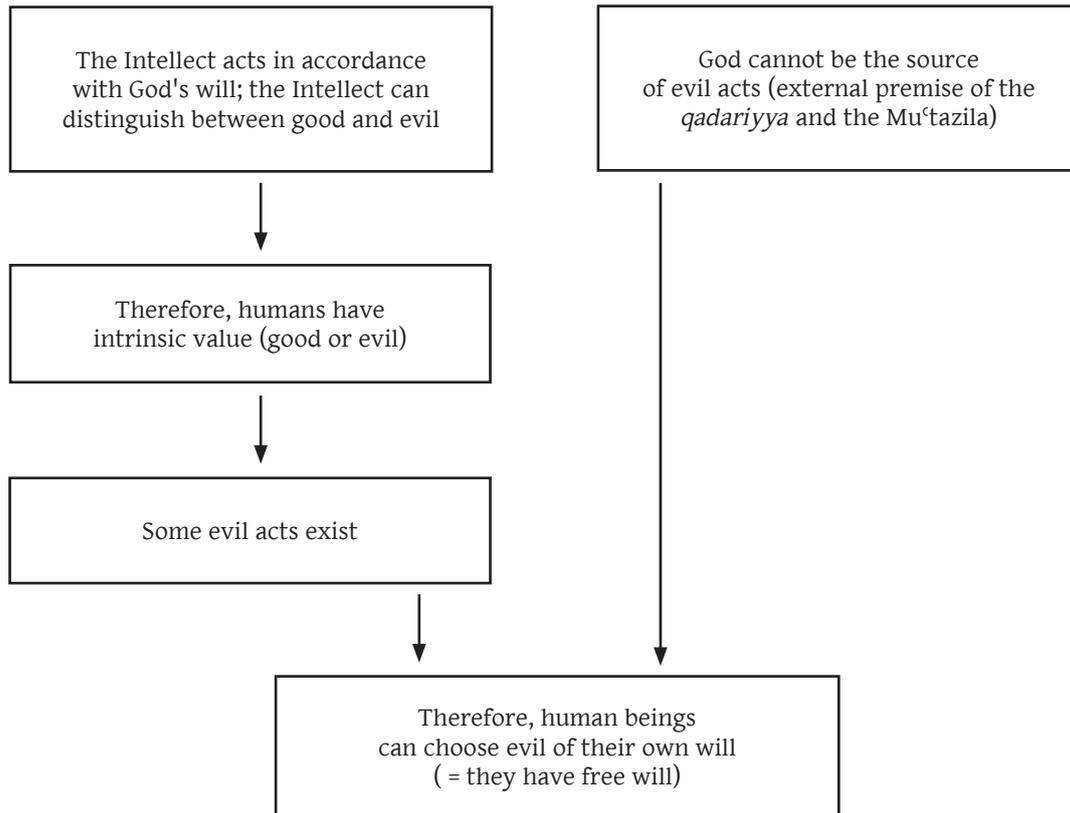
Figure 1. The connection between the ḥadīth and the argument for free will.

Since these steps are not self-evident in the text of the *ḥadīth*, free will could hardly be the *ḥadīth*'s primary intention. That being said, the *ḥadīth* circulated widely and different people appropriated it for their own purposes, and it undoubtedly also entered the *qadarī-jabrī* controversy in the course of its journey.[26] But because the *ḥadīth* is not primarily about free will, it is unlikely that this debate was the context in which it emerged.

---

25. For a succinct discussion of the debate and the controversies that surround it in modern scholarship, see A. Treiger, "Origins of Kalām," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke, 27–43

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). For a crucial scholarly work on the debate, see, for instance, M. A. Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

26. Although Crow deems most versions of the *ḥadīth* to express *qadarī* views, he also identifies a few that expound the opposite predestinarian/*jabrī* position. See, for example, Crow, "Role of al-ʿAql," 12–13.

The ḥadīth is about ʿaql being a parameter for distinguishing between good and evil. The group most famously connected with ʿaql was the Muʿtazila, who emerged from qadarī circles. They were proponents of rationalistic ethics and moral objectivism and the first ones to articulate a coherent system of religious moral theology, which, I contend, is reflected in this ḥadīth. The Muʿtazila believed that human acts have intrinsic values that can be known through reason, a doctrine that came to be known as al-taḥsīn wa-l-taqbīḥ al-ʿaqliyyān ("establishing good and evil through reason"). Because God is necessarily good and just, human reason and divine revelation both guide humans toward the same goal. As such, they are in harmony and do not contradict each other. This doctrine is reflected in the first point made in the ḥadīth on the creation of the Intellect, which states that ʿaql is absolutely obedient, acts only in accordance with God's will, and reaches conclusions about good and evil that accord with God's justice. Therefore, it is the creation dearest to God.

Being able to distinguish good from evil through reason is one thing; being obliged to act on this knowledge is another. The latter thus needs to be stated separately, yielding the second point of the ḥadīth, expressed in the last sentence, "**Through you I take and through you I give.**" It means that reason is the locus of obligation (al-ʿaql manāṭ al-taklīf). The Muʿtazila conceived of a causal connection between one's conduct in this world and one's reward or punishment in the hereafter. They believed that God imposed obligation (taklīf) on human beings to benefit them by giving them the opportunity to attain reward.[27] One of the early Muʿtazilī theologians, Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915), defines the value of human acts according to whether they merit reward or punishment.[28] The doctrine of taklīf, with the prominent place it gives to ʿaql, lay at the heart of Muʿtazilī teachings for as long as we are aware. Already the first systematic Muʿtazilī philosopher whose teachings are known to us, Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf, held that one is "under obligation due to reason (ʿaql) to know God beyond any doubt" even if one has not yet received revelation, and that one "is also duty bound to know the goodness of the good and the evil of the evil, with the consequent obligation of pursuing the good, such as truth and justice, and avoiding the evil, such as lying and injustice."[29] Reason (ʿaql) is therefore the tool of both knowledge and punishment, because it is by means of knowledge that the human subject is liable to punishment. The ḥadīth encapsulates these beliefs, albeit in a much more rudimentary form, and attests to their existence long before Abū al-Hudhayl wrote down his teachings in early second/eighth-century Basra.

Let us next move to the isnāds of the ḥadīth, which identify the time and place of its emergence and early circulation. The first thing that stands out when we look at the lists of Sunnī and Shīʿī isnāds and matns of the ḥadīth and at charts 1 and 2, which represent them graphically, is that the two charts do not show a single common transmitter between the

---

27. S. Vasalou, *Moral Agents and Their Deserts: The Character of Muʿtazilite Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 32. This obligation can be either rationally known (taklīf ʿaqlī) or known through revelation (taklīf samʿī). For the relationship between the two, see chapter 3 in Vasalou, *Moral Agents*, 38–66.

28. "The evil [act] is that for which, taken in isolation, one deserves blame." G. F. Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of ʿAbd Al-Jabbār* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 49. Vasalou's book revolves around the Muʿtazilī conceptions of desert.

29. Al-Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, trans. A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn (London: Routledge, 1984), 47.

two traditions. In this case, then, what has *not* been recorded of its transmitters is almost as important as what has. The absence of shared transmitters begs for explanation, because it is not plausible that the *ḥadīth* emerged and developed completely independently in the two traditions. The Muʿtazilī scenario will provide the link.

The Sunnī variants speak to the earlier circulation of the *ḥadīth*, and I will therefore start with them and then move to the Shīʿī variants. The cities with which the transmitters were affiliated according to *rijāl* works are my guiding tool, along with the transmitters' approximate lifetimes. Therefore, in the list of Sunnī *isnād*s and *matn*s that follows, I include the places where narrators lived and, when known, their death dates (but I omit them on subsequent mentions of the same person). On the whole, these early variants closely resemble each other and the basic version quoted above, with some minor additions here and there.[30]

Sunnī variants (*isnād*s and *matn*s)

1. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 290/903):[31]ʿAlī b. Muslim al-Ṭūsī (d. 253/867, Baghdad)—Sayyār b. Ḥātim al-ʿAnazī (d. 199 or 200/815, Basra)—Jaʿfar b. Sulaymān al-Ḍubaʿī (d. 178/794, Basra)—Mālik b. Dīnār (d. 127/745, Basra)—al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728, Basra), *marfūʿ*[32]

   Lammā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Fa-qāla "Mā khalaqtu khalqan aḥabba ilayya minka. Bika ākhudhu wa-bika uʿṭī."

2. Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿUqaylī (d. 322/933, Mecca):[33] Aḥmad b. Dāwūd al-Qūmsī (d. 295/907, Baghdad)—Abū Hammām (= al-Walīd b. Shujjāʿ, d. 243/857, Kufa, Baghdad)—Saʿīd b. al-Faḍl al-Qurashī (d. ca. 200/815, Basra, Damascus, *munkar al-ḥadīth*)—ʿUmar b. Abī Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAtakī (*majhūl, munkar al-ḥadīth*)—Abū Ghālib (Basra)—Abū Umāma (d. 81/700, Hijaz, Syria)—the Prophet

   Lammā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla: "Wa-ʿizzatī mā khalaqtu khalqan huwa aʿjabu ilayya minka. Bika ākhudhu wa-bika uʿṭī wa-laka al-thawābu wa-ʿalayka al-ʿiqābu."

---

30. I have organized the variants based on common traits that they show. Variants 1-5 all show the basic form of the *ḥadīth* (similar to the one recorded by Ibn Ḥanbal) on occasion with some minor additions; the rest include additional orders that God addresses to the Intellect. Variants 6 and 7, for example, both include the order "*qum!*" "stand up!" and variants 8 and 9 expand on the divine orders with "*uqʿud!*" "sit down!" "*unṭuq!*" "speak!" "*uṣmut!*" "be quiet!". Some of the variants also emphasize the warning in the last part of the *ḥadīth* by inserting the expression "*iyyāka*" "beware," similarly to the variant found in *al-Kāfī*.

31. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, with the *Zawāʾid* of his son ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, ed. Ḥ. al-Basyūnī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2004), 372, no. 1872.

32. This is the one *isnād* that al-Zabīdī considers sound. See Appendix, n. 163.

33. Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿUqaylī, *Kitāb al-Ḍuʿafāʾ*, ed. ʿA. A. Qalʿajī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1984), 3:175, no. 1169.

3. Al-Ṭabarānī (d. 360/971):[34] Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā b. Manda al-Iṣbahānī (d. 301/913, Isfahan, Basra, Kufa)—Abū Hammām al-Walīd b. Shujjāʿ (d. 243/857, Kufa, Baghdad)—Saʿīd b. al-Faḍl al-Qurashī (*munkar al-ḥadīth*)—ʿUmar b. Abī al-Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAtakī (*majhūl*, *munkar al-ḥadīth*)—Abū Ghālib—Abū Umāma—the Prophet

Lammā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla qāla la-hu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Qāla: "Wa-ʿizzatī mā khalaqtu khalqan aʿjabu ilayya minka. Bika uʿṭī wa-bika al-thawābu wa-ʿalayka al-ʿiqābu."

4. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894):[35] Muḥammad b. Bakkār (d. 238/852, Baghdad, Ruṣāfa)—ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī al-Zinād (d. 174/790, Medina, Baghdad)—Muḥammad b. ʿUqba (*mawlā* of Zubayr, Medina)—Kurayb (d. 98/716, *mawlā* of Ibn ʿAbbās, Hijaz, possibly Basra)

Lammā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Qāla—wa-huwa aʿlamu bihi—"Wa-ʿizzatī wa-jalālī lā ajʿaluka illā fīman uḥibbu wa-mā khalaqtu shayʾan huwa aḥabbu ilayya minka."

5. Al-Ḥusayn b. Ziyād—Abū Ismāʿīl al-Azdī:[36] al-Ḥusayn b. Ziyād—Abū Ismāʿīl Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh (= "author" of the book, Basra)—Abū Jahḍam al-Azdī (Syria, Basra)—Sufyān b. Sulaym (Syria, Wasit, overseeing police squads in Basra under al-Ḥajjāj in 93/711)—al-Ḥārith b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Azdī (appointed governor of Basra in 45/665)

[Qāla lanā nabiyyunā ṣallā Allāhu ʿalayhi anna] Allāha lammā khalaqa al-ʿaqla fa-qaddarahu wa-ʿawwarahu wa-faragha min khalqihi qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla: "Wa-ʿizzatī mā khalaqtu min khalqī shayʾan huwa aḥabbu ilayya minka. Bika uḥmadu wa-bika uʿbadu wa-bika uʿrafu wa-bika tanālu ṭāqatī wa-bika tudkhalu jannatī.

6. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā:[37] Muḥammad b. Bakkār—Ḥafṣ b. ʿUmar (*qāḍī* of Aleppo, *munkar al-ḥadīth*)—al-Faḍl b. ʿĪsā al-Raqāshī (d. 132/749, Basra, *wāʿiẓ*, *qadar*, *munkar al-ḥadīth*)—Abū ʿUthmān al-Nahdī (d. 95/713, lived 130 years)—Abū Hurayra (d. 59/678)—the Prophet

Lammā khalaqa Allāhu taʿālā al-ʿaqla qāla lahu: "Qum!" fa-qām. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Uqʿud!" fa-qaʿada. Fa-qāla Allāhu ʿazza wa-jalla: "Mā khalaqtu khalqan khayran minka wa-lā akrama minka wa-lā-afḍala minka wa-lā aḥsana minka. Bika ākhudhu

---

34. Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, ed. Ḥ. ʿA. al-Salafī (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 1983), 8:339–40, no. 8086.

35. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-ʿAql wa-faḍluhu*, ed. L. M. al-Ṣaghīr and N. ʿA. Khalaf (Riyadh: Dār al-Rāya, 1989), 40–41, no. 16.

36. Abū Ismāʿīl al-Azdī, *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Shām* (Calcutta: Baptiste Mission, 1854), 178.

37. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-ʿAql wa-faḍluhu*, 39–40, no. 15.

wa-bika uʿṭī wa-bika uʿazzu wa-bika uʿrafu wa-iyyāka uʿātibu wa-bika al-thawābu wa-ʿalayka al-ʿiqābu."[38]

7. Ibn Shāhīn (d. 385):[39] Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad b. Ṣāʿid—al-Ḥasan b. ʿArafa (d. 257/870, Baghdad)—Sayf b. Muḥammad b. Ukht Sufyān (Kufa, Baghdad, *kadhdhāb*)—Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778, Khurasan, Kufa, Basra)—al-Faḍl b. ʿĪsā al-Raqāshī—(*matrūk, munkar al-ḥadīth, qadarī, qāṣṣ*)Abū ʿUthmān al-Nahdī—Abū Hurayra—the Prophet

Lammā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla qāla lahu: "Qum!" fa-qām. Thummā qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Fa-qāla lahu: "Mā khalaqtu khalqan huwa khayrun minka wa-lā aḥsanu minka wa-lā akramu minka wa-lā aḥabbu ilayya minka. Bika ākhudhu wa-bika uʿṭī wa-bika uʿrafu wa-laka al-thawābu wa-ʿalayka al-ʿiqābu."

8. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. between 318/936 and 320/938):[40] ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. Ḥabīb—Dāwūd b. Muḥabbir al-Baṣrī[41] (d. 206/821, Basra)—al-Ḥasan b. Dīnār (d. mid-second/eighth century)—al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī—several companions of the Prophet—the Prophet

[Addition in the beginning: "The Intellect is light. God the Almighty created it and divided it among His worshippers according to His will concerning them and knowledge of them. For it was narrated that the Prophet said:"] *Lammā khalaqa Allāhu taʿālā al-ʿaqla qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla lahu: "Uqʿud!" fa-qaʿada. Thumma qāla lahu: "Unṭuq!" fa-naṭaqa. Thumma qāla lahu: "Uṣmut!" fa-ṣamata. Fa-qāla: "Wa-ʿizzatī wa-jalālī wa-kibriyāʾī wa-sulṭānī wa-jabarūtī mā khalaqtu khalqan aḥabba ilayya minka wa-lā akrama ʿalayya minka. Bika uʿrafu wa-bika uḥmadu wa-bika uṭāʿu wa-bika ākhudhu wa-bika uʿṭī wa-iyyāka uʿātibu wa-laka al-thawābu wa-ʿalayka al-ʿiqābu.*"

9. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī:[42] Hishām b. Khālid (d. 249/863, Syria)—Baqiyya b. al-Walīd (d. 197/812, Syria)—al-Awzāʿī (d. 158/774, Syria)—the Prophet

Lammā khalaqa Allāhu taʿālā al-ʿaqla qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla lahu: "Uqʿud!" fa-qaʿada. Thumma qāla lahu: "Unṭuq!" fa-naṭaqa. Thumma qāla lahu: "Uṣmut!" fa-ṣamata. Fa-qāla: "Wa-ʿizzatī wa-jalālī wa-kibriyāʾī wa-sulṭānī wa-jabarūtī mā khalaqtu khalqan aḥabba ilayya minka wa-lā akrama ʿalayya minka. Bika uʿrafu wa-bika uḥmadu wa-bika uṭāʿu wa-bika ākhudhu wa-bika uʿṭī wa-iyyāka uʿātibu wa-laka al-thawābu wa-ʿalayka al-ʿiqābu. Wa-mā akramtuka bi-shayʾin afḍala min al-ṣabri."

---

38. The same *matn* and *isnād* appear in Ibn ʿAdī al-Jurjānī.

39. Ibn Shāhīn, *al-Targhīb fī faḍāʾil al-aʿmāl*, ed. M. Ḥ. M. Ḥ. Ismāʿīl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004), 84, no. 252.

40. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *al-Nuskha al-musnada min Nawādir al-uṣūl fī maʿrifat maṣādir al-Rasūl*, ed. I. I. M. ʿAwaḍ (Cairo: Maktabat al-Imām al-Bukhārī, 2008), 2:764, no. 1035.

41. The edition gives his name incorrectly as Dāwūd b. Muḥammad b Muḥarrim al-Baṣrī.

42. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *al-Nuskha al-musnada*, 2:764, no. 1036.

Chart 1: Sunnī *Isnāds*

Prophet Muḥammad

Kurayb, *mawlā* of Ibn ʿAbbās

"Several Companions"

Abū Umāma (d. 81, Hijaz, Syria)

Ḥārith b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Azdī

Abū Hurayra (d. 59)

al-Awzāʿī (d. 158, Syria)

Muḥammad b. ʿUqba (Hijaz)

al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110, Basra)

Abū Ghālib (Basra)

Sufyān b. Sulaym (Syria, Wasit)

Abū Uthmān al-Nahdī (d. 95)

Baqiyya (d. 197, Syria)

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ziyād (d. 174, Medina, Baghdad)

Mālik b. Dīnār (d. 127, Basra)

al-Ḥasan b. Dīnār

ʿUmar b. Abī Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAtakī

Abū Jaḥdam al-Azdī (Syria, Basra)

al-Faḍl b. ʿĪsā (d. 132, Basra)

Hishām b. Khālid (d. 249, Syria)

Muḥammad b. Bakkār

Jaʿfar b. Sulaymān (d. 178, Basra)

Dāwūd b. Muḥabbir (d. 206, Basra)

Saʿīd b. al-Faḍl al-Qurashī (d. approx. 200, Basra)

Abū Ismāʿīl Muḥammad al-Azdī

Sufyān al-Thaqwrī (d. 161, Kufa, Basra)

Ḥafṣ b. ʿUmar (Aleppo)

9

4, 6

Sayyār b. Ḥātim al-ʿAnazī (d. 199, Basra)

ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. Ḥabīb

Abū Hammām (d. 243, Kufa, Baghdad)

al-Ḥusayn b. Ziyād

Sayf b. Muḥammad (Kufa, Baghdad)

ʿAlī b. Muslim al-Ṭūsī (d. 253, Baghdad)

8

Aḥmad b. Dāwūd al-Qūmsī (d. 295, Baghdad)

5

al-Ḥasan b. ʿArafa (d. 257, Baghdad)

1

2

Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā (d. 301, Isfahan, Basra, Kufa)

Yaḥyā b. Muḥammad b. Ṣāʿid

3

7

As mentioned earlier, medieval Sunnī critics considered the *ḥadīth* highly unreliable, largely because many of its transmitters are classified as unknown or untrustworthy. The criteria developed by some modern scholars also render it dubious, because its *isnād*s consist mainly of different single strands.[43] On the other hand, however, these two features may in fact provide a reason for greater confidence in the *isnād*s. The large number of transmitters deemed unreliable by the Sunnī tradition suggests that these transmitters had some historical connection with the *ḥadīth*, because if later transmitters had wanted to forge full *isnād*s, they would have probably chosen to name more reliable narrators to give their forgery greater authority.

The first thing that stands out when we look at the early Sunnī variants of the *ḥadīth* is that most of their *isnād*s are Basran; especially in the early second/eighth century, many people are reported to have narrated this *ḥadīth* in Basra. Variants 1, 6, 7, and 9 feature exclusively Basran transmitters in the second/eighth century. Variants 2 and 3 include an unknown transmitter, ʿUmar b. Abī Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAtakī, who connects two Basran transmitters, so these *isnād*s can also be safely considered Basran. The *isnād* of variant 4 is Medinan in its second/eighth-century portion, but it, too, shows connections with Basra.[44]

---

43. See note 22.

44. The earliest transmitter named in the *isnād*, Kurayb, was a *mawlā* of Ibn ʿAbbās and served as the governor of Basra. Ibn ʿAbbās himself had a strong presence in Mecca and Basra. The second transmitter, Muḥammad b. ʿUqba, although Medinan, was a *mawlā* of al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām. Basra had strong Zubayrid inclinations and connections.

Variant 5 is more complicated. It was recorded not in a *ḥadīth* compilation like the others but in a historical work, *Futūḥ Shām* ("Conquests of Syria"), attributed to Abū ʿIsmāʿīl al-Azdī al-Baṣrī, which some modern scholars believe was compiled in the late second/ eighth century.[45] The *isnād* is composed exclusively of members of the tribe of Azd. I suspect that Abū Ismāʿīl attached the *ḥadīth* to the broader narrative, which touches on the theme of ʿaql, as a rhetorical embellishment.[46] This variant nonetheless constitutes an important piece of evidence to support the idea that by Abū ʿIsmāʿīl's time the *ḥadīth* was well known in Basra to the extent that it sprang to mind when the theme of ʿaql was broached. Variant 10 is Syrian, but if I am correct that the *ḥadīth* spread in early second/eighth-century Basra, the variant's earliest transmitter—the famous al-Awzāʿī—lived too late to interfere with the *ḥadīth*'s Basran provenance (if we wanted to give this variant some historical credit). Finally, variant 8 is Basran as well as Kufan; however, the *isnād*'s Kufan part is most probably forged. As al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995) noted, the unique *isnād* implies that only one person heard the *ḥadīth* from Sufyān al-Thawrī, which would be odd in the case of such a famous *muḥaddith*.[47] If this part of the *isnād* is indeed forged, it is significant that it is attached to the name of a Basran figure, al-Faḍl b. ʿĪsā al-Raqāshī, who was not particularly highly regarded in *ḥadīth* circles—for if the *isnād* had been forged in its entirety, it would have been more logical to populate it with well-regarded transmitters. Al-Faḍl's very unreliability thus lends greater credibility to the *ḥadīth*'s historical connection with him. Even if we disregard al-Dāraquṭnī's argument and consider the *isnād* possibly sound, al-Faḍl b. ʿĪsā remains important, because he is then the closest to a common link we get. Either way, he is a noteworthy narrator whose interest in ʿaql and connections with the Muʿtazila suggest that he probably played some role in the historical transmission of the *ḥadīth*. He was a Basran Muʿtazilī preacher (*qāṣṣ, wāʿiẓ*) and a follower of Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (fl. ca. 100/719), who, according to Josef van Ess, emphasized the role of ʿaql.[48]

---

45. See S. A. Mourad, "On Early Islamic Historiography: Abū Ismāʿīl al-Azdī and His Futūḥ al-Shām," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120, no. 4 (2000): 577–93.

46. There are three reasons for my suspicion. First, the *ḥadīth* plays no role in the narrative; it is merely a digression on the theme of ʿaql mentioned in a story about an encounter between Khālid b. al-Walīd and a Byzantine general by the name of Bāhān. Second, if conciseness is any indicator of historicity, as some scholars have argued, this version, with all its additions, seems to be later. Cf. Motzki, "Dating Muslim Traditions," 212–13. Finally, the name of the third transmitter, Abū Jahḍam al-Azdī, provides an important clue: he also narrated other stories about Bāhān. See al-Azdī, *Futūḥ Shām*, 185, 192, 193. It seems likely, therefore, that Abū Ismāʿīl heard the narrative together with others and added the *ḥadīth* to it. It is also noteworthy that although Abū Jahḍam is usually described in *rijāl* works as a Syrian who narrated from Kufans such as Shurayḥ, Ibn Ḥibbān says that he is counted among the people of Basra (*ʿidāduhu fī ahl al-Baṣra*). Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Thiqāt* (Hyderabad: Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1973), 7:144.

47. Al-Dāraquṭnī also notes that just as Sayf b. Muḥammad is the only person who narrated it from Sufyān, al-Ḥasan b. ʿArafa is the only person who narrated it from Sayf. Al-Dāraquṭnī and Abū al-Faḍl al-Maqdisī, *Aṭrāf al-gharāʾib wa-l-afrād min ḥadīth Rasūl Allāh li-l-imām al-Dāraquṭnī*, ed. M. M. M. Ḥ. Naṣṣār and S. Yūsif (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1998), 5:240.

48. J. van Ess, *Zwischen Ḥadīt und Theologie: Studien zum Entstehen prädestinatianischer Überlieferung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 121–22. Ibn Ḥajar says about al-Faḍl "*qāla Yaʿqūb b. Sufyān "muʿtazilī, ḍaʿīf al-ḥadīth.*" Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 8, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1984), no. 521.

Finally, another Basran transmitter who looms over others in *rijāl* works as the culprit for "forging" the *ḥadīth* confirms the Muʿtazilī origin theory. Al-Dāraquṭnī and others agree almost unanimously that a certain Dāwūd b. Muḥabbir and a couple of men associated with him[49] forged the *ḥadīth*. This Dāwūd, according to the critics, spent too much time with the Muʿtazila, and they ruined his reputation.[50] Dāwūd b. Muḥabbir is the author of a work titled *Kitāb al-ʿAql.* This work, which was still available to *ḥadīth* scholars such as al-Ḥāfiẓ al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1404),[51] collected *ḥadīth*s that dealt with the theme of *ʿaql*, and it also included the *ḥadīth* under study. Dāwūd was probably responsible for the *ḥadīth*'s wide dissemination in Sunnī circles. His poor reputation probably accounts for the fact that he does not appear as the common link. It is possible that some later narrators indeed forged some of the *isnād*s, precisely because they wanted to cite the *ḥadīth* without mentioning the disgraced Dāwūd.

The Sunnī *isnād*s thus strongly suggest that the *ḥadīth* circulated in early second/eighth-century Basra, which was the hub of the forming Muʿtazila. The *rijāl* works also point overwhelmingly to a Muʿtazilī connection, though they do so inadvertently (since they claim that Dāwūd forged the *ḥadīth*, not simply disseminated it).

Let us now consider the *ḥadīth*'s circulation among early Shīʿī traditionists. In contrast to its dubious reputation among medieval Sunnī critics, the *ḥadīth* enjoys a canonical status in Shīʿī circles. The variants here are taken from three prestigious early *ḥadīth* collections: al-Barqī's *Maḥāsin*, al-Kulaynī's *Kāfī*, and al-Ṣaddūq's *Āmālī* and *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*. A glance at the *isnād*s tells us that the *ḥadīth* circulated in Kufa, which is not surprising as Kufa was the center of Shīʿism in this time. The *isnād*s and *matn*s are listed chronologically according to the compilers' death dates. All variants closely resemble one another, with the exception of variants 15 and 17, which represent much-expanded versions that nonetheless still contain the basic *ḥadīth*.[52]

Shīʿī variants (isnāds *and* matns)

10. Al-Barqī (d. 274/887):[53] Muḥammad b. ʿAlī—Wuhayb b. Ḥafṣ (Kufa, wrote books)—
    Abū Baṣīr (d. 150/767, Kufa)—Imam al-Ṣādiq

---

49. Four names are usually mentioned: Maysara b. ʿAbd Rabbihi, Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abī Rajāʾ, and Sulaymān b. ʿĪsā al-Sanjarī. See al-Zabīdī's commentary below for more detail. Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir is the only one of these four mentioned in the *isnād*s. It thus seems that he was the one responsible for the *ḥadīth*'s spread and circulation among Sunnī *muḥaddith*s. Many sources quote al-Dāraquṭnī as the author of the accusation that Dāwūd forged the *ḥadīth*. In the printed material available to me, I found al-Dāraquṭnī's denunciation of Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir, but not one made in the context of this *ḥadīth*. See, e.g., Abū al-Ḥasan al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan*, ed. A. A. ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and A. M. Muʿawwaḍ (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 2001), 1:386–87; al-Dāraquṭnī, *al-Ḍuʿafāʾ wa-l-matrūkūn*, ed. M. b. ʿA. b. ʿAbd al-Qādir (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1984), 202.

50. See Appendix.

51. Al-Ḥāfiẓ al-ʿIrāqī was one of the leading Shāfiʿī scholars of his time. He wrote a commentary on al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn.*

52. See below for a discussion of the "Armies" *ḥadīth.*

53. Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, 1: 306, no. 602.

Inna Allāha khalaqa al-ʿaqla fa-qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla lahu: "Wa-ʿizzatī wa-jalālī mā khalaqtu shayʾan aḥabba ilayya minka. Laka al-thawābu wa-ʿalayka al-ʿiqābu."

11. Al-Barqī:[54] al-Sindī b. Muḥammad—al-ʿAlāʾ b. Razīn (Kufa)—Muḥammad b. Muslim (companion of Imams al-Bāqir, and al-Ṣādiq, Kufa)— Imam al-Bāqir and Imam al-Ṣādiq

Lammā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Fa-qāla: "Wa-ʿizzatī wa-jalālī mā khalaqtu khalqan aḥsana minka. Iyyāka āmuru wa-iyyāka anhī wa-iyyāka uthību wa-iyyāka uʿāqibu."

12. Al-Barqī and al-Kulaynī:[55] Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā—al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb (= al-Sarrād, narrated from Imam al-Riḍā, "one of the four pillars of his era")— al-ʿAlāʾ b. Razīn—Muḥammad b. Muslim—Imam al-Bāqir

Lammā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla istanṭaqahu. Thumma qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla lahu: "Wa-ʿizzatī wa-jalālī mā khalaqtu khalqan huwa aḥabbu ilayya minka. Wa-lā ukammiluka illā fiman uḥibbu. Amā innī iyyāka āmuru wa-iyyāka anhī wa-iyyāka uʿāqibu wa-iyyāka uthību."

13. Al-Barqī:[56] ʿAlī b. al-Ḥakam (companion of Imam al-Jawwād, Baghdad)—Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (companion of Imams al-Ṣādiq and Musā al-Kāẓim, great *mutakallim*, Wasit, Baghdad)[57]— Imam al-Ṣādiq

Lammā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla lahu: "Wa-ʿizzatī wa-jalālī mā khalaqtu khalqan huwa aḥabbu ilayya minka. Bika ākhudhu wa-bika uʿṭī wa-ʿalayka uthību."

14. Al-Barqī:[58] Muḥammad b. Khālid—ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Faḍl al-Nawfalī—the latter's father—Imam al-Ṣādiq—the Prophet

Khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla: "Mā khalaqtu khalqan aḥabba ilayya minka."

Qāla: Fa-aʿṭā Allāhu Muḥammadan ṣallā Allāhu ʿalayhi wa-ālihi wa-sallam tisʿata wa-tisʿīna juzʾan thumma qassama bayna al-ʿibādi juzʾan wāḥidan.

---

54. Ibid., no. 603.

55. Ibid., no. 604; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:5, no. 1.

56. Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsin*, 1:307, no. 605.

57. The other possibility is Hishām b. Sālim. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥakam narrated *ḥadīth* from both Hishāms.

58. Ibid., no. 606.

15. The "Armies *ḥadīth*"; al-Barqī, al-Kulaynī, and al-Ṣaddūq:[59] ʿAlī b. Ḥadīd—Samāʿa b. Mihrān (companion of Imam al-Ṣādiq, Kufa)— Imam al-Ṣādiq

God created the Intellect, which is the first creation among spiritual beings residing to the right of the Throne from His light, and . . .

. . . *qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Thumma qāla lahu: "Aqbil" fa-aqbala. Fa-qāla Allāhu taʿālā lahu: "Khalaqtuka khalqan ʿaẓīman wa-karramtuka ʿalā jamīʿ khalqī."*

Then he created Ignorance . . . [a long narrative follows about Ignorance's disobedience and about the creation of seventy-five armies for both the Intellect and Ignorance]

16. Al-Kulaynī:[60] Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan—Sahl b. Ziyād (Qum, Rayy, *ghalw*, weak *ḥadīth* narrator) Ibn Abī Najrān (Kufa, narrated from Imam Riḍā, d. 203/817)—al-ʿAlāʾ b. Razīn—Muḥammad b. Muslim—Imam al-Bāqir

Lammā khalaqa Allāhu al-ʿaqla qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Fa-qāla: "Wa-ʿizzatī mā khalaqtu khalqan ahsana minka. Iyyāka āmuru wa-iyyāka anhī wa-iyyāka uthību wa-iyyāka uʿāqibu."

17. Al-Ṣaddūq:[61] Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shāh—Abū Ḥāmid Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn—Abū Yazīd Aḥmad b. Khālid al-Khālidī—Muhammad b. Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ al-Tamīmī—the latter's father—Muḥammad b. Ḥātim al-Qaṭṭān[62]—Ḥammād b. ʿAmr—Imam Ṣādiq—Imam Bāqir—Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (d. 95/712)—ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d.40/661)

[part of a narrative several pages long about the Prophet's *waṣiyya* to ʿAlī] *Yā ʿAlī: inna awalla khalaqa khalqahu Allāhu ʿazza wa-jalla al-ʿaqlu fa-qāla lahu: "Aqbil!" fa-aqbala. Thumma qāla lahu: "Adbir!" fa-adbara. Fa-qāla: "Wa-ʿizzatī wa-jalālī mā khalaqtu khalqan huwa aḥabbu ilayya minka. Bika ākhudhu wa-bika uʿṭī wa-bika uthību wa-bika uʿāqibu."*

59. Ibid., 1:311, no. 620; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:11, no. 14; al-Ṣaddūq, *Amālī al-Ṣaddūq* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 2009), 304.

60. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:13, no. 26.

61. Al-Ṣaddūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, ed. ʿA. A. al-Ghaffārī (Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1429H), 4:369, no. 5765, *isnāds* to Ḥammād and Anas on p. 536 (unreliable *isnād*).

62. Al-Ṣaddūq provides also an alternative *isnād,* which replaces Muḥammad b. Ḥātim al-Qaṭṭān and Ḥammād b. ʿAmr with Anas b. Muḥammad Abū Mālik and his father.

Chart 2 : Shīʿī *Isnāds*.

17
ʿAlī (d. 40)

Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn

14
Prophet Muḥammad

11, 12, 16
Imam Bāqir (d.114)

14

Imam Ṣādiq (d.148) — 10, 11, 13, 15

11, 12, 16

10, 11, 13, 14, 15

Abū Baṣīr al-Asadī (d.150, Kufa)

Muḥammad b. Muslim (mid 2nd c, Kufa)

Hishām (b. al-Ḥakam?) (d. 179, Wāsiṭ, Baghdad)

al-Faḍl al-Nawfalī

Samāʿa b. Mihrān (Kufa)

Ḥammād b. ʿAmr

Wuhayb b. Ḥafṣ (Kufa)

ʿAlā b. Razīn (mid, late 2nd c, Kufa)

ʿAlī b. al-Ḥakam

ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Faḍl

ʿAlī b Ḥadīd

Muḥammad b. Ḥātim b. Qaṭṭān

Muḥammad b. ʿAlī
10

Sindī b. Muḥammad (Kufa)
11

al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb (d. 224)

Ibn Abī Najrān (Kufa)

13

Muḥḥammad b. Khālid al-Barqī
14

15

Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ al-Tamīmī

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā
12

Sahl b. Ziyād (Qum, Rayy)

Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ṣāliḥ

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan
16

Abū Yazīd al-Khālidī

Abū Ḥāmid

Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Shāh
17

The Shīʿī variants document the spread of the ḥadīth in the middle of the second/eighth century in Kufa, around the same time that Dāwūd was disseminating it in Sunnī circles. Since we did not see many Kufan figures in the earlier Sunnī *isnād*s, the ḥadīth must have originated outside Kufa and traveled there from Basra. Al-ʿAlāʾ b. Razīn, who lived in the second half of the second/eighth century, seems to be the common link and the main candidate for the disseminator of the ḥadīth in Basra. In the Shīʿī tradition, he is considered a reliable transmitter who had books from which "everyone narrated ḥadīth."[63] Another interesting transmitter, given what we know of his life, is Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795), the famous Shīʿī theologian who debated the Muʿtazila—if it is indeed this Hishām who is meant here.[64] In any case, it is evident that the ḥadīth spread first in Basra and then in Kufa by the second half of the second/eighth century.

---

63. *Lahu kutub yarwīhā jamāʿatun*; al-Khūʾī, *Muʿjam rijāl al-ḥadīth* (Najaf: Maktabat al-Imām al-Khūʾī, n.d.), 12:184.

64. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥakam narrated from two Hishāms, Hishām b. al-Ḥakam and Hishām b. Sālim. See al-Khūʾī, *Rijāl*, 12:411–25, esp. 414.

The real common link between the Sunnī and Shīʿī traditions is not a single person but the Muʿtazilī environment of Basra. In Basra, the ḥadīth emerged as a saying encapsulating a Muʿtazilī teaching about human responsibility conditioned by the Intellect's ability to tell good from evil. The early Muʿtazila were not a private group, quite the opposite; they sent out missionaries (duʿāt) to spread their doctrine and instructed them in public disputations.[65] The two founding fathers of the Muʿtazila, Wāsit b. ʿAṭāʾ and ʿAmr b. ʿUbayd, were both famed preachers. Early second/eighth-century Basra was thus infused with Muʿtazilī ideas.

It is important to emphasize that we are not dealing here with a quotation from a treatise by a great systematic Muʿtazilī theologian such as al-ʿAllāf or even Wāṣil himself;[66] rather, the ḥadīth is an echo of Muʿtazilī teachings among the broader Basran public. In this way, the ḥadīth's emergence highlights an important function of the genre as a means of communicating the intellectual debates of the day to the public. Therefore, we do not need to talk about direct influences or borrowings between different sects. Basra was a booming intellectual center in the early second/eighth century, where different people participated in lively debates and from which ideas spread to the wider world.

The transformation of a Muʿtazilī teaching into the form of a ḥadīth is what subsequently enabled it to spread among people and groups of different inclinations. The examination of the ḥadīth's variants shows that all kinds of later collectors recorded it, even those who can in no way be suspected of having sympathies for the Muʿtazila. This is the case, for example, with Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, a famous Sunnī scholar and a representative of the ascetic strand of ahl al-ḥadīth who not only recorded this ḥadīth but also compiled a book on ʿaql.[67] It is thanks to its ḥadīth form that this former Muʿtazilī teaching could be dissociated from its original setting and reinterpreted by various narrators, for ḥadīths were accepted by all and accessible to all, regardless of sect or socioeconomic status. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, as his book suggests, did not understand the ḥadīth it in rationalistic terms but as a tradition about divine wisdom. The ḥadīth form turned any idea into a currency up for grabs for any group, which could then infuse its ideas into it.

The Muʿtazilī origin of the ḥadīth and its subsequent spread in the Sunnī and Shīʿī circles furthermore illustrates the porousness of the boundaries between these groups in the second/eighth century. Michael Dann has documented the important role that Shīʿī transmitters played in the transmission of ḥadīths in the proto-Sunnī milieu before 150/767.[68] It is worth emphasizing that none of these groups was yet a well-defined entity in this time. Early Muʿtazila was still "a tradition of socially and politically disembodied

---

65. S. Stroumsa, "The Beginnings of the Muʿtazila Reconsidered," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990): 265–93, at 287–91.

66. If Wāṣil indeed wrote books. Van Ess suggested that the books attributed to him whose names have been preserved may have been written later by Ḍirār b. ʿAmr. Stroumsa, "Beginnings of the Muʿtazila," 291.

67. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *al-ʿAql wa-faḍluh*, 40.

68. M. Dann, "Contested Boundaries: The Reception of Shīʿite Narrators in the Sunnī Hadith Tradition" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2015).

intellection," in Michael Cook's words,[69] and as for early Shīʿism, both medieval and modern scholars have struggled to categorize its various groups (for example, *tashayyuʿ* and *rafḍ*).[70] Regarding the Sunnīs, some scholars have objected to the use of the term prior to the fifth/ eleventh century.[71] In the second/eighth century, as Racha el-Omari observed, "seemingly everyone was engaged in reporting *ḥadīth* [...] including proto-Muʿtazilites"[72] and thus it is not surprising that these group would share some of the *ḥadīth* material.

The relationship between early Shīʿism and the Muʿtazila, in particular, has been hotly debated, because the two groups later on came to overlap on many points. Scholars have argued either that the Shīʿīs acquired Muʿtazilī positions early on or that they developed them independently.[73] By contrast, others, such as Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, have painted early Shīʿism as an esoteric (not a rationalist) movement.[74] What is interesting is that in their efforts to present early Shīʿism as rationalistic or esoteric, respectively, both camps have used this *ḥadīth* and other *ʿaql* traditions to support their positions.[75] In a way, then, they continue the practice of reinterpreting and engaging with the *ḥadīth* in their modern scholarly practice.

By the end of the second/eighth century, however, the sectarian boundaries became much more defined. The *ahl al-ḥadīth* appropriated *ḥadīth* as their dominion, through the rising institution of *isnād* and excluded non-*ahl al-ḥadīth* transmitters from it,[76] while other groups, especially the Muʿtazila, criticized them for abusing *ḥadīth* as an ideological weapon.[77] However, as the next section shows, using the example of *ʿaql ḥadīth,* different groups continued to use, adapt, and interpret *ḥadīth*s for centuries. Especially non-legal *ḥadīth* (like the one under study) were under much less scrutiny. The genre's adaptability to new environments and intellectual frameworks is one of its important literary facets and *ḥadīth*s should be thus seen as an important vehicle for expressing ideas and creating memorable shortcuts.

---

69. M. Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 195. Sarah Stroumsa has also pointed out that there was no one political platform that united the Muʿtazila. Stroumsa, "Beginnings of the Muʿtazila."

70. Dann, "Contested Boundaries," 30–34.

71. Ibid., 8.

72. R. El-Omari, "Accommodation and Resistance: Classical Muʿtazilites on *Ḥadīth*," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 71, no. 2 (2012): 231-256, at 232.

73. H. A. Abdulsater, *Shiʿi Doctrine, Muʿtazili Theology: Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and Imami Discourse* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 2–3.

74. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

75. Amir-Moezzi understands the Shīʿī *ʿaql* as a phenomenon he labels "hiero-intelligence," which has four dimensions—cosmogonic, ethical-epistemological, spiritual, and soteriological. In his view, the transformation of *ʿaql* into the logical *ʿaql* of the theologians began in the third/ninth century under the influence of Aristotelian texts. Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 11. For his discussion of *ʿaql*, see 6–13. Cf. W. Madelung, "Early Imāmī Theology as Reflected in the *Kitāb al-Kāfī* of al-Kulaynī," in *The Study of Shiʿi Islam: History, Theology and Law*, ed. F. Daftary, 465–74 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 467–68.

76. On the decline of Shīʿī narrators in the proto-Sunnī milieu see Dann, "Contested Boundaries," 1-28.

77. El-Omari, "Accommodation and Resistance," 234-236.

2. The Journey of the *ʿAql Ḥadīth* in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period

By the fourth/tenth century, the *ʿaql ḥadīth* had spread across the whole Islamic world in the works of authors with divergent interests, from the pious Sunnī ascetic Ibn Abī al-Dunyā in Baghdad to the *adīb* Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi (d. 328/940) in Cordoba and the Ṣūfī master al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī in Termez in modern-day Uzbekistan.[78] Throughout its long journey, the *ḥadīth* was reinterpreted and adapted to new contexts in a number of different ways. I have chosen five examples. The first three come from the medieval period and illustrate the diverse ways in which the text of the *ḥadīth* could be molded.

Three Medieval Variants

The first example presents the *ḥadīth* unchanged but set into a new intellectual framework and reinterpreted. This instance is associated with Aḥmad b. Khābiṭ (d. between 227/842 and 232/847), who had studied with the Muʿtazilī theologian al-Naẓẓām.[79] Ibn Khābiṭ was from a well-known Basran Muʿtazilī family, but the Muʿtazilīs denounced his teachings about the migration of souls as going too far, and as a result he was investigated under the caliph al-Wāthiq. He and his companion Faḍl al-Ḥadathī are reported to have taught the *ḥadīth* with a twist. According to the heresiologist ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), they held that there were two lords of the universe, one eternal and one created, the latter being Jesus, who is identical with the *ʿaql* of the *ḥadīth*. Al-Baghdādī quotes Ibn Khābiṭ and al-Faḍl saying: "The Messiah armored himself with a body; before that he was *ʿaql*."[80]

The second example shows the *ḥadīth* combined with another, forming a new narrative. In this form it appears in *Kitāb al-Aẓilla* ("Book of Shadows"), a text written in the circles of Shīʿī Ghulāt ("Extremists") in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries in Iraq and preserved as quotations in various Nuṣayrī texts.[81] (The Nuṣayrīs were a group of Ghulāt who left Iraq and settled in Syria.) The *ḥadīth* speaks about God first creating a name of four letters (MḤMD), then other names from it, then His throne on water, and only then the *ʿaql*. It continues:

> Then God spread His light, and from that light He created an image. Then from knowledge (*ʿilm*), power (*qudra*), light (*nūr*), and will (*mashīʾa*) He created by His command intelligence (*ʿaql*). He then commanded: "Turn toward me!" And intelligence turned toward Him. Then He commanded: "Turn away!" And it turned away. God then

---

78. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, ed. M. M. Qumayḥa (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), 2:107. Without *isnād*. For the other references, see chart 1.

79. On Aḥmad b. Khābiṭ, see J. van Ess, *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra*, trans. G. Goldbloom (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 3:467–72.

80. Al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-firaq*, ed. M. M. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Madanī, 1964), 277.

81. M. Asatryan, "Shiite Underground Literature between Iraq and Syria: 'The Book of Shadows' and the History of Early Ghulat," in *Texts in Transit in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Y. T. Langermann and R. G. Morrison, 128–61 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), 131.

told it, "By you I reward and by you I punish," and made it live with water, possessed of knowledge, eternally in the realm.[82]

The part that comes from a different *ḥadīth* is the motif of knowledge, power, light, and will; this element has been recorded in the *Ikhtiṣāṣ*, attributed to Shaykh Mufīd (d. 413/1022).[83] Mushegh Asatryan places the teaching of the *Kitāb al-Aẓilla* in the Iraqi Ghulāt milieu of the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, whose center was in Kufa. This is probably where the two *ḥadīth*s crossed trajectories.[84] In the context of Shīʿī Ghulāt, Asatryan and Dylan Burns connect the idea of the *ʿaql* moving back and forth over a primordial water to Jewish sapiential traditions about the presence of the divine Wisdom at the moment of first creation.[85]

The third example, which I call the "Armies *ḥadīth*," is the *ʿaql ḥadīth*'s much-extended variant. This tradition, also included in al-Kulaynī's *Kāfī* as no. 14, has not lost its appeal, as a modern commentary on it by Ruhollah Khomeini indicates.[86] It includes the motif of the Intellect's creation and obedience and expands on it by describing the creation of Ignorance, its failing the obedience test, and the divine allotment of seventy-five armies to the two opposing sides:

> God, may He be glorified and exalted, created *ʿaql* first among the spiritual entities; He drew it forth from the right of His throne (*ʿarsh*), making it proceed from His own Light. Then He commanded it to retreat, and it retreated, to advance, and it advanced; then God proclaimed: "I created you glorious, and I gave you pre-eminence over all my creatures." Then Ignorance (*al-jahl*) was created; seeing its pride and its hesitation in approaching God, He damned it: "Then, from the briny ocean God created dark Ignorance; He ordered it to retreat and it retreated, to advance and it did not advance. Then God said to it "Certainly you have grown proud," and He damned it and chased it from His presence. [. . .] Then God endowed *ʿaql* with 75 armies; when Ignorance saw God's generosity toward *ʿaql*, it became ferociously hostile and said to God: "O Lord, here is a creature similar to me; you have privileged it and made it powerful. I am its adversary and I have no power. Give me troops like those of *ʿaql*." And God replied, "So be it, but if you revolt again, I shall banish you and your troops from my Mercy."[87]

Whereas the more basic version of the *ḥadīth* is about *taklīf*, this extended variation partakes in a wider Shīʿī dualistic discourse about the cosmic struggle between the powers

---

82. M. Asatryan and D. Burns, "Is Ghulat Religion Islamic Gnosticism? Religious Transmissions in Late Antiquity," in *L'ésotérisme shi'ite, ses racines et ses prolongements*, ed. M. A. Amir-Moezzi, M. De Cillis, D. De Smet, and O. Mir-Kasimov, 55–86 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 60. The translation is theirs, hence the differences in wording.

83. Asatryan, "Shiite Underground Literature," 141–42.

84. Ibid., 142.

85. Asatryan and Burns, "Is Ghulat Religion Islamic Gnosticism?," 82.

86. R. Khomeini, *Junūd al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl*, trans. into Arabic A. al-Fahrī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 2001).

87. Translation from Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 8.

of good and evil, which likely built on and mixed with more ancient traditions in the region.[88] Amir-Moezzi has drawn parallels, for instance, between the "Armies *ḥadīth*" and the Mazdean teaching that the entities of Wisdom and Ignorance are engaged in perpetual combat.[89]

Variously expressing ideas about the identification of *ʿaql* with Jesus as the lesser creator, reflecting Jewish beliefs about the divine Wisdom, or echoing Mazdean dualistic teachings, the *ḥadīth* traveled from one community to another, with each adapting the text to reflect its world view. These changes should be seen not in terms of forgery, falsification, or plagiarism but rather as a more organic process. The exchange of formulas, the filling in of words, and the addition of short passages are all to be expected in a society whose members had immediate access to large databases of texts and traditions stored in their memory. *Ḥadīth*s were the substance that traveled across sectarian boundaries and social classes and and that people molded consciously or unconsciously to communicate different ideas effectively.

Two Early Modern Commentaries

The *ḥadīth*'s legacy extended well beyond the medieval period, as the *ḥadīth* continued to be narrated and reinterpreted. By the early modern period, the Sunnī and Shiʿī *ḥadīth* traditions were well established, and so we turn to *ḥadīth* commentaries to see how the *ḥadīth* was understood at this time. *Ḥadīth* commentaries are not "merely a derivative and rarified literary practice,"[90] as they were once perceived; rather, they constitute an arena in which commentators engaged with tradition creatively and in novel ways. The two commentaries analyzed here, by Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī and Mullā Ṣadrā, show how the authors use the *ḥadīth* as inspiration for intellectual contemplation. They approach it as a hermeneutical challenge. The two scholars, one known mainly as a *ḥadīth* scholar and the other as a philosopher, both grapple with the *ḥadīth* and creatively reinterpret it to fit their understanding of the world. Regarding Ṣadrā's commentary, Jari Kaukua asks: "Does Ṣadrā simply read his philosophical doctrine into the religious texts, or do the latter have a significant influence on his philosophy?"[91] Kaukua concludes that the philosopher's main motivation is "to maintain the integrity of the philosophical theory."[92] This may indeed have been his internal motivation, but it does not invalidate his earnest attempt to weave in the religious traditions. More than anything, the two scholars' treatment of the *ḥadīth* shows their efforts to harmonize different strands of Islamic thought and their creativity in expounding their ideas through this *ḥadīth*.

---

88. On the early Shīʿī dualistic discourse, see M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Silent Qurʾan and the Speaking Qurʾan: Scriptural Sources of Islam between History and Fervour*, trans. E. Ormsby (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 92–96.

89. Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, 8, n. 13.

90. Blecher, *Said the Prophet of God*, 13.

91. J. Kaukua, "The Intellect in Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on the *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*," forthcoming.

92. Kaukua, "Intellect in Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary."

The first commentary on the *ḥadīth* is taken from *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, Mullā Ṣadrā's seventeenth-century commentary on the first part of al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*.[93] Mullā Ṣadrā, "arguably the most significant Islamic philosopher after Avicenna,"[94] was an Iranian Shīʿī thinker who became famous for his attempt to synthesize philosophical methods with insights from theology and mysticism; he exerted a dominant influence on modern Shīʿī thought.[95] His interpretation of the *ḥadīth* shows influences from Avicennan philosophy, the *ishrāqī* ("illuminative") school associated with al-Suhrawardī, and the Ṣūfī metaphysics of being formulated by Ibn ʿArabī. The second text comes from *Itḥāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn* ("The gift of the God-fearing sayyids"), an eighteenth-century commentary by Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī on *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* ("Revival of the religious sciences") by the famous Sunnī theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111).[96] Al-Zabīdī, a prominent Sunnī scholar of *ḥadīth* and a Ṣūfī theologian, was a towering figure of his age. A man of universal erudition, he hosted visitors who came to meet him from near and far, and he had a vast scholarly network and excellent relations with the Ottoman court. He was born in Bilgrām in modern-day India, grew up in Zabīd in Yemen, and settled in Cairo. His fame rests mainly on his *Tāj al-ʿarūs* ("Bridal crown"), the largest Arabic lexicon ever written.

The two scholars' motivated engagement with the tradition is clear, in the first instance, in the close attention that they pay to the *ḥadīth*'s *isnād*s. Al-Zabīdī examines with particular care the Sunnī *isnād*s, whose reliability has been seriously contested, and argues against his major source of *isnād* criticism, al-Ḥāfiẓ al-ʿIrāqī,[97] that not *all* of the *ḥadīth*'s pathways (*ṭuruq*) are weak. He singles out the variant recorded by ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad in his *Zawāʾid* to his father's *Kitāb al-Zuhd* (variant 1 above) as a having a sound *isnād*. In an effort to salvage some of the *ḥadīth*'s credibility, he concludes that "what can be said about it at most is that it is weak in some of its pathways (*ṭuruq*)."[98]

Both Mullā Ṣadrā and al-Zabīdī attempt to harmonize contradictory traditions and explain away any inconsistencies. I mentioned earlier that there were two versions of the *ḥadīth*.[99] The first—which is attested in the earlier versions—started with *lammā*, "when," whereas the second began with *awwalu mā*, "the first thing [that God created]." The *awwalu mā* formula was shared by a large number of other sayings that talk about the first creation but substitute some other entity, such as light, spirit, a cherub, or the pen, for *ʿaql*. Some

---

93. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, ed. M. Khawājawī (Tehran: Muʾassasa-i Muṭālaʿāt wa Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, 1366H), 215–19.

94. S. Rizvi, "Mulla Sadra," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, spring 2019 ed., ed. E. N. Zalta.

95. The studies on Mullā Ṣadrā are too numerous to be listed here. For an exhaustive bibliography, see Rizvi, "Mulla Sadra."

96. Al-Zabīdī, *Itḥāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn bi-sharḥ Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1894), 452–56.

97. Al-ʿIrāqī, *Takhrīj aḥādīth Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, ed. A. ʿA. M. b. M. al-Ḥaddād (Riyadh: Dār al-ʿĀṣima, 1987). The text thus usually consists of three main levels: the *Iḥyāʾ* of al-Ghazālī, the commentary of al-ʿIrāqī, and the commentary of al-Zabīdī. In the analytical part al-ʿIrāqī's text is substituted by the work of Shaykh Najm al-Dīn. See below.

98. See Appendix.

99. See note 15.

of these sayings contradict the *ʿaql ḥadīth* in spirit; for example, the version with the pen takes a predestinarian position by portraying God's first act as the creation the divine Pen, which then writes down all human destiny: "**The first thing God created was the Pen. Then He said to it, 'Write.' So [the Pen] wrote what came to pass and what will come to pass until the Day of Resurrection.**"[100] Mullā Ṣadrā makes clear, at the outset of his discussion of the *ḥadīth*, that these seemingly different and conflicting *ḥadīth*s all refer to the same reality:

> The Intellect is the first creation, the closest of the created things (*majʿūlāt*) to the First Truth, the greatest, the most perfect, and the second among the existents in existentiality (*mawjūdiyya*)—although the Almighty has no second in His reality (*fī ḥaqīqatihi*) because His oneness (*waḥdatuhu*) is not countable as others in the genus of countable things (*waḥdāt*) are. And this is what is meant in what has come to us in the *ḥadīth*s from him [the Prophet], may God bless him and his family, and in his sayings in the version, "**The first thing that God created was the Intellect**," and in the version, "**The first thing that God created was my light**," and in the version, "**The first thing that God created was my spirit**," and in the version, "**The first thing that God created was the pen**," and in the version, "**The first thing that God created was a cherub (*karūbī*).**" All of these are attributes and descriptions of one thing in different phrasings. It is called by a different name in reference to each attribute. The names are multiple, while the named (*musammā*) is one in essence and existence.

Later in the text, Mullā Ṣadrā explains that all of these entities are just different names for the Intellect. He argues, for example, that the Intellect "was referred to as the pen only because it is the tool [of God] to represent the truths (*al-ʿulūm wa-l-ḥaqāʾiq*) on the spiritual tablets of divine decree and of fate (*al-alwāḥ al-nafsāniyya al-qaḍāʾiyya wa-l-qadariyya*)."[101]

Al-Zabīdī, for his part, relies on an earlier text to harmonize these accounts through a linguistic argument. He quotes at length Shaykh Najm al-Dīn (d. 654/1256), an Iranian Ṣūfī intellectual who fled from the Mongol invasion to Anatolia, where he played an important role in the development of mysticism. In the quoted passage, Shaykh Najm al-Dīn explains that God referred to the Intellect as the pen synecdochally, using a part to stand for the whole (that is, the Intellect writing with the pen): "**When He [God] called it [the Intellect] the pen, He told it: 'Tell what will come to pass from now until the Day of Judgment.'** Calling it 'pen' is like calling the owner of a sword 'sword.'"[102] He also argues for the functional and semantic equivalence of the two terms a little later in the text, when he points out that "the pen is close in meaning to the Intellect" on the basis of Q 96:4, which states that God "taught

---

100. This is the version found in ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Ṭ. M. al-Jāzāʾirī (Najaf: Maktabat al-Hudā, 1966–68), 2:198, quoted in Crow, "Role of al-ʿAql," 126. Van Ess has located the emergence of the "pen" *ḥadīth* among the *jabrī* circles of first/seventh-century Kufa. It makes sense that a concrete entity such as a pen, which has a clear antecedent in Qurʾān Q 68:1, would spark the creation of a *ḥadīth* earlier than would the more abstract *ʿaql*, which lacks such clear Qurʾānic referents. The Qurʾān does not even contain the noun *ʿaql*, only the verbal forms *ʿaqala* and *yaʿqilu*. When it refers to the intellects of people it usually uses the terms *albāb* or *afʾida*.

101. See Appendix.

102. See Appendix.

by the pen." Similarly, "things are known through the Intellect." This example shows that Ṣadrā and al-Zabīdī spared no effort to bring the divergent traditions into harmony.

Finally, they use the *ḥadīth* as inspiration to show that these ideas do not contradict the *ḥadīth* but rather provide the intellectual framework for its full understanding. Both refer to the Ṣūfī teaching about the pre-eternal Muḥammadan reality (*ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*).[103] Many thinkers, such as Ibn ʿArabī, considered the Muḥammadan reality the first entity created by God and thus identified it with the Logos, the Intellect, and the Pen, which is also the context in which Ṣadrā and al-Zabīdī introduce it. For them, the Muḥammadan reality or spirit is the perfect equivalent of the immaterial Intellect. This equation allows further symbolic interpretation of the *ḥadīth* and the synthesis of different traditions. Commenting on the part of the *ḥadīth* that reads "**Then He told it: 'Go back!'**" Ṣadrā interprets it as referring to the night of Muḥammad's journey to the divine presence (*miʿrāj*) and to "his departure from the realm of the world."

Both commentaries are also imbued with philosophical concepts. Al-Zabīdī's discussion of the nature of the Intellect is a good example. It offers a response to al-Ghazālī, who presents the following conundrum: If the Intellect is an accident, how is it possible that it was created before everything else? And if it is a substance, "how could it exist on its own without occupying space (*lā yataḥayyazu*)?" Al-Zabīdī, in the tradition of scholastic Avicennan philosophy, provides a taxonomy of substances and identifies five types of substance—matter, form, body, soul, and intellect—to argue that some substances, such as the Intellect, are abstract and therefore do not occupy space. Here, philosophy helps to resolve a philosophical problem that the *ḥadīth* raises; the system is in harmony, and as a welcome corollary, the reader has been edified.

Ṣadrā discusses many of his own philosophical and theological theories, always proceeding from the *ḥadīth*. He takes up the argument that I quoted earlier, about all the first creations—the pen, the Intellect, and so on—referring to the same named thing (*musammā*), to launch his discussion about the notions of essence and existence.[104]

---

103. The Muḥammadan reality guides the Prophet (and anyone who wants to follow him) during his ascent to the divine presence (*miʿrāj*), which the tradition links to Q 53:18 and which also appears in Ṣadrā's commentary. The tradition and the commentary also speak about the Muḥammadan light and the Muḥammadan spirit as equivalents of the Muḥammadan reality, but some authors have distinguished between the three; see W. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-ʿArabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), chap. 2.

104. The distinction between essence and existence is already present in the work of Aristotle, but it assumes true significance only in the works of al-Fārābī and Avicenna. *Posterior Analytics* II B 92b10, *Metaphysics*, Δ V.5, 1015a20–b15; 7, 1017a7–b10; also E and Z, *De interpretatione* 11 21a25–28, referred to in O. Lizzini, "Ibn Sina's Metaphysics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), ed. E. N. Zalta. In particular, Avicenna developed the distinction between the existence of something and its "reality by virtue of which something is what it is," that is, its essence, quiddity, thingness. Scholarship on the issue is abundant; see for instance, R. Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Its Context* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). Mullā Ṣadrā's key contribution to the discussion is the doctrine of the ontological primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*). Ṣadrā argued that existence must be ontologically prior because it applies to all things, whereas essence applies only to some things, such as genera or species. All things are composites of existence and essence except for God, who has no essence (God cannot be a composite, and further, essence implies multiplicity because it is shared by a multitude of subjects). Everything is therefore an instantiation of existence, including God's connection

He defines the Intellect as the highest of all created things in terms of its degree of existence, for it needs only God and nothing else. He also brings in the doctrine of simple reality (*basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa*), which draws on Neoplatonic ideas of emanation and the sequence of intellects and posits that all things flow from the Simple One. God is simple, pure existence devoid of quiddity[105] that would imply complexity and multiplicity (e.g., genera, composition, divisions). All things flow from this simple reality and are both in it and not in it.[106] In this context of emanation, Ṣadrā invokes the rule of the most noble contingency (*qāʿidat al-imkān al-ashraf*)—namely, that the nobler being must be prior to the less noble in grades of existence[107]—and identifies the Intellect as "the noblest possible and the most distinguished creation." Further, the theme of love, inspired by the part of the *ḥadīth* that says, "**I have not created a creature dearer to Me than you are,**" takes up a significant portion of the discussion. Love, in Ṣadrā's view, is pure good connected with perfection of existence. On this point, he debates earlier theologians and specifically al-Zamakhsharī, who claimed love would make God deficient in His essence. Ṣadrā refutes this position: "They did not know that His, the Almighty's, love for His creation stems from His love for Himself." After Him there are the "rational substances, luminous spirits, and holy angels, [all of whom are] delighted with Him . . . for they are Divinely Lovers." In this case, the *ḥadīth* serves Ṣadrā as evidence for his philosophical views. Finally, Ṣadrā interprets the last part of the *ḥadīth*, "**It is you whom I order, it is you whom I forbid, it is you whom I punish, and it is you whom I reward,**" as reflecting the Intellect's function as the condition for obligation (*taklīf*), although he problematizes the doctrine by distinguishing between obligation of this world and rewards in heaven. With Ṣadrā's discussion of *taklīf*, the journey of the *ḥadīth* has come full circle.

On this last stop, the *ḥadīth* has, once more, acquired new meanings and significations, this time not by modifying the *ḥadīth* itself but by collecting and harmonizing its variants and weaving it into other intellectual frameworks. For the commentators, the *ḥadīth* posed an occasion to espouse their ideas about the world and a challenge to formulate a harmonious system in which *ḥadīth*s, Ṣūfī ideas, and philosophy all had their place.

---

to the world. This doctrine, which Mullā Ṣadrā used for his own proof of God's existence, was also informed by the Ṣūfī metaphysics of ontological monism (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) associated with Ibn ʿArabī. Ṣadrā's monism is expressed in the phrase *basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa kull al-ashyāʾ* ("The simple reality is all things"), which is based on Neoplatonic teachings of the simple One. God, as the simple One and pure Being, is the totality of existence. Rizvi, "Mulla Sadra"; I. Kalin, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mullā Ṣadrā on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 89–95.

105. See previous note.

106. This doctrine reconciles the tension between the unity of existence and its multiplicity as it appears in this world and provides a proof for the existence of God through an analysis of simplicity. The doctrine of *basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa* relates to Ṣadrā's doctrine of *aṣālat al-wujūd* (see note 108) as well as to his doctrine of the gradation of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), which posits that all things in the world are different degrees of a single whole, in a chain and hierarchy of existence. S. H. Rizvi, *Mulla Sadra and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being* (London: Routledge, 2009), 104–5; Rizvi, "Mulla Sadra."

107. Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya fī al-asfār al-ʿaqliyya al-arbaʿa*, ed. R. Luṭfī, I. Amīnī, and F. A. Ummīd (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, 1981), 3:244. See also Rizvi, *Mulla Sadra and Metaphysics*, 108.

Conclusion

The *ḥadīth* about the creation of the Intellect originated in Basra in the first half of the second/eighth century. It reflected Muʿtazilī ideas about the Intellect's obedience to God's will and its ability to distinguish between good and evil—ability that makes it at the same time the locus of human obligation to choose good. Around the mid-second/eighth century or a little after, the *ḥadīth* was disseminated widely in Sunnī traditionist circles in Basra and among Shīʿī *ḥadīth* collectors in Kufa, and then spread across the whole Islamic world, changing meanings and audiences. In the early modern period, its journey continued in *ḥadīth* commentaries, in which the *ḥadīth* was, once more, reinterpreted to fit to a new intellectual context.

Genre matters. The saying gained currency the moment it acquired the form of a *ḥadīth*. Thanks to its *ḥadīthization*, it could travel across sectarian boundaries and be adapted and readapted for diverse contexts. Only as a *ḥadīth* could it become part of an intersectarian common discourse. The fluidity, openness to reinterpretation, and capacity for inspiration that the case study of the ʿ*aql ḥadīth* has demonstrated make *ḥadīth*s an effective literary vehicle.

There are, clearly, other aspects of *ḥadīth*s that contribute to making them so compelling. One such aspect is the aura of reality that they carry. Stefan Leder observed that the apparent reality of the *akhbār* is achieved by the employment of *isnād*s and a narrative technique that leaves the narrator in the background.[108] Daniel Beaumont added that the *isnād*'s function is to "anchor the text to the actual instance of enunciation."[109] These effects are naturally magnified in the case of *ḥadīth*s. Stefan Sperl has underlined the *isnād*'s role of holding "the promise of a direct, authentic and virtually unmediated access to the past."[110] This past is not any past; it is the unmitigated prophetic authority speaking.

Mircea Eliade's ideas about two types of time, sacred and profane, further illuminates the emotional power of *ḥadīth*s. Religious rites and services mark a break in profane time, and by reenacting events that took place in sacred time, they take participants back to that time.[111] All narration of *ḥadīth*s is a similar practice, a ritual through which a community is transmitted to a different temporal sphere. Eliade notes that Christianity, with its insistence on the historicity of Christ, radically changed the conception of sacred time. Whereas people had—through their rites and myths—traditionally striven to return to a primordial cosmic time, Christianity sanctified a clearly defined historical time.[112] The same can be said

---

108. S. Leder, "The Literary Use of the Khabar: A Basic Form of Historical Writing," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 1, *Problems in the Literary Source Material*, ed. A. Cameron and L. Conrad, 277–315 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1992), 307–8.

109. D. Beaumont, "Hard-Boiled: Narrative Discourse in Early Muslim Traditions," *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 5–31, at 28.

110. S. Sperl, "Man's 'Hollow Core': Ethics and Aesthetics in *Ḥadīth* Literature and Classical Arabic *Adab*," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70, no. 3 (2007): 459–86, at 480.

111. M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. W. R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959), 68 ff.

112. Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 111.

about Islam and the time of the Prophet, and from this perspective, *isnād*s serve as a direct connection to this sanctified historical past, as a time machine that takes one back to the sacred time of the first Muslim generation. The act of *ḥadīth* narration transforms into an experience of encountering the Prophet. The case of the *ʿaql ḥadīth* is different. The *ḥadīth* goes even a step further, for it takes the listeners to Eliade's primordial cosmic time, to the moment of first creation, in the beginning.

Appendix: Translation

First text: *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī* by Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī)[113]

K[114]: Several of our companions[115] [i.e., Shīʿīs], including Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-ʿAṭṭār, narrated to me (*ḥaddathanī*):

Ṣ: [Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-ʿAṭṭār is] Abū Jaʿfar al-Qummī [fl. before 300/913], [about whom it is said] in *al-Khulāṣa* [by al-Ḥillī, d. 726/1325][116] and other works [that he is] the master among our companions in his time,

K: reliable (*thiqa*),

Ṣ: the source of many *ḥadīth*s (*ʿayn kathīr al-ḥadīth*),

K: on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad,

Ṣ: [who is] Ibn ʿĪsā b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Mālik al-Aḥwaṣ, with *ḥāʾ* and *ṣād muhmalatān* [i.e., without diacritical points], whose *kunya* is Abū Jaʿfar al-Qummī, the shaykh of Qum. He was one of its prominent men and its *faqīh*. He met Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā [d. 202/817, the eighth imam] and Abū Jaʿfar al-Thānī [d. 220/835, the ninth imam] and Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī [d. 254/868, the tenth imam], peace be upon them. He was reliable (*thiqa*) and wrote books.

K: on the authority of al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb,

Ṣ: [who is] al-Sarrād, called al-Zarrād, whose *kunya* is Abū ʿAlī Kūfī, a reliable source, who narrated on the authority of al-Riḍā, peace be upon him. He [al-Ḥasan] was of noble standing, and is considered one of the four pillars of his era.[117] Al-Kashshī said: "Our companions agreed on approving what is narrated truly on their authority[118] and on assenting to them, and they [i.e., our companions] endorsed their legal opinions (*fiqh*) and their learning," and he mentioned al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb as one of this group. [Al-Kashshī added:] "Some mentioned in his place al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Faḍḍāl."

K: on the authority of al-ʿAlāʾ b. Razīn,

Ṣ: the first letter [in Razīn] being *rāʾ* and the following *zāʾ*; he was reliable (*thiqa*), of noble standing (*jalīl al-qadr*), and a prominent man (*wajh*),

K: on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim,

---

113. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, 215–19.

114. Ṣ stands for Mullā Ṣadrā, K stands for al-Kulaynī. In the original text al-Kulaynī's words are distinguished by double parentheses.

115. Shīʿī *ḥadīth* scholars in general take the expression "several of our companions" used by al-Kulaynī to refer to five specific people (including Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-ʿAṭṭār) when narrating from Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā; see the introduction to al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 48.

116. Cf. al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī, *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl fī maʿrifat al-rijāl*, ed. J. al-Qayyūmī (Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1417H), 61.

117. Cf. al-Ḥillī, *al-Khulāṣa*, 97.

118. "They" in al-Kashshī's text are not in fact the four pillars. Mullā Ṣadrā and his source, al-Ḥillī, somewhat misquote al-Kashshī here, because al-Kashshī is referring to the six most reliable members of the second generation in transmitting Imāmī traditions. Cf. al-Ḥillī, *al-Khulāṣa*, 97; Muḥammad al-Kashshī, *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, ed. A. al-Ḥusaynī (Karbala: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1962), 556.

Ṣ: [Muḥammad b. Muslim] b. Ribāḥ Abū Jaʿfar, one of the prominent companions of Kūfa, a pious *faqīh*, a companion of Abū Jaʿfar [Imam al-Bāqir] and Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imam al-Ṣādiq], peace be upon them. He narrated on their authority, and he was one of the most reliable people.

Al-Kashshī [d. ca. 350/961] narrated with an *isnād* reaching al-ʿAlāʾ b. Razīn from ʿAbd Allāh b. Abī Yaʿfūr that he said: "I said to Abū ʿAbd Allāh [Imam al-Ṣādiq], peace be upon him: 'I cannot meet you every time and [sometimes] coming is impossible, and [then] a man from among our companions comes and asks me, and I do not always have the answer to everything[119] that he is asking about.' He [Imam al-Ṣādiq] said: 'What prevents you from [going to] Muḥammad b. Muslim? For he has heard *ḥadīth* from my father [i.e., Imam al-Bāqir] and according to him, he [Muḥammad b. Muslim] was a prominent man.'"[120] And [al-Kashshī narrated also] on the authority of Abū Jaʿfar b. Qawlawayh, with the *isnād* reaching ʿAlī b. Asbāṭ on the authority of his father, Asbāṭ b. Sālim, that Abū al-Ḥasan Mūsā b. Jaʿfar, peace be upon them, said: "Muḥammad b. Muslim is one of the disciples (*ḥawāriyyūn*)[121] of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī [i.e., Imam al-Bāqir] and his son [Imam] Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon them." Al-Kashshī said: "He [Muḥammad b. Muslim] is one of those on whose reliability the community (*ʿiṣāba*) agrees and whose knowledge/legal opinions (*fiqh*) it follows."[122]

K: that [Imam] Abū Jaʿfar, peace be upon him, said: "**When God created the Intellect, he made it speak and then He told it: 'Come forward!' And it came forward. Then He told it: 'Go back!' And it went back. Then He said: 'By My Might and by My Glory, I have not created a creature dearer to Me than you are. I perfected you only in those I love. It is you (*iyyāka*) whom I order, it is you whom I forbid, it is you whom I punish, and it is you whom I reward.'"**

Ṣ: <u>Commentary</u>

O my brothers, walking the path of God on the feet of gnosis (*ʿirfān*), know that this Intellect is the first creation, the closest of the created things (*majʿūlāt*) to the First Truth, the greatest, the most perfect, and the second among the existents in existentiality (*mawjūdiyya*)—although the Almighty has no second in His reality (*fī ḥaqīqatihi*) because His oneness (*waḥda*) is not countable (*ʿadadiyya*) as others in the genus of countable things (*waḥdāt*) are. And this is what is meant in what has come to us in the *ḥadīth*s from him [the Prophet], may God bless him and his family, and in his sayings in the version, "**The first thing that God created was the Intellect**," and in the version, "**The first thing that God created was my light**," and in the version, "**The first thing that God created was my spirit**," and in the version, "**The first thing that God created was the pen**," and in the version, "**The first thing that God created was a cherub (*karūbī*)**." All of these are attributes and descriptions of one thing in different phrasings. It is called by a different name in reference

---

119. *Kulla mā* rather than *kullamā*, as in the published text.

120. Cf. Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār maʿrifat al-rijāl*, ed. M. al-Rajāʾī (Qum: Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt, 1404H), 1:383.

121. *Ḥawāriyyūn* is also the term for the twelve Apostles of Jesus in Arabic.

122. Cf. al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, 10.

to each attribute. The names are multiple, while the named (*musammā*) is one in essence (*dhāt*) [1] and existence (*wujūd*) [2].

[1] As for the quiddity (*māhiyya*) and essence [of the Intellect], it is a substance (*jawhar*) that has no relation of any kind to bodies (*ajsām*): not in terms of existence, like accidents, and not in terms of actions (*taṣarruf*), and not in terms of governance, like souls, and not in terms of particularity (*juzʾiyya*) or mixing (*imtizāj*), like matter and form.

In general: The substantial created things (*majʿūlāt jawhariyya*) fall into three groups, differentiated on the basis of their degrees of existence. The first and highest of them is one that needs only God and does not look to anything except God, and does not pay attention to anything but the Almighty.

The second is one that needs only the Almighty for its mere existence (*aṣl al-wujūd*). But in perfecting its existence (*fī istikmāl wujūdihi*) it does need what is other than God. The perfection of its existence [comes] after its mere existence, [but from another perspective] it [the perfection of its existence] comes before it.

And the third is one that needs what is other than the Almighty in both matters—that is, in the basis of existence and in its perfection.

The first one is the Intellect, the second one is the soul, and the third one is the body or its part.

[2] As for the existence (*wujūd*) and the reality (*ḥaqīqa*), their proof is the existence of the Almighty Reality. For since the One with the Simple Reality (*basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa*)[123] is knowing, powerful, magnanimous, and merciful; possessed of supreme virtue, great force, and boundless power; and encompassing all virtues, good qualities, and perfections, it is not possible for Him, given His noble nature, mercy, and compassion, to refrain from emanation (*fayḍ*) and mercy or to be sparing[124] of the good and generosity toward the worlds. So it is inevitable that beings emanate from Him in the best order and in the most perfect arrangement and [it is inevitable that] He begins with the noblest (*ashraf*) and proceeds to the next noblest, as the principle of most noble contingency (*qāʿidat al-imkān al-ashraf*) dictates.[125]

There is no doubt that the noblest possible being and the most distinguished creation is the Intellect, as you know. For it is the first of the emanations (*ṣawādir*) and the closest and dearest to the Truth. And that is why He said: "**I have not created a creature dearer to Me than you are**." And we will repeat this saying in order to investigate God's love for his creation. This existent's reality (*ḥaqīqa*) is the same as the very reality of the Great Spirit, a matter that has been pointed out in the Almighty's saying: "Say: 'The spirit [cometh] by command of my Lord'" [Q 17:85][126] and his saying: "Is it not His to create and

---

123. See my earlier discussion of Ṣadrā's doctrine of the simple reality, *basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa*"

124. Reading *yaḍinnu* for *yaẓunnu*.

125. For the principle of the most noble contingency, see Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya*, 3:244. See also Rizvi, *Mulla Sadra and Metaphysics*, 108.

126. Q 17:85 reads as follows: "They ask thee concerning the Spirit [of inspiration]. Say: 'The Spirit [cometh] by command of my Lord; of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, [O men!]'"

to govern?" [Q 7: 54],[127] and it [the Intellect] was referred to as the pen only because it is the tool of Truth to represent the truths (*al-ʿulūm wa-l-ḥaqāʾiq*) on the spiritual tablets of divine decree and of fate (*al-alwāḥ al-nafsāniyya al-qaḍāʾiyya wa-l-qadariyya*).[128]

Indeed, the "pen" of God is neither cane nor iron nor a different body. Likewise, His tablet is not made of wood or papyrus. When He called it "pen," He said: "**Let come to pass what will come to pass until the Day of Judgment.**"

[Furthermore,] because it [the Intellect] is an existence free of the darkness of corporeality and concealment and of the darkness of shortcomings and inexistence, it is called "light" (*nūr*). For light is existence and darkness inexistence, and it is apparent to itself and makes other things apparent.

Because it [the Intellect] is the origin of life of high and low souls alike, it is called "spirit" (*rūḥ*). It [the Intellect] is also the Muḥammadan reality (*ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*) in the view of the greatest and the most accomplished (*muḥaqqiq*) Ṣūfīs because it is the perfection of his [*Muḥammad's*] existence, may God bless him and his family, which commences from Him and returns to Him, as shown in some *ḥadīth*s of the Imams, peace be upon them. On this topic [we have undertaken] a demonstrative investigation (*taḥqīq burhānī*) whose discussion would lengthen our discourse, and we will come back to it in the explanation of those *ḥadīth*s.

Whoever scrutinizes this point finds that how the First Intellect has been described and what has been narrated about it correspond to the characteristics of his [Muḥammad's] spirit, may God bless him and his family, and His peace be upon him. And [the Imam's] saying, peace be upon him, "**He [God] made it [the Intellect] speak (*istanṭaqahu*)**," means that He endowed it with speech/reason and discourse (*jaʿalahu dhā nuṭq wa-kalām*) appropriate to its status. As for his words, "**Then He told it: 'Come forward!' And it came forward. Then He told it: 'Go back!' And it went back**," this was the case with the spirit [i.e., the Prophet], may God bless him and his family, when God told him: "Come to the world and descend on Earth as a mercy to the two worlds [of human beings and *jinn*s]!" And he came, and his light was concealed in each prophet, while in the person described [as Muḥammad] it was apparent, as in the statement reported from him, "**We are the last ones and the first ones**," meaning the last ones to come out and appear, like a fruit, and the first ones in creation and existence, like a seed. So, he [Muḥammad] is the seed of the tree of the world.

"**Then He told him: 'Go back!'**" This meant: "Return to your Lord!" And he [Muḥammad] turned away from the world and returned to his Lord on the night of *miʿrāj* and on his departure from the realm of the world.

Then He said: "**By My power and by My glory, I have not created a creature dearer to Me than you are.**" And this was also his [Muḥammad's] case, may God bless him and his family, because he was God's beloved and the most beloved among His creatures.

---

127. Q 7:54 reads as follows: "Your Guardian Lord is God, Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days; then He established Himself on the Throne [of authority]: He draweth the night as a veil over the day, each seeking the other in rapid succession; He created the sun, the moon, and the stars, [all] governed by laws under His command. Is it not His to create and to govern? Blessed be God, the cherisher and sustainer of the worlds!"

128. As Muḥammad Khawājawī, the editor of Ṣadrā's text, points out, by the two types of spiritual tablets Ṣadrā refers to universal souls and to the universe's faculty of imagination.

The rational aspect in this is that love belongs to the perception of existence (*idrāk al-wujūd*) because it is pure good.[129] And everything[130] with a more perfect existence is also greater in goodness, stronger in the perception of it, and more intensive in its delight in it. And the most sublime [thing] delighted by itself is the First Truth (*al-ḥaqq al-awwal*), because It/He perceives most intensely the greatest of what there is to be perceived. It/He has the most perfect virtue, the most shining light, and the most elevated sublimity, and it is pure good. After It/Him in goodness, existence, perception, and delight are the rational substances (*jawāhir ʿaqliyya*), luminous spirits (*arwāḥ nūriyya*), and holy angels (*malāʾik qudsiyya*), [all of whom are] delighted with Him, the Almighty, and with themselves through their being delighted with Him, for they are Divinely Lovers (*ʿushshāq ilāhiyyūn*). After their level there is the level of the souls yearning for Him (*nufūs mushtāqūn ilayhi*), the Almighty, [which varies] according to their attainment and perception of Him; they are the heavenly angels. And after those—in terms of passion for Him, the Almighty—there are human souls and the happy among the lords of right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) possessing different degrees of faith in God, the Almighty.[131]

As for those close to God (*muqarrabūn*) among the human souls in the hereafter, who are the lords of spiritual ascent, their position in the afterlife will be like that of the angels, who are close to the Almighty in terms of love and delight in Him. If you know this, then [you know that] the love of God, the Almighty, for His servants stems from His love for Himself. For since it has been established that the thing dearest to Him, the Almighty, is Himself and that He is most delighted with Himself, [and since it has been established] that whoever loves something loves all of its actions, movements, and effects for the sake of the beloved and that what is closer to Him is [also] dearer to Him, and [since it has been established] that all contingents (*mumkināt*) of different levels are the effects of Truth and His actions, for God loves them for His own sake, and [it has been established that] the creation closest to Him is the Muḥammadan spirit, may God bless him and his family, here called the "Intellect"—[in view of all of the above, it follows that] it is true that he is the creature dearest to Him.

There are some theologians, such as al-Zamakhsharī and his contemporaries, who have denied God's love for His servants, claiming that it would necessarily imply that He is deficient in His essence. [But] they did not know that His, the Almighty's, love for His creation stems from His love for Himself.

[Consider] His saying in another version: "**Through you I know, through you I take, through you I give, and through you I reward**." All of this applies to the Prophet, may God bless him and his family, for who does not know the Prophet, may God bless him and his family, in his prophecy and message does not know God as he should, even if he had a

---

129. Love in Mullā Ṣadrā's thought is seen in cosmological terms as penetrating all beings. It is the innate natural tendency of all things to reach their natural perfection.

130. Reading *kullu mā* for *kullamā*.

131. There are two possible explanations for the term "lords of right" (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*). The first is that they are those who are given the book in their right hand on the Day of Judgment; that is, they are in great standing before God. The other is that they are people bestowed with great blessings. See J. al-Subḥānī, *Mafāhīm al-Qurʾān* (Qum: Muʾassasat al-Imām al-Ṣādiq, 2000), 363–65.

thousand proofs for the ways of knowing God! The meaning [of these words] is: "I [God] am known through knowing you [Muḥammad]." That means, "Who knows you in your prophecy knows Me in my Lordship." "**Through you I take**" means, "I take the obedience of the one who took from you what you were given of religion and law." And "**Through you I give**" means, "I give, by way of your intercession, a level to the people of levels [i.e., I elevate them from their level to a higher one in heaven], as he [Muḥammad] said: "**[All] people, even Abraham, peace be upon him, need my intercession!**" and "**Through you I punish and through you I reward.**" And this is [the manifestation] of the words of the Almighty:

> Behold! God took the covenant of the Prophets, saying: "I give you a Book and Wisdom; then comes to you a Messenger, confirming what is with you; do ye believe him and render him help?" God said: "Do ye agree, and take this, My Covenant, as binding on you?" They said: "We agree." He said: "Then bear witness and I am with you among the witnesses." [Q 3:81]

This is because God, the Almighty, made a covenant with each prophet He sent to a group of people (*qawm*) so that they would believe in Muḥammad and his family, may God bless them, and to entrust his community (*umma*) with faith in him and with support for his religion. And whoever believed in him among the nations of the past before his mission and among the bygone nations belongs to the people of reward (*ahl al-thawāb*), whereas whoever did not believe in him among the ancient and the recent ones belongs to the people of punishment. So His words are true: "**Through you I punish and through you I reward.**"

As for his words in this version, "**It is you (*iyyāka*) whom I order, it is you whom I forbid, it is you whom I punish, and it is you whom I reward,**" it is probable that the word "you" here means "through you" (*bika*) and "for your sake" (*min ajlika*) by way of extension. If we took this expression literally, it would also be true and correct, because the reality of the Intellect is the condition for obligation (*malāk al-taklīf*) [and for] order, probation, reward, and punishment. However, its reality has [various] stations and levels, since the oneness of the Intellect is not a numerical oneness. Its [the Intellect's] being the thing dearest to Him, the Almighty, is with regard to its utmost perfection and closeness to the First, the Almighty; its being punished and tortured is with regard to its distance from Him, the Almighty; its being obligated (*mukallaf*), commissioned, and forbidden is with regard to its position in the house of obligation [i.e., this world]; and its being rewarded is with regard to its being in the hereafter in levels of heaven.[132]

---

132. In this paragraph, Mullā Ṣadrā interprets the last sentence of the *ḥadīth*. He recognizes its reference to the notion of *taklīf*, discussed earlier. The complication that he tackles here lies in the fact that the *ḥadīth*, in this version, seems to treat the Intellect, not the human being, as the immediate *mukallaf*, the subject of divine reward and punishment. Ṣadrā proposes two possible explanations: what is meant is either that the Intellect is the tool of fulfilling obligations or that the Intellect is the immediate subject of obligation by way of being the condition for it. If the latter is the case, the question how the Intellect can be rewarded and punished is raised. Ṣadrā explains that reward and punishment consist of either closeness to or distance from God.

Second text: *Itḥāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn* by Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī al-Zabīdī[133]

G[134]: [The Prophet] said, may God honor him and grant him peace: **"O people, reason (*aʿqilū ʿan*) through your Lord."**

Z: That is, learn and understand through Him, for it is said: "I have reasoned [i.e., understood] something through Him."

G: **And advise one another [to cherish] the Intellect!**

Z: That is, its perfection.

G: **Know through it what you were ordered and through it what you were forbidden, and know that it**

Z: that is, the Intellect

G: **is your savior before your Lord.**

Z: [It is found] in this way in al-ʿIrāqī's edition, but in others [it is found as] "aids you before God."

G: **And know that a rational person is one who obeys God even if he were of a misshapen**

Z: with *al-dāl al-muhmala* [the letter *dāl* without a diacritical point], that is, ugly

G: **appearance,**

Z: with regard to what is apparent in him

G: **of little importance,**

Z: that is, in standing and value

G: **of low rank,**

Z: that is, of miserable rank

G: **and of shabby exterior.**

Z: with regard to his clothes and how much toil and hardship he has had to endure, which has made him disheveled

G: **And verily the ignorant**

Z: he [al-Ghazālī] included the ignorant as the opposite of the rational because Knowledge and the Intellect come from one source, as we have pointed out above

G: **[is the one] who disobeys God, even if he is of a beautiful appearance, of great importance, of a noble rank, and of a handsome exterior,**

Z: These [features—misshapen appearance, little importance, low rank, and a shabby exterior] are four descriptions in opposition to four descriptions [namely, beautiful appearance, great importance, noble rank, and a handsome exterior]. For the first thing that thrills man is the beauty of his looks, and if, in addition, his importance is great, this is the highest position, and through it he will reach a noble rank and a handsome exterior. Then he [al-Ghazālī] adds another two descriptions, saying:

G: **eloquent and articulate.**

Z: And what a hideous man is one whose corporeal prison is—in comparison with the ugliness of his soul—a paradise in which an owl resides, a sacred place protected by a wolf, as a wise man [once] said to an ignorant with a graceful face: "The house is good, but its resident is wicked." And how hideous of him that he is concerned with the amount of his

---

133. Al-Zabīdī, *Itḥāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn*, 452-455.

134. G stands for al-Ghazālī and Z for al-Zabīdī.

wealth and the excellence of his possessions (*athāth*). Verily, some wise people called the rich billy goats whose wool is pearls and donkeys whose excrement is silken shawls."

G: **Monkeys and pigs are more rational (*aʿqalu*) before God than is a person who disobeys Him.**

Z: For it is disgraceful (*qabīḥ*) for a rational man (*dhū al-ʿaql*) to be a beast when it is surely possible for him to be a human being, and [it is disgraceful for a rational man] to be a human being when he has the potential to become an angel.

For we have not seen among the flaws of people a failing
equal to the failing of those who are capable of perfection.[135]

G: **And do not be seduced by the glorification of you by the people of the world, for they are among the losers.**

Z: Al-ʿIrāqī said:

It was narrated to us in the *Kitāb al-ʿAql* by Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir[136] in the version (*riwāya*) of Abū al-Zanād [d. ca. 130/748] on the authority of al-Aʿraj [d. ca. 117/735] on the authority of Abū Hurayra on the authority of the Prophet, may God honor him and grant him peace, that he [too] said this, except that he said, "**indeed they were considered among the losers,**" and al-Ḥārith b. Abī Usāma narrated it in his *Musnad* on the authority of Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir.[137]

There was disagreement about Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir. ʿAbbās al-Dawrī narrated on the authority of Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn [d. 233/847], who said that he was a known transmitter, but then he left it [the practice of *ḥadīth* transmission] and became associated with a group of the Muʿtazila (*ṣaḥaba qawman min al-muʿtazila*). "They corrupted him, but he is reliable."

Abū Dāwūd [al-Sijistānī, d. 275/888] said: "He is reliable, though he appears weak" (*thiqa shibh ḍaʿīf*).

Aḥmad [b. Ḥanbal, d. 241/855] said: "He does not know what *ḥadīth* is" (*lā yadrī mā al-ḥadīth*).

Al-Dāraquṭnī [d. 385/995] said: "His *ḥadīth*s are to be abandoned" (*matrūk*).

ʿAbd al-Ghanī b. Saʿīd al-Azdī al-Miṣrī [d. 409/1019] narrated on the authority of al-Dāraquṭnī that he said: "Four men forged (*waḍaʿa*) *Kitāb al-ʿAql.* Maysara b. ʿAbd Rabbihi was the first of them, then Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir stole it and attached to it *isnād*s different from Maysara's, then ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abī Rajāʾ stole it and attached to it other *isnād*s, then Sulaymān b. ʿĪsā al-Sanjarī stole it and invented other *isnād*s," or as he [al-Dāraquṭnī] said.

---

135. This a verse from a poem by Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī, which starts *Malūmukumā yajillu ʿan al-malāmī* See Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān al-Mutanabbī* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1964), 483.

136. See my earlier discussion of Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir.

137. Cf. al-Ḥārith b. Abī Usāma, *Bughyat al-bāḥith ʿan zawāʾid Musnad al-Ḥārith*, ed. M. al-Saʿdānī (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭalāʾiʿ, n.d.), 257, no. 833.

According to what al-Dāraquṭnī said, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abī Rajāʾ stole it from Dāwūd. He shortened it, created another *isnād* for it, and narrated it on the authority of Mālik, on the authority of Suhayl, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Abū Hurayra and Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī [d. ca. 74/694] that they said: "The Messenger of God, may God honor him and grant him peace, said: **'Son of Adam, obey your Lord and you will be called rational; do not disobey Him, [otherwise] you will be called ignorant.'**" Abū Nuʿaym [al-Iṣbahānī, d. 430/1038] narrated it in his *Ḥilya* and al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī [d. 463/1071] in [his] *Asmāʾ man rawā ʿan Mālik* ["Names of those who transmitted *ḥadīth* from Mālik"][138] through the narration (*riwāya*) of the abovementioned Ibn Abī Rajāʾ.[139] Al-Khaṭīb said: "This *ḥadīth* is to be rejected (*munkar*) from the corpus of Mālik [b. Anas]'s *ḥadīth*s."

Al-Dāraquṭnī said: "ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Abī Rajāʾ's *ḥadīth*s are to be abandoned" (*matrūk*).

Al-Dhahabī [d. 748/1348] said in his *al-Mīzān*:[140] "It is falsely attributed to Mālik [b. Anas]" (*bāṭil ʿalā Mālik*).

Z: I say that the *kunya* of Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir b. Mukharram al-Bakrāwī was Abū Sulaymān al-Baṣrī. He was a resident of Baghdād, and he died in the year 206 [821]. Muḥabbir is [to be read] as *muḥaddith*. His father narrated on the authority Hishām b. ʿUrwa [d. 146/763], and his son Dāwūd narrated on the authority of Shuʿba [b. al-Ḥajjāj, d. 160/776] and Hammām and several others, and on the authority of Muqātil b. Sulaymān [d. 150/767]. Abū Umayya and al-Ḥārith b. Abī Usāma and several others narrated on his authority. Al-Dhahabī mentioned in his *Mīzān* through his [Dāwūd's] narration a *ḥadīth* about the virtue of Qazwīn, which Ibn Māja recorded (*akhrajahu*)[141] in his *Sunan*. Then he [al-Dhahabī] said: "Verily, Ibn Māja disgraced his *Sunan* by adding this forged *ḥadīth* to it." All *ḥadīth*s of Maysara and Ibn Abī Rajāʾ and Sulaymān b. ʿĪsā are to be abandoned.

G: **The Messenger of God, may God honor him and grant him peace, said: "The first thing that God created was the Intellect. He told it: 'Come forward.' And it came forward. Then He told it: 'Go back!' And it went back. Then God said: 'By My Might and by My Glory, I have not created a creature dearer to Me than you are. Through you I take, through you I give, through you I reward, and through you I punish.'"**

Z: Shaykh Najm al-Dīn [d. 654/1256],[142] the narrator of this *ḥadīth*, may God's mercy be upon him, said:

---

138. This book has not come down to us. Ibn Rashīd al-ʿAṭṭār al-Qurashī produced an abridgment of it, removing the *isnād*s. Ibn Rashīd al-ʿAṭṭār al-Qurashī, *Mujarrad Asmāʾ al-ruwāt ʿan Mālik li-l-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī*, ed. M. S. b. A. al-Salafī (Medina: Maktabat al-Ghurabāʾ al-Athariyya, 1997).

139. Cf. Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1932–38), 7:318.

140. Al-Dhahabī, *Mīzān al-iʿtidāl fī naqd al-rijāl*, ed. ʿA. M. al-Bajāwī (Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1963), 2:628.

141. *Akhraja* means recording a report with the *isnād*.

142. This is Najm al-Dīn Abī Bakr ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Shāhawar al-Rāzī al-Azadī, d. 654/1256. See his *Manārāt al-sāʾirīn ilā ḥaḍrat Allāh wa-maqāmāt al-ṭāʾirīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004), 38; J. Curry, *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 264, n. 61.

On the basis of this, it has been concluded that the Intellect is preparatory for receiving revelation and believing in it. Another version reads: "**And through you, I am worshipped.**" That is, it [the Intellect] was the first to whom God allotted revelation, speech (*khiṭāb*), love, knowledge, worship, veneration, and the prophecy of the messages of Almighty Truth, as He told it to know itself and its Lord. And if you saw in depth and relied on the light of God you would realize that knowledge [comes] through the Intellect and that the one that is described by the allotment of inspiration, speech, love, knowledge, worship, veneration, and prophecy is the spirit of God' beloved and His Prophet Muḥammad, may God honor him and grant him peace. For he is the one who said: "**The first thing that God created was my spirit**," and in a different version, "**my light**." For his [Muḥammad's] spirit is luminous essence and his light is the Intellect and he is an accident in his substance (*ʿaraḍ qāʾim fī jawharihi*).[143] That is why [the Prophet], may God honor him and grant him peace, said: "**I was a prophet [already] while Adam was still between spirit and body.**"[144] That is, he was neither spirit nor body yet. That is why he [the Prophet] said: "**The one who knows his soul indeed knows his Lord.**" For it [the Intellect] knew its soul because God made it know it, when He said to it: "**I have not created a creature dearer to Me than you are.**" It also knew God through God's making himself knowable to it when He said: "**By My Might and by My Glory, I have not created a creature dearer to Me than you are.**" So, it [the Intellect] knew that He is God, whose attributes include might, glory, power of creation, and love, and that He is known to every gnostic (*ʿārif*), and that He has the power and authority to take, to give, to reward, and to punish, and that He is the One who deserves to be worshipped. It has reached us from the accounts of some great masters that the first creation was a cherub (*karūbī*), called the Intellect, and that he was the lord of the pen, as is demonstrated by the words: "'**Come forward!' And it came forward. Then He told it: 'Go back!' And it went back.**'" And when He called it [the Intellect] the pen, He told it: "**Tell what will come to pass [from now] until the Day of Judgment.**" Calling it "pen" is like calling the owner of a sword "sword." Also, it is not unlikely that the spirit of God's Prophet, may God honor him and grant him peace, is called "angel" because of the large quantity of his angelic attributes, in the same way as Gabriel, peace be upon him, is called "spirit" because of the predominance of his spirituality. As we say, one is a flame of fire because of the sharpness of his mind. Likewise, he [the Prophet] is called "Intellect" because of the abundance of his intellect and "pen" because he writes what is being created, and he is called "light" for his illumination. "The Intellect" may be understood in language as "the reasoning" (*ʿāqil*), so on the basis of this assessment and interpretation the Prophet's spirit, may God honor him and grant him peace, is the first creation. Understood as such, it is, however, also "angel," "Intellect," "light," and "pen." Pen is close in its meaning to the Intellect. For the Almighty God said: "He taught by the pen," as has come down to us in the exegesis of some; that is, by the Intellect,

---

143. As in Mullā Ṣadrā's commentary, the Ṣūfī notion of the Muḥammadan spirit appears here.

144. Cf. John 8:58: "'Very truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!'"

because things are known through the Intellect. In His saying: "**Come forward, and so on**" there is an allusion to the fact that the Intellect encompasses both "coming" and "going." The devoted inherited its "coming," and they are the predecessors close to God who were among the prophets and the saints, and they are the lords of right and the people of Paradise. The negligent inherited its "going," and they are the lords of left (*mashʾama*) and the people of Hell, to which the following words of the Almighty God allude: "And you became of three classes," and so on [Q 56:7].

Z: I transmitted his [Najm al-Dīn's] account in its entirety because of its logical interconnectedness and its usefulness. As for the recording (*takhrīj*) of the ḥadīth, al-ʿIrāqī said:

It was narrated on the authority of Abū Umāma, ʿĀʾisha, Abū Hurayra, Ibn ʿAbbās, and al-Ḥasan on the authority of several of the Companions. The ḥadīth of Abū Umāma, in turn, was narrated by al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Awsaṭ*[145] and by Abū al-Shaykh [b. Ḥibbān] in his *Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-aʿmāl* from the narration of Saʿīd b. al-Faḍl al-Qurashī, who said: "ʿUmar b. Abī Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAtakī related to us on the authority of Abū Ghālib on the authority of Abū Umāma that he said: 'The Messenger of God, may God honor him and grant him peace, said:**"When God created the Intellect,"** but [in this version] He [God] did not say, '**by My Glory**,' but rather said, '**[there is no creature] more wonderful (*aʿjabu*) to me than you are**,' and '**through you [there is] reward and punishment**.'" ʿUmar b. Abī Ṣāliḥ [al-ʿAtakī] was mentioned by al-ʿUqaylī in *al-Ḍuʿafāʾ*, and he recorded this ḥadīth as his (*awrada lahu hādhā al-ḥadīth*).[146]

Al-Dhahabī said in *al-Mīzān:* "He [ʿUmar] is not known" (*lā yuʿrafu*). And he then said that the narrator on the authority of ʿUmar b. Abī Ṣāliḥ [al-ʿAtakī] is among the unknown[147] and that the story [i.e., the ḥadīth] is false (*al-khabar bāṭil*).

Z: I say that al-ʿUqaylī's exact wording in *al-Ḍuʿafāʾ* is: "This ḥadīth is to be rejected (*munkar*)."[148] ʿUmar and Saʿīd, who narrated on his authority, are entirely unknown in the field of transmission (*fī al-naql*), and he [Saʿīd] has not been corroborated by anyone else [in narrating this ḥadīth], and it [the ḥadīth] is not sound (*lā yutābaʿu ʿalā ḥadīthihi wa-lā yuthbatu*).

Then al-ʿIrāqī said:

As for ʿĀʾisha's ḥadīth, Abū Nuʿaym narrated it in his *al-Ḥilya* and he said: "Abū Bakr ʿAbd Allāh b. Yaḥyā b. Muʿāwiya al-Ṭalḥī informed us that al-Dāraquṭnī told him (*bi-ifādat*) on the authority of Sahl b. al-Marzubān b. Muḥammad al-Tamīmī on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Zubayr al-Ḥumaydī on the authority of Ibn ʿUyayna on the authority of Manṣūr on the authority of al-Zuhrī on the authority of ʿUrwa on the

---

145. Cf. al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, 8:190–91.

146. Cf. al-ʿUqaylī, *Kitāb al-Ḍuʿafāʾ*, 3:916, no. 1171: ʿUmar b. Abī Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAtakī.

147. The text says منكرات , but it is probably نكرات .

148. Cf. al-ʿUqaylī, *Kitāb al-Ḍuʿafāʾ*, 3:916, no. 1171: ʿUmar b. Abī Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAtakī.

authority of ʿĀʾisha, may God be pleased with her, that she said: 'The Messenger of God, may God honor him and grant him peace, said: **"The first thing that God created was the Intellect."**'[149] And he [Abū Nuʿaym] mentioned this *ḥadīth* in this way in his biographical entry on Sufyān b. ʿUyayna [d. 198/814]. I did not find in his *isnād* anyone who might be described as weak; nevertheless, there is no doubt that this [*ḥadīth*] is attached to this *isnād*, and I do not know who did it. The *ḥadīth* is to be rejected.

Z: I say that the exact wording of ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth*, according to what is written in the *Ḥilya*, is that ʿĀʾisha said: "The Messenger of God, may God honor him and grant him peace, narrated to me: **'The first thing that God created was the Intellect. He told it: "Come forward!" And it came forward. Then He told it: "Go back!" And it went back. Then He said: "I have not created a creature better than you are. Through you I take and though you I give."'**" Abū Nuʿaym said that this is a *gharīb* [i.e., a *ḥadīth* conveyed by only one narrator] among the *ḥadīth*s of Sufyān, Manṣūr, and al-Zuhrī.[150] I do not know of any narrator on the authority of al-Ḥumaydī other than Sahl, and [so] I consider him [Sahl] mistaken in it[s narration] (*wāhiyan*).

And then al-ʿIrāqī said:

As for Abū Hurayra's *ḥadīth*, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī narrated it in the 206th chapter *(aṣl)*,[151] where he said: "Al-Faḍl b. Muḥammad narrated to us that Hishām b. Khālid al-Dimashqī narrated to him that Yaḥyā"—by whom he meant, in my view, Yaḥyā al-Ghassānī— "narrated to him that Abū ʿAbd Allāh, the client (*mawlā*) of the Banū Umayya, narrated to him on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ on the authority on Abū Hurayra, may God be pleased with him, that he said: **'I heard the Messenger of God say: "The first thing that God created was the pen; then He created the *nūn*,"**[152] which is the inkwell, and so on. And it goes on: **"And then God created the Intellect and said: 'By My Might, I will perfect you only in those I love, and I will make you deficient in those I made deficient.'"**' As for Abū ʿAbd Allāh, I do not know who that is."

Z: I say that Ibn ʿAsākir [d. 571/1176] recorded (*akhraja*) in his *Tārīkh* [*madīnat Dimashq*] the following: "Abū al-ʿIzz Aḥmad b. ʿAbd Allāh informed us that Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ḥasanūn informed him that Abū Ḥusayn al-Dāraquṭnī informed him that the *qāḍī* Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Naṣr narrated to him that Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad al-Faryānī narrated

---

149. Cf. Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, 7:318.

150. Cf. Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, 7:318.

151. In the edition I used, the *ḥadīth* is found in the 208th chapter. See al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *al-Nuskha al-musnada*, 1:765. However, in the available abridged version (which omits the *isnād*s) it indeed appears in the 206th chapter. See al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Nawādir al-uṣūl fī maʿrifat aḥādīth al-Rasūl*, ed. ʿA. ʿUmayra (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), 2:254.

152. Al-Zabīdī's version contains "light" (*nūr*) instead of the word *nūn* (the name of the letter ن). However, I chose to use *nūn*, because *nūr* is likely to be the result of an oversight by the editor. Other versions of the *ḥadīth* in this edition mention *nūn* along with "pen," likely alluding to the Qurʾānic verse 68:1. Furthermore, it is the meaning of *nūn*, not of *nūr*, that is discussed later in the text. Finally, another edition of selections of commentaries on *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* mentions *nūn* here. See al-ʿIrāqī, *Takhrīj aḥādīth Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, 233.

to him that Abū Marwān Hishām b. Khālid al-Azraq narrated to him that al-Ḥusayn b. Yaḥyā al-Khushanī narrated to him on the authority of Abū ʿAbd Allāh, the client (*mawlā*) of the Banū Umayya, on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ on the authority of Abū Hurayra that he said: **'I heard the Messenger of God, may God honor him and grant him peace, say that the first thing that God created was the pen; then He created the *nūn*, which is the inkwell, and then He told it: "Write!" And it replied: "And what should I write?" He said: "Write what is and what will come to pass of actions or effects or allotments (*rizq*) and appointed times (*ajal*)." So it wrote what is and what will be until the Day of Judgment.'"** And this is [what God meant in the Qurʾān by] saying: "*Nūn.* By the pen and by the [record] that [men] write" (Q 68:1). [The report continued:] **"Then he sealed the pen and it [the pen] did not speak. It will not speak until the Day of Judgment. Then He [God] created the Intellect and said: 'By My Might, I will perfect you in those I love and I will make you deficient in those I hate.'"** And this is a good corroboration (*mutābaʿa*) of what the shaykh of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī had narrated (the shaykh of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī is al-Faḍl b. Muḥammad), even though the shaykhs of Hishām differ in the two narrations, as you can see.

I say that Abū ʿAbd Allāh is the client of the Banū Umayya; his name is Nāṣiḥ, and he was mentioned by Ibn ʿAsākir. And Sumayy also narrated it on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ. Ibn ʿAdī[153] [al-Jurjānī, d. 365/976] said:

> ʿĪsā b. Aḥmad, the Ṣūfī, narrated to us in Egypt, and al-Rabīʿ b. Sulaymān al-Jīzī narrated to him that Muḥammad b. Wahb al-Dimashqī narrated to him that al-Walīd b. Muslim narrated to him that Mālik b. Anas [d. 179/795] narrated to him on the authority of Sumayy, and he quoted it [the *ḥadīth*], except that it contains: **"actions or appointed times (*ajal*) or effects, and the pen pinned down (*jarā*) what will come to pass until the Day of Judgment."** And it also contains: **"And the Omnipotent said: 'I have not created a creature more wonderful to me than you are,' and so on."**

Ibn ʿAdī said:[154] "It [this *ḥadīth*] is false (*bāṭil*) and to be rejected (*munkar*), and its ruin (*āfa*) is Muḥammad b. Wahb. He has more than one rejected *ḥadīth*."

And [al-Dhahabī] said in *al-Mīzān*: "Ibn ʿAdī said the truth that this *ḥadīth* is false."[155] Al-Dāraquṭnī recorded (*akhraja*) it in *al-Gharāʾib*[156] on the authority of ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Azraq on the authority of Aḥmad b. Jaʿfar b. Aḥmad al-Fahrī on the authority of al-Rabīʿ b. Sulaymān al-Jīzī with this *isnād* [that continues with al-Dimashqī].

And he [al-Dāraquṭnī] said: This *ḥadīth* is not well-known either from Mālik or from Sumayy." And al-Walīd b. Muslim is reliable, and Muḥammad b. Wahb and the [transmitter] after him are unobjectionable (*laysa bihim baʾs*). And I am afraid that they may have mixed

---

153. Ibn ʿAdī al-Jurjānī, *al-Kāmil fī ḍuʿafāʾ al-rijāl*, ed. M. b. M. al-Sarsāwī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2013), 9:379–80.

154. Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil*, 9:380.

155. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Mīzān*, 4:61.

156. This book has been lost.

up the *ḥadīth*. Ibn ʿAdī[157] and al-Bayhaqī[158] recorded through the narration of Ḥafṣ b. ʿUmar that al-Faḍl b. Qays al-Raqāshī[159] narrated to him on the authority of Abū Uthmān al-Nahdī on the authority of Abū Hurayra, who raised it to the Prophet (*rafaʿahu*),[160] and he quoted it in the same way as Abū Umāma's *ḥadīth*, mentioned above. As for al-Faḍl, Yaḥyā said about him: "He is a bad man." As for Ḥafṣ b. ʿUmar, he was the *qāḍī* of Aleppo and Ibn Ḥabbān said about him: "He narrates forged *ḥadīth*s on the authority of reliable transmitters, and it is not permitted to use his *ḥadīth*s as legal proofs (*Lā yaḥillu al-iḥtijāj bihi*)." Al-Dāraquṭnī[161] recorded it from the narration of Ḥasan b. ʿArafa, [who said:] "Sayf b. Muḥammad narrated to us on the authority of Sufyān al-Thawrī on the authority of al-Fuḍayl b. ʿUthmān on the authority of Abū Hurayra," and so on, as mentioned earlier. It was agreed that Sayf was a liar (*Sayf kadhdhāb bi-l-ijmāʿ*).

Al-ʿIrāqī said:

The *ḥadīth* of al-Ḥasan [al-Baṣrī] on the authority of a number of transmitters (*ʿan ʿidda*) was also narrated by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī,[162] who said: ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. Ḥabīb narrated to us that Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir narrated to him that al-Ḥasan b. Dīnār said: I heard al-Ḥasan say: **"I heard from a number of Companions of the Messenger of God, may God honor him and grant him peace, that the Messenger of God, may God honor him and grant him peace, said: 'When (*lammā*) God created the Intellect,'** and so on, and he added to it (*zāda fīhi*): **Then He [God] told it: "Sit down!" And it sat down. Then He told it: "Depart!" (*inṭaliq*) And it departed. Then He told it: "Be quiet!" And it was quiet. Then He said: "By My Might and by My Glory and by My Greatness and by My Magnificence and by My Power and by My Omnipotence, I have not created a creature dearer to Me than you are or nobler to Me (*akram*) than you are. Through you I am known, through you I am praised, through you I am obeyed, through you I take, through you I give, it is you that I blame, and it is you that I reward, and to you belongs punishment."'"** All of its [this *ḥadīth*'s] narrators except for al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī are to be damned (*halkā*). ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. Ḥabīb al-Faryābī is worthless, as Yaḥyā b. Maʿīn said. Ibn Ḥibbān said that he may have forged more than five hundred *ḥadīth*s. Dāwūd was already mentioned. Al-Ḥasan b. Dīnār is also weak. And Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir narrated it also in [*Kitāb*] *al-ʿAql* with an interrupted *isnād* (*mursalan*), saying, "Ṣāliḥ al-Murrī narrated to us on the authority of al-Ḥasan b. Abī Ḥusayn," and then he gave a shortened version. So, as a whole, all of its [this *ḥadīth*'s] pathways are weak.

---

157. Ibn ʿAdī, *al-Kāmil*, 4:82.

158. Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-shuʿab al-īmān*, ed. M. A. al-Nadawī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2003), 6:349.

159. He is discussed earlier under the name al-Faḍl b. ʿĪsā al-Raqāshī; Qays is probably a scribal error.

160. This means that he directly attributed the *ḥadīth* to the Prophet, omitting some narrators in the *isnād*

161. Cf. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Laʾālī al-maṣnūʿa fī al-aḥādīth al-mawḍūʿa* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d.), 1:129; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt*, ed. ʿA. M. ʿUthmān (Medina: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1966–68), 1:174.

162. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *al-Nuskha al-musnada*, 764.

Z: I say that al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī[163] said that al-Faḍl b. Muḥammad narrated to him that Hishām b. Khālid narrated to him on the authority of Baqiyya [b. Makhlad] on the authority of al-Awzāʿī the same ḥadīth from the Messenger of God, may God honor him and grant him peace. As for what he [al-ʿIrāqī] said—that Dāwūd b. al-Muḥabbir narrated it in [*Kitāb*] *al-ʿAql* with an interrupted *isnād* (*mursalan*), and so on—al-Bayhaqī recorded it (*akhrajahu*), and after quoting the ḥadīth from the narration of the previously mentioned Ḥafṣ b. ʿUmar, he said: "The *isnād* is not strong (*ghayr qawī*)." And it is famous from the statement of Ḥasan: "Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad b. Maḥmish narrated to us that Abū Ṭāhir al-Muḥammad Ibādī narrated to him that al-Faḍl b. Muḥammad b. al-Musayyab narrated to him that ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-ʿĀbisī narrated to him that Ṣāliḥ al-Murrī narrated to him on the authority of al-Ḥasan that he said: 'When Almighty God created the Intellect,' and he quoted it."

ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad, in *Zawāʾid al-Zuhd*, said:

ʿAlī b. Muslim narrated to us that Sayyār narrated to him that Jaʿfar narrated to him that Mālik b. Dīnār narrated to him on the authority of al-Ḥasan, who raised it to the Prophet (*yarfaʿuhu*): **"When God created the Intellect, He told it: 'Come forward!' And it came. Then he told it: 'Go back!' And it went back. Then He told it: 'I have not created a creature better than you. Through you I take and through you I give.'"**

This is, as you see, a good chain [of transmitters], so al-Ḥāfiẓ al-ʿIrāqī's statement that "as a whole, all of the ḥadīth's pathways are weak" deserves further investigation. And [the same applies to] what Ibn al-Jawzī said in *al-Mawḍūʿāt*, which was followed by Ibn Taymiyya as well as al-Zarkashī and others. What can be said about it at most is that it is weak in some of its pathways.[164] Indeed, the ḥadīth was also narrated on the authority of ʿAlī, may God be pleased with him. Al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Suyūṭī said in his *al-Laʾāliʾ al-maṣnūʿa* that al-Khaṭīb said:[165]

ʿAlī b. Aḥmad al-Razzāz informed us (*akhbaranā*) that al-Faraj ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Kātib informed him that the *qāḍī* Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Naṣr narrated to him that Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Raqqī narrated to him that Mūsā b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥasan b. Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib narrated to him from Fāṭima bt. Saʿīd b. ʿUqba b. Shaddād b. Umayya al-Juhanī on the authority of her father on the authority of Zayd b. ʿAlī on the authority of his father and his grandfather on the authority of ʿAlī on the authority of the Prophet, may God honor him and grant him peace, that he said: **"The first thing that God created was the pen; then He created an inkwell, and he continued [the ḥadīth]. In it, He created the Intellect. Then He interrogated it and it answered Him. Then He told it: 'Go back (*idhab*)!' And it went back. Then He told it: 'Come forward!' And it came forward. Then He interrogated it and it answered Him. He [God] said: 'By My Might and by My Glory, I have not created anything dearer to Me than you are or and better than you are,'"** until the end of what he mentioned.

---

163. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *al-Nuskha al-musnada*, 764.

164. This is an important point: al-Zabīdī makes an effort to salvage the ḥadīth.

165. Cf. al-Suyūṭī, *al-Laʾāliʾ al-maṣnūʿa*, 1:128–32.

G: And if you say: "Assuming that the Intellect was an accident, how was it created before bodies (*ajsām*)?"

Z: Because accidents cannot exist on their own.

G: "And assuming that it was a substance, how would it exist on its own without occupying space (*lā yataḥayyazu*)?" Then know that this belongs to

Z: the realm of

G: esoteric knowledge (*ʿilm al-mukāshafa*) [i.e., Ṣūfism], and it should not be mentioned

Z: and another copy (*nuskha*) has "It is not appropriate that it be mentioned"

G: in the context of exoteric knowledge (*ilm al-muʿāmala*), and our objective

Z: here and now

G: is exoteric knowledge.

Z: Al-Rāghib [al-Iṣfahānī, early fifth/eleventh century] conveyed this study in his *Dharīʿa*[166] in a shortened version. He said:

> The Intellect is the first substance (*awwalu jawhar*) that the Almighty God created (*awjadahu*) and honored. This is proven by the *ḥadīth* whose *isnād* was raised to the Prophet (*marfūʿ*): '**The first thing (*awwalu mā*) that God created was the Intellect**,' and so on. And were it an accident, as a group of people have imagined, it would not be correct to say that it is the first creation. For it is not possible for any accident to exist before the existence of a substance that could carry it.

Z: And the examination of this point [has shown] that the substance is quiddity (*māhiyya*), such that when it exists in the sensible world (*aʿyān*) it would not exist in a substrate (*mawḍūʿ*). It is confined to five [types]: matter (*hayūlā*), form (*ṣūra*), body (*jism*), soul (*nafs*), and intellect (*ʿaql*).[167] Because it [i.e., the substance] is either abstract (*mujarrad*) or not. As for the first [kind, the abstract], it is either not connected to the body (*badan*) by way of governance or control, or it is so connected. The former is the Intellect and the latter the Soul. As for the non-abstract, it is either composite or noncompound (*basīṭ*). The former is the body and the latter is either something that inheres in a substratum (*ḥāl*) or a substratum (*maḥall*). The former is the form and the latter the matter, and it is called the reality (*ḥaqīqa*). The substance is divided into spiritual noncompounds, such as abstract intellects and souls, and bodily noncompounds, such as the elements, and into those that are composite in the intellect and not in the external world, such as the composite substantial essences of genus and differentiae, and those that are composite, such as the three generated classes (*muwalladāt thalātha*) [i.e., minerals, plants, and animals].

---

166. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Dharīʿa ilā makārim al-sharīʿa*, ed. A. Y. A. Z. al-ʿAjamī (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2007), 1:133.

167. This division follows the tradition of scholastic Avicennian philosophy.

Bibliography

Abdulsater, H. A. *Shiʿi Doctrine, Muʿtazili Theology: Al-Sharif al-Murtaḍā and Imami Discourse.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī. *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ.* Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1932–38.

Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. *Kitāb al-Zuhd.* Edited by Ḥ. al-Basyūnī. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2004.

ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr.* Edited by Ṭ.M. al-Jāzāʾirī. Najaf: Maktabat al-Hudā, 1966–68.

Al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī. *Khulāṣat al-aqwāl fī maʿrifat al-rijāl.* Edited by J. al-Qayyūmī. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1417H.

Amir-Moezzi, M. A. *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʾism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam.* Translated by D. Streight. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

———. *The Silent Qurʾan and the Speaking Qurʾan: Scriptural Sources of Islam between History and Fervour.* Translated by E. Ormsby. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Asatryan, M. "Shiite Underground Literature between Iraq and Syria: 'The Book of Shadows' and the History of Early Ghulat." In *Texts in Transit in the Medieval Mediterranean,* edited by Y. T. Langermann and R. G. Morrison, 128–61. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016.

Asatryan, M., and D. Burns. "Is Ghulat Religion Islamic Gnosticism? Religious Transmissions in Late Antiquity." In *L'ésotérisme shiʾite, ses racines et ses prolongements*, edited by M. A. Amir-Moezzi, M. De Cillis, D. De Smet, and O. Mir-Kasimov, 55–86. Turnhout: Brepols, 2016.

Al-Azdī, Abū Ismāʿīl. *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Shām.* Calcutta: Baptiste Mission, 1854.

Al-Baghdādī. *Al-Farq bayna al-firaq.* Edited by M. M. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Madanī, 1964.

Al-Barqī. *Al-Maḥāsin.* Edited by M. al-Rajāʾī. Qum: Majmaʿ al-ʿĀlamī li-Ahl al-Bayt, 2011.

Al-Bayhaqī. *Al-Jāmiʿ li-shuʿab al-īmān.* Edited by M. A. al-Nadawī. Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2003.

Beaumont, D. "Hard-Boiled: Narrative Discourse in Early Muslim Traditions." *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 5–31.

Blecher, J. *Said the Prophet of God: Hadith Commentary across a Millennium.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2018.

Brown, J. A. C. *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World.* London: Oneworld, 2009.

Burge, S. R. "The 'Ḥadīṯ Literature': What Is It and Where Is It?" *Arabica* 65, no. 1/2 (2018): 64–83.

Burge, S. R. "Myth, Meaning and the Order of Words: Reading Hadith Collections with Northrop Frye and the Development of Compilation Criticism." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 27, no. 2 (2016): 213–28.

Chittick, W. *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-ʿArabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Compagno, D. "Theories of Authorship and Intention in the Twentieth Century: An Overview." *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012): 37–53.

Cook, M. A. *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

———. *Early Muslim Dogma: A Source-Critical Study.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Crow, D. S. "The Role of al-ʿAql in Early Islamic Wisdom with Reference to Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq." PhD dissertation, McGill University, 1996.

Curry, J. *The Transformation of Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

Dann, M. "Contested Boundaries: The Reception of Shīʿite Narrators in the Sunnī Hadith Tradition." PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2015.

Al-Dāraquṭnī, *al-Ḍuʿafāʾ wa-al-matrūkūn.* Edited by M. b. ʿA. b. ʿAbd al-Qādir. Riyadh: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1984.

———. *Sunan.* Edited by A. A. ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and A. M. Muʿawwaḍ. Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 2001.

Al-Dāraquṭnī and Abū al-Faḍl al-Maqdisī. *Aṭrāf al-gharāʾib wa-l-afrād min ḥadīth Rasūl Allāh li-l-imām al-Dāraquṭnī.* Edited by M. M. M. Ḥ. Naṣṣār and S. Yūsif. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1998.

Al-Dhahabī. *Mīzān al-iʿtidāl fī naqd al-rijāl.* Edited by ʿA. M. al-Bajāwī. Cairo: al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1963.

Eisenberg, I. "Die Prophetenlegenden des Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Kisāʾī." PhD dissertation, University of Bern, 1898.

Eliade, M. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion.* Translated by W. R. Trask. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959.

Fahd, T. "La naissance du monde selon l'Islam." *Sources Orientales* 1 (1959): 237–77.

Goldziher, I. "Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente im Ḥadīt̲." *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete* 22 (1908): 317–44.

Günther, S. "Modern Literary Theory Applied to Classical Arabic Texts: Ḥadīth Revisited." In *The Hadith*, edited by M. Shah, 4:28–33. London: Routledge, 2010.

Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī. *Nawādir al-uṣūl fī maʿrifat aḥādīth al-Rasūl.* Edited by ʿA. ʿUmayra. Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992.

———. *Al-Nuskha al-musnada min Nawādir al-uṣūl fī maʿrifat aḥādīth al-Rasūl.* Edited by I. I. M. ʿAwaḍ. Cairo: Maktabat al-Imām al-Bukhārī, 2008.

Al-Ḥārith b. Abī Usāma. *Bughyat al-bāḥith ʿan zawāʾid Musnad al-Ḥārith.* Edited by M. al-Saʿdānī. Cairo: Dār al-Ṭalāʾiʿ, n.d.

Hourani, G. F. *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of ʿAbd Al-Jabbār.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi. *Al-ʿIqd al-farīd.* Edited by M. M. Qumayḥa. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997.

Ibn Abī al-Dunyā. *Al-ʿAql wa-faḍluhu.* Edited by L. M. al-Ṣaghīr and N. ʿA. Khalaf. Riyadh: Dār al-Rāya, 1989.

Ibn ʿAdī al-Jurjānī. *Al-Kāmil fī ḍuʿafāʾ al-rijāl.* Edited by M. b. M. al-Sarsāwī. Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2013.

Ibn Ḥajar. *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb.* Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1984.

Ibn Ḥibbān. *Kitāb al-Thiqāt.* Hyderabad: Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1973.

Ibn al-Jawzī. *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt.* Edited by ʿA. M. ʿUthmān. Medina: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1966–68.

Ibn Rashīd al-ʿAṭṭār al-Qurashī. *Mujarrad Asmāʾ al-ruwāt ʿan Mālik li-l-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī.* Edited by M. S. b. A. al-Salafī. Medina: Maktabat al-Ghurabāʾ al-Athariyya, 1997.

Ibn Shāhīn. *Al-Targhīb fī faḍāʾil al-aʿmāl.* Edited by M. Ḥ. M. Ḥ. Ismāʿīl. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004.

Al-ʿIrāqī. *Takhrīj aḥādīth Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn.* Edited by A. ʿA. M. b. M. al-Ḥaddād. Riyadh: Dār al-ʿĀṣima, 1987.

Kalin, I. *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mullā Ṣadrā on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Al-Kashshī. *Rijāl al-Kashshī.* Edited by A. al-Ḥusaynī. Karbala: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1962.

Kaukua, J. "The Intellect in Mullā Ṣadrā's Commentary on the *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*." Forthcoming.

Khomeini, R. *Junūd al-ʿaql wa-l-jahl*. Translated into Arabic by A. al-Fahrī. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 2001.

Al-Khūʾī. *Muʿjam rijāl al-ḥadīth*. Najaf: Maktabat al-Imām al-Khūʾī, n.d.

Al-Kulaynī. *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*. Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Fajr, 2007.

Leder, S. "The Literary Use of the Khabar: A Basic Form of Historical Writing." In *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, vol. 1, *Problems in the Literary Source Material,* edited by A. Cameron and L. Conrad, 277–315. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1992.

Lizzini, O. "Ibn Sina's Metaphysics." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), edited by E. N. Zalta.

Madelung, W. "Early Imāmī Theology as Reflected in the *Kitāb al-Kāfī* of al-Kulaynī." In *The Study of Shiʿi Islam: History, Theology and Law,* edited by F. Daftary, 465–74. London: I. B. Tauris, 2014.

Motzki, H. "Dating Muslim Traditions: A Survey." *Arabica* 52, no. 2 (2005): 204–53.

Mourad, S. *Early Islam between Myth and History: Al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110 H/728 CE) and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship*. Leiden: Brill, 2005.

———. "On Early Islamic Historiography: Abū Ismāʿil al-Azdī and His Futūḥ al-Shām." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120, no. 4 (2000): 577–93.

Mullā Ṣadrā. *Al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya fī al-asfār al-ʿaqliyya al-arbaʿa*. Edited by R. Luṭfī, I. Amīnī, and F. A. Ummīd. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, 1981.

———. *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfī.* Edited by M. Khawājawī. Tehran: Muʾassasa-i Muṭalaʿāt wa Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, 1366H.

Al-Mutanabbī, Abū al-Ṭayyib. *Dīwān al-Mutanabbī*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1964.

Najm al-Dīn. *Manārāt al-sāʾirīn ilā ḥaḍrat Allāh wa-maqāmāt al-ṭāʾirīn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004.

El-Omari, R. "Accommodation and Resistance: Classical Muʿtazilites on *Ḥadīth*." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 71, no. 2 (2012): 231-256.

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī. *Al-Dharīʿa ilā makārim al-sharīʿa*. Edited by A. Y. A. Z. al-ʿAjamī. Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2007.

Rizvi, S. "Mulla Sadra." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), edited by E. N. Zalta.

———. *Mulla Sadra and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Al-Ṣāddūq. *Amālī al-Ṣaddūq*. Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 2009.

———. *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh.* Edited by ʿA. A. al-Ghaffārī. Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1429H.

Sadeghi, B. "The Traveling Tradition Test: A Method for Dating Traditions." *Der Islam* 85, no. 1 (2010): 203–42.

Shah, M., ed. *The Hadith.* London: Routledge, 2010.

Al-Shahrastānī. *Muslim Sects and Divisions.* Translated by A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn. London: Routledge, 1984.

Sperl, S. "Man's 'Hollow Core': Ethics and Aesthetics in *Ḥadīth* Literature and Classical *Adab*." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70, no. 3 (2007): 459–86.

Stroumsa, S. "The Beginnings of the Muʿtazila Reconsidered." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990): 265–93.

Al-Subḥānī, J. *Mafāhīm al-Qurʾān.* Qum: Muʾassasat al-Imām al-Ṣādiq, 2000.

Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. *Al-Laʾālī al-maṣnūʿa fī al-aḥādīth al-mawḍūʿa.* Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d.

Al-Ṭabarānī. *Al-Muʿjam al-kabīr.* Edited by Ḥ. ʿA. al-Salafī. Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 1983.

Treiger, A. "Origins of Kalām." In *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology,* edited by Sabine Schmidtke, 27–43. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Al-Ṭūsī, Abū Jaʿfar. *Ikhtiyār maʿrifat al-rijāl.* Edited by M. al-Rajāʾī. Qum: Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt, 1404H.

Al-ʿUqaylī, Abū Jaʿfar. *Kitāb al-Ḍuʿafāʾ.* Edited by ʿA. A. Qalʿajī. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1984.

Van Ess, J. *Theology and Society in the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra.* Translated by G. Goldbloom. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

———. *Zwischen Ḥadīṯ und Theologie: Studien zum Entstehen prädestinatianischer Überlieferung.* Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975.

Vasalou, S. *Moral Agents and Their Deserts: The Character of Muʿtazilite Ethics.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Watt, W. M. *Free Will and Predestination.* London: Luzac, 1948.

Wisnovsky, R. *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Its Context.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.

Al-Zabīdī, Murtaḍā. *Itḥāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn bi-sharḥ Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn.* Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1894.

The Paperwork of a Mamluk *Muqṭaʿ*:
Documentary Life Cycles, Archival Spaces, and the
Importance of Documents Lying Around*

Daisy Livingston

University of Hamburg,
Cluster of Excellence "Understanding Written Artefacts"

(daisy.livingston@uni-hamburg.de)

Abstract

This article follows prevailing trends in research on the archival practices of the premodern Middle East by emphasizing the importance of documentary life cycles. Specifically, it examines the afterlives of a micro-sample of documents from an underexplored historical context: the administration of amirs who held iqṭāʿ *land grants in areas of Egypt outside Cairo. Though* iqṭāʿ *holders (*muqṭaʿs*) were key administrative actors in the Mamluk sultanate, we know little about their activities on the ground. The material investigated here is related to the administration of justice in far-flung districts of Egypt, one of the less-known roles of these* muqṭaʿs, *and is preserved in the Papyrus Collection of the Austrian National Library in Vienna. Contextualizing the documents by relating them to the activities of several named amirs, I delineate three stages in the documents' afterlives: archiving, reuse, and disposal. I rely on the materiality of the documents, an indispensable tool for identifying the more enigmatic aspects of documentary life cycles. I then turn to reflect on what these afterlives can tell us about the archival spaces of this administrative setting. By examining the* muqṭaʿs' *paperwork, I highlight shifts in meaning that documents underwent over time, calling attention to the phenomenon of casual storage, or "documents lying around."*

Introduction

In the governing of the territories of the Mamluk sultanate, *iqṭāʿ* land grants allotted to individual amirs played a fundamental role. Each *iqṭāʿ* holder, or *muqṭaʿ*, was granted the temporary right to collect tax revenue from the land he held, in return for military service. In spite of the importance of *muqṭaʿ*s for the administration of the Mamluk realm, we know surprisingly little about how this system functioned on the ground, particularly at the lower levels of administration. Contemporary chronicles, biographical dictionaries, and administrative and chancery manuals provide substantial information on the functioning of the *iqṭāʿ* system under Mamluk rule.[1] Nonetheless, like much of the contemporary narrative literature, they maintain an elite focus and manifest a tangible "urban tunnel vision."[2] The *muqṭaʿ*s named in such narratives are usually holders of high government office, often recipients of multiple *iqṭāʿ*s in far-flung Mamluk territories, and distant from the management of affairs on the ground.[3] The day-to-day activity of administering these regions, as well as the documents and paperwork it inevitably generated, thus remain mysterious. Surviving documentary traces originating in these settings have so far largely not been explored.

This article aims to fill this gap by exploring the documentary activities of lower-ranking *iqṭāʿ*-holding amirs in regions of Mamluk Egypt outside the capital of Cairo. The documentary practices of *muqṭaʿ*s, and particularly their archiving activities, have attracted some prior scholarly interest. In his study of archival practices in the Mamluk administration, Konrad Hirschler highlighted the significance of these amirs' offices (sing. *dīwān*), not only as the "main administrative partner" to the central state apparatus in Cairo but as one of its primary archival partners, too.[4] These *dīwān*s, though rather poorly documented in the contemporary literature, appear to have been the institution through which amirs managed their *iqṭāʿ*s.[5] Hirschler thus argued for the decentering of archival practices in the Mamluk state, highlighting the amir's *dīwān* at the site of the *iqṭāʿ* as an important location where documents were produced, used, and preserved.

---

1. Tsugitaka Sato, *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam: Sultans, Muqtaʿs, and Fallahun* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Hassanein Rabie, *The Financial System of Egypt AH 564–741/AD 1169–1341* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); Jean-Claude Garcin, *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Égypte médiévale, Qūṣ* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1976), esp. 231–86. See also, though with an earlier focus, Claude Cahen, "L'évolution de l'iqṭaʿ du IXe au XII siècle: Contribution à une histoire comparée des sociétés médiévales," *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 8, no. 1 (1953): 25–52; and, more recently, Yossef Rapoport, *Rural Economy and Tribal Society in Islamic Egypt: A Study of al-Nābulusī's "Villages of the Fayyum"* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), esp. 143–70.

2. This apt phrase is borrowed from Konrad Hirschler, "Studying Mamluk Historiography: From Source-Criticism to the Cultural Turn," in *Ubi Sumus? Quo Vademus? Mamluk Studies—State of the Art*, ed. Stephan Conermann, 159–86 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2013), 169.

3. See, for instance, the examples listed in Rabie, *Financial System*, 46–47. For the hierarchy of *muqṭaʿ*s, albeit in the Ayyūbid period, see Rapoport, *Rural Economy*, 149–55.

4. Konrad Hirschler, "From Archive to Archival Practices: Rethinking the Preservation of Mamlūk Administrative Documents," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136, no. 1 (2016): 21–26.

5. Rabie, *Financial System*, 64–68; Sato, *State and Rural Society*, 87–91. See also references to the secretaries (*kuttāb*) of *muqṭaʿ*s: Rapoport, *Rural Economy*, 157.

This emphasis on the paperwork of Mamluk state actors reflects a recent renewal of scholarly interest in the archival history of the premodern Middle East. Shifting away from a fixed and institutional idea of "the archive" toward a more flexible conceptualization of practices, this trend has served to problematize the oft-presumed paucity of surviving documents from the pre-Ottoman period.[6] Prominent in such studies is a new appreciation of the life cycles of documents. The phenomenon of document reuse, for instance, has been highlighted as a practice with profound implications for understanding archiving. Reuse practices shed light on the shifting meanings attributed to documents over time, their potentially declining archival value, and the practical and symbolic ways in which they were used.[7] Scholarly discussions of archiving place emphasis on the "afterlives" of documents, emphasizing the shifts that documents underwent after fulfilling their immediate functional purposes.[8] Taking these discussions further still, Marina Rustow's recent work on Fatimid state documents preserved in the Cairo Geniza argues for the reconstruction of an entire "documentary ecology." She contends that the archival uses of documents are only to be fully understood within the broader range of processes in which documents played a part, including the "migration" of documents to new sites and uses and the documents' disposal.[9] It is thus increasingly clear that by exploring this entire "ecology," and not just moments of clear archival preservation, we can work toward a more profound understanding of the archival and wider documentary cultures prevailing in the societies we study.

In this article, I sustain this approach, applying it to a different corpus: original documents stemming from the activities of Mamluk *muqṭaʿ*s. These documents are preserved in the Papyrus Collection (Papyrussammlung) of the Austrian National Library in Vienna. They are mostly endorsed petitions or decrees, which shed light on the role *muqṭaʿ*s played in the administration of justice in the regions over which they had authority. Werner Diem published a number of these documents in his volume of so-called "official letters"

6. See, e.g., Frédéric Bauden, "Du destin des archives en Islam: Analyse des données et éléments de réponse," in *La correspondance entre souverains, princes et cités-états: Approches croisées entre l'Orient musulman, l'Occident latin et Byzance (XIIIe–début XVIe siècle)*, ed. Denise Aigle and Stéphane Péquignot, 27–49 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Petra Sijpesteijn, "The Archival Mind in Early Islamic Egypt: Two Arabic Papyri," in *From al-Andalus to Khurasan: Documents from the Medieval Muslim World*, ed. Petra Sijpesteijn et al., 163–86 (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Julien Loiseau, "Le silence des archives: Conservation documentaire et historiographie de l'État dans le sultanat mamelouk (XIIIe–XVI siècle)," in *L'autorité de l'écrit au Moyen Âge: Orient-Occident*, ed. Société des Historiens Médiévistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur Public (SHMESP), 285–98 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2009); Tamer El-Leithy, "Living Documents, Dying Archives: Towards a Historical Anthropology of Medieval Arabic Archives," *Al-Qanṭara* 32, no. 2 (2011): 389–434; Maaike van Berkel, "Reconstructing Archival Practices in Abbasid Baghdad," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 1 (2014): 7–22; Hirschler, "From Archive to Archival Practices"; Marina Rustow, *The Lost Archive: Traces of a Caliphate in a Cairo Synagogue* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); Daisy Livingston, "Managing Paperwork in Mamlūk Egypt (c. 1250–1517): A Documentary Approach to Archival Practices" (PhD diss., SOAS, University of London, 2019).

7. Frédéric Bauden, "The Recovery of Mamlūk Chancery Documents in an Unsuspected Place," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, ed. Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni, 59–76 (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Konrad Hirschler, "Document Reuse in Medieval Arabic Manuscripts," *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Bulletin* 3, no. 1 (2017): 33–44.

8. E.g., El-Leithy, "Living Documents," 426.

9. Rustow, *Lost Archive*, esp. 6.

(*amtliche Briefe*), where he flagged the connections of multiple documents to individual named amirs, extrapolating that they represent the traces of document collections that were at some point archived together.[10] These published documents formed some of the key sources Hirschler used to assert the archival importance of the amir's *dīwān*.[11] The specific archival and documentary practices attested by the original material have not, however, earned comment. In this article, I address this by exploring the life cycles of these documents. I identify "dossiers" of documents issued by the same few amirs—groups of documents that belonged, at one stage, to the broader documentation of an amir's *dīwān*.[12] In addition, I consider further individual documents that belong to the same genres and administrative milieus. The article has two main goals: first, to contribute to the ongoing broader discussion of documentary life cycles, and second, to add further substance to our understanding of Mamluk *iqṭāʿ* holders' administrative activities and the roles played by their offices outside the capital in the generation and preservation of paperwork.

The origin of the material in the Vienna collection poses some difficulties, particularly for those interested in practices of archiving. This collection owes its origins to the massive upsurge of interest in Egyptian antiquities that developed during the nineteenth century alongside European colonial intervention in the country. Mounting "archaeological fervor" led to increasing efforts to gain control of archaeological sites, especially after the British occupation, and many documents obtained from these sites were shipped to European collections.[13] The Vienna collection was supplied by documents that emerged from several large archaeological finds, notably those in the Fayyūm oasis, around 80 km southwest of Cairo, and in the district of Ashmūnayn, located in the Nile Valley around 300 km south of the capital.[14] Subsequent excavations continued to produce large numbers of documents, many of them derived from these same two locales, and the collection was also fed by the flourishing antiquities market.[15] The collection thus contains an enormous number

---

10. Werner Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe des 10. bis 16 Jahrhunderts aus der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek in Wien* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 3.

11. Hirschler, "From Archive to Archival Practices," 21–26.

12. My use of the term "dossier" is close to that recently proposed by Jean-Luc Fournet, who defined it as a "subset" of a contemporary archive: Jean-Luc Fournet, "Archives and Libraries in Greco-Roman Egypt," in *Manuscripts and Archives: Comparative Views on Record-Keeping*, ed. Alessandro Bausi et al., 171–99 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018). This departs from earlier definitions, which see dossiers as corpora brought together by modern scholars. See Katelijn Vandorpe, "Archives and Dossiers," in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall, 216–55 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 218.

13. Hélène Cuvigny, "The Finds of Papyri: The Archaeology of Papyrology," in Bagnall, *Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, 30–58, esp. 30–38.

14. For the find and acquisition history of the collection, see Helene Loebenstein, "'Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer': Zur Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek; 100 Jahre sammeln, bewahren, edieren," in *Die Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek: Katalog der Sonderausstellung 100 Jahre Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer*, ed. Helene Loebenstein and Hermann Harrauer, 3–39 (Vienna: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 1983), esp. 4–6, 27.

15. For a recent study of the vagaries of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century antiquities market, albeit with an Egyptological focus, see Fredrik Hagen and Kim Ryholt, *The Antiquities Trade in Egypt 1880–1930: The H. O. Lange Papers* (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2018), esp. 164–82.

of documents and fragments, including well over 30,000 Arabic paper documents, many of which are difficult or impossible to contextualize geographically. Complicating this unpromising situation further, large numbers of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Egyptian documents were found in excavations of ancient and medieval rubbish heaps, where the documents had been disposed of by their medieval or ancient owners. Such origins hardly seem indicative of careful archiving by the documents' original custodians. Despite this, these excavations tended to unearth documents in bulk, and some collections of papers were found in baskets, suggesting that they were brought to the rubbish heap en masse to be disposed of.[16] The implication is that the documents were accumulated before being at some point deemed useless or irrelevant and thrown away. There is no direct evidence that the particular documents I examine in this article were unearthed from such a rubbish heap. Nonetheless, given the history of the Vienna collection, this is probably the kind of backdrop that we should envisage for their preservation to the modern day.[17]

The preservation context of these documents is therefore inescapably problematic. It dictates methodological necessities that can limit our ability to draw firm conclusions, and we must exercise constant caution, for instance when dating and ascribing provenance to documents. Despite this, I contend that the documents' problematic provenance also raises valuable possibilities. Their apparently accidental preservation and the deliberate method of their disposal serve to highlight the non-static nature of these documents, revealing a progression through multiple stages over the course of their lives. Unlike material that has been carefully looked after over the course of the intervening centuries, these documents demonstrate traces of use, reuse, and abandonment; care and also lack of care. They thus offer us a relatively complete picture of the treatment of documents by the various individuals and institutions that were involved in their contemporary creation, use, and archiving. Like the Geniza documents in Rustow's recent study, these documents offer a full view of a messy documentary life cycle, unobstructed by processes of archival rationalization.[18]

Rather than attempting to identify specific archival sites or formal archival practices that in this corpus may be unrecoverable, in what follows I use these documents to comment on the larger documentary ecology, to borrow Rustow's expression. Specifically, I explore the afterlives of these documents: the stages they went through after their initial production and use. In this enterprise, the materiality of the extant documents represents my most valuable methodological tool. In the first section I delineate the corpus under consideration, through which we can gain some grasp of the historical and administrative backdrop to the documents and their life cycles. I then identify and explore in turn three stages of the documents' afterlives: their archiving, their reuse, and their eventual disposal. Finally, I offer some reflections on what this life cycle can tell us about the nature of the spaces in which such documents were preserved. Ultimately, I argue that the afterlives of

---

16. Cuvigny, "Finds of Papyri," 50–53.

17. The archaeological origins of many of these documents are clearly perceptible in the soil that still adheres to their surfaces.

18. Rustow, *Lost Archive*, e.g., 8, 54.

these documents reveal a continual shifting in the value attributed to documents by their custodians, manifest above all in the material ways in which they were used and preserved. Reflecting on the potential of these afterlives to shed light on the archival spaces of the *muqtaʿ*'s administration, I highlight the phenomenon of casual storage, which I term in this article "documents lying around," the significance of which extends beyond this small corpus.

In the analysis of a corpus such as this one, one cannot avoid some speculation. I would nonetheless argue that this kind of analysis, even if speculative, is an indispensable tool. Without allowing conjecture, source material of this nature, which is not only highly understudied[19] but also fragmentary and difficult to contextualize, would simply remain untapped. Instead of offering firm conclusions, I thus aim to flag the phenomena these documents reveal, and in so doing to flesh out our meager understanding of the documentary and archival contexts in which their lives played out. For the purposes of this special dossier it seems to me fitting to contribute something with many empty holes, which I have no doubt Michael Cook, and all the members of the Holberg Seminar, would have risen to the task of filling.

The *Muqtaʿs'* Documents and Their Afterlives

The documents used in this article are connected to processes of petition and response. Petitions were submitted to amirs to lodge requests or complaints, and amirs responded in one of two ways: by endorsing the petition with a rescript, that is, an official response drafted on the reverse side of the petition; or with a decree written on a separate support. Documents of these genres are, compared with many of the other genres held in the Vienna collection, relatively easy to contextualize. Where the full text of a petition or decree survives, place-names are often included. When the names of amirs can be found, the practice of deriving honorific *nisba*s from the names of the sultans they served sometimes makes it possible to date documents to a particular sultan's reign.[20] In addition, the naming of amirs allows us to identify dossiers of documents issued by the same amir.

The dossiers I am using thus consist of sets of decrees and endorsed petitions that can be firmly connected to one or several individual amirs, with most datable examples originating around the turn of the eighth/fourteenth century. The most substantial such dossier (the al-Azkā dossier) contains a group of decrees issued on the authority of a certain Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf al-Azkā along with documents issued by his two sons, Bahāʾ al-Dīn Aḥmad b. al-Azkā and ʿAlā al-Dīn ʿAlī b. al-Azkā.[21] Many of these decrees are written on the verso of the petitions to which they respond, and the place-names that are mentioned refer to

---

19. The Arabic papyrology research community has largely focused on the early Islamic period in Egypt, meaning that later Arabic material represents one of the most underutilized parts of the Vienna collection.

20. Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 7–8.

21. In the catalog for the exhibition of the Vienna collection that took place in 1894, Josef von Karabacek read this signature as the *nisba* al-Karakī: Josef von Karabacek, *Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer: Führer durch die Ausstellung* (Vienna: Hölder, 1894); Diem offered the reading al-Azkā instead: Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 240.

locations within the district of Ashmūnayn. The respective titles of these three individuals, *al-malakī al-nāṣirī* for Yūsuf and Aḥmad and *al-malakī al-muẓaffarī* for ʿAlī, allow these documents to be dated to the period of the second sultanate of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (698–708/1299–1309) and that of his successor al-Muẓaffar Baybars II (708–9/1309–10).[22] Diem edited ten documents connected to these three related individuals.[23] I was able to identify several more documents belonging to this dossier among the unpublished material in the Vienna collection. These include four documents issued by Yūsuf,[24] three by Aḥmad,[25] and one by ʿAlī,[26] all identifiable on the basis of their distinctively written signatures and official titles. The entire dossier thus comprises eighteen documents, a substantial number considering the challenges of connecting documents within the Vienna collection. The collection also contains several other, much smaller dossiers of similar documents: three documents connected to a certain Bahāʾ al-Dīn, also based in Ashmūnayn, probably around the same time (the Bahāʾ al-Dīn dossier),[27] and a later dossier of an amir known as al-Būshī based in the Fayyūm region.[28]

These dossiers are complemented by a more disparate and unwieldy set of documents that represent similar genres, also recording the administrative activities of amirs, but that cannot be so easily connected to each another and are often fragmentary. Through familiarity with better-preserved and contextualized examples of documents, one begins to recognize the documentary features, formulary, and scripts of these genres, which eventually makes it possible to incorporate these decontextualized or fragmentary examples within the corpus. Locating the surviving dossiers against the background of larger numbers of similar though less easily contextualized documents allows us to extend arguments beyond the individual samples surviving in the dossiers and to identify the wider currency of the practices they reveal.[29]

These extant documents, though clearly constituting just a micro-sample, provide important evidence of the activities of amirs in local administration. It should be noted that the majority of these documents do not explicitly specify that the amir in question held an *iqṭāʿ*. Nonetheless, the details of the amirs' responsibilities and activities that emerge from the documents, as well as the wider picture of the various agents in the region with whom they communicated, suggest strongly that they were indeed *muqṭaʿ*s, as they tally closely

---

22. Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 240–42.

23. A Ch 12502; 25677; 10809; 15499; 11584; 25676; 25674; 23075; 16220; 2007. Published in ibid., nos. 50–59.

24. A Ch 12503; 15915; 25672; 25675. Diem briefly notes the details of these four documents in his introduction to Yūsuf al-Azkāʾs documents but does not deem them worthy of full critical edition, no doubt because of their fragmentary nature. Ibid., 240.

25. A Ch 6249; 12531; 25966.

26. A Ch 6239.

27. A Ch 366; 5864; 25673c. The latter document is published in Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, no. 6. For a more detailed exposé of these dossiers see Livingston, "Managing Paperwork," 169–73, 256–60.

28. A Ch 17306; 24993. Published in Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, nos. 7—8.

29. A full list of the documents that I have consulted in the writing of this article can be found at the beginning of the bibliography.

with accounts in the contemporary narrative literature.[30] The amirs who appear in these documents are almost certainly rather junior, unlike the high-ranking *muqṭaʿ*s who surface in other contemporary sources.[31] The surviving documents are particularly expansive on the role of these amirs in the administration of justice, an aspect of the *muqṭaʿ*'s activities about which we know little from the contemporary literature. Many of the petitions, for instance, show locals complaining of crimes against them—cases of murder[32] and theft[33]—and requesting that the amir begin the process of securing justice. The documents in the al-Azkā and Bahāʾ al-Dīn dossiers show the amirs responding to petitioners in villages scattered around the administrative district of Ashmūnayn, presumably the locales where they held *iqṭāʿ* units.[34] The dossiers and individual documents are thus fertile ground for explorations of the involvement of *muqṭaʿ*s in the day-to-day concerns of local communities, particularly among the lower ranks about which less in known from the narrative and administrative literature.

The documentary lives that I seek to examine through this corpus strongly reflect the geographical realities of *iqṭāʿ* holding. They seem to have been documents whose *raison d'être* was mobility.[35] Petitions were ordinarily drawn up outside the sphere of the amirs and their *dīwān*s on behalf of petitioners, while the responding decrees would be written by the amirs' secretaries or scribes. This much is clear from the different scripts used for the petitions and their responding decrees: whereas petitions are mostly written in legible and practiced handwriting, they are not the chancery-trained hands used for the responding decrees, some of which seem to have been written by the same unnamed individuals (compare recto and verso on Fig. 1).[36] After their initial submission, then, the lives of these documents converged in the amirs' administrative circles. Responding decrees were not addressed to the petitioners themselves. Instead, the amirs usually addressed local shaykhs or representatives, who were charged with acting on the amirs' commands, summoning those accused of crimes to meet justice or compelling recalcitrant peasants to pay taxes of various kinds. As Hirschler has argued, the address of these decrees implies that the documents, though centered on the amir's *dīwān*, "circulated" within broader administrative networks in which the amirs were active.[37] Traces of their intrinsic mobility survive in peculiar remarks written in their margins, which usually specify an individual charged with their delivery. At times the note refers to "a soldier as messenger" (*jundī rasūl*

---

30. Livingston, "Managing Paperwork," 169–79; Hirschler, "From Archive to Archival Practices," 25–26. See also Rapoport, *Rural Economy*, 144.

31. For the hierarchy of *muqṭaʿ*s, albeit in an Ayyubid context, see Rapoport, *Rural Economy*, esp. 149–55.

32. A Ch 16220.

33. A Ch 366; 12502; 25676.

34. For the distribution of *iqṭāʿ* units, see Rapoport, *Rural Economy*, 144–49.

35. Processes of petition and response are, of course, always to some extent characterized by mobility. For decrees, for instance, see Rustow, *Lost Archive*, e.g., 267–68.

36. See similar comments on the scripts of Fatimid petitions: Marina Rustow, "The Fatimid Petition," *Jewish History* 32 (2019): 351–72.

37. Hirschler, "From Archive to Archival Practices," 26.

or *jundī sāᶜī*);[38] others mention simply "a soldier" (*jundī*),[39] "a young soldier" (*jundī ṣabīy*),[40] or just "a messenger" (*sāᶜī*).[41] This feature is present in both the dossiers identified above and in several individual documents and fragments from both Ashmūnayn and Fayyūm, and it thus seems to represent part of a consistent documentary procedure used in the *dīwān*s of amirs in different parts of Egypt. Whether the surviving original documents were themselves sent out to the amirs' various contacts is not clear. These documents might instead be the "archival" copies, with the marginal delivery notes representing official verification that copies had in fact been sent out to the relevant personnel.[42] Either way, these documentary practices highlight the dispersed geographical realities of the *muqṭaᶜ*s' administration.
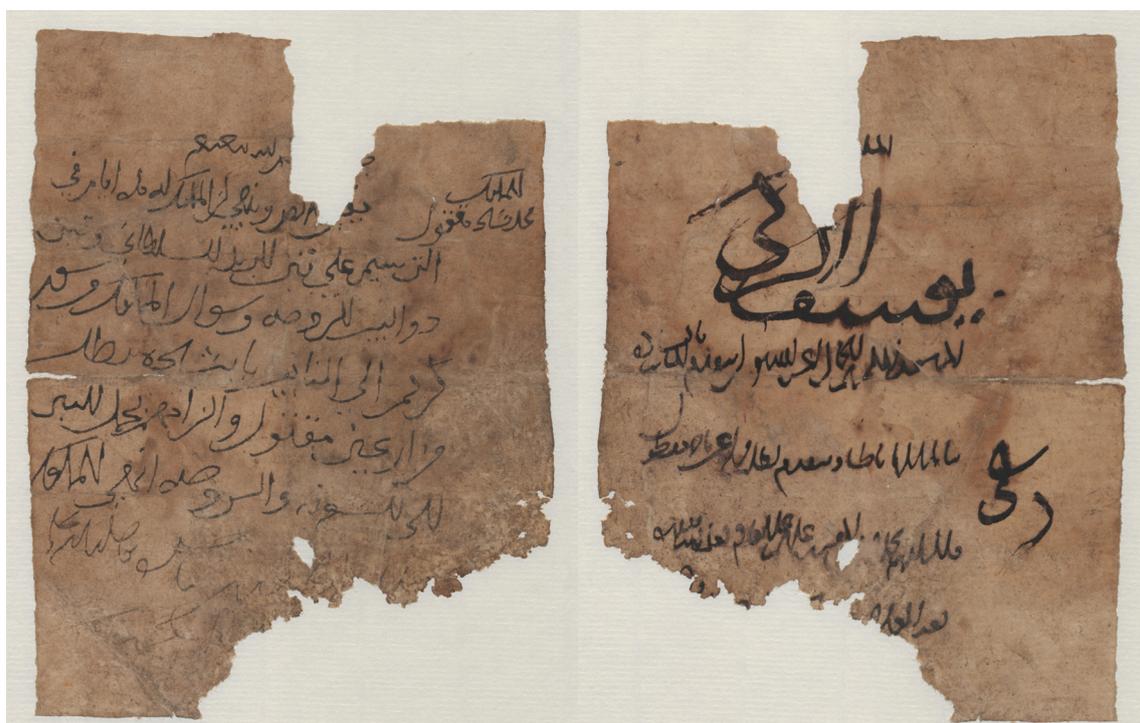
Figure 1: Endorsed petition from the al-Azkā dossier containing Yūsuf al-Azkā's distinctive signature (A Ch 25677); petition on recto (left) and rescript on verso (right). (Photograph: Papyrussammlung, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)

---

38. *Jundī rasūl* in two of the three documents in the Bahāʾ al-Dīn dossier; also in A Ch 16196. I suspect that this latter document also belongs to the Bahāʾ al-Dīn dossier, though it is too fragmentary to allow confirmation. *Jundī sāᶜī* in one document in the al-Azkā dossier: A Ch 16220. Diem's translation reads "Ein Soldat als Bote/ Eilbote": e.g., Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 271.

39. A Ch 17306.

40. A Ch 12495.

41. A Ch 25677. See Fig. 1, above. The pen stroke below *sāᶜī* may be a *rāʾ* (ر), perhaps an abbreviation of *rasūl*.

42. The addition of these delivery remarks seems to serve a kind of verification purpose, being added to the support in the same thick pen used for the amir's signature. See Livingston, "Managing Paperwork," 193–94.

The textual content of this corpus of endorsed petitions and decrees thus reveals an extended documentary life cycle. Nevertheless, none of the stages I have discussed—the submission of the petition, the response in the decree, the "circulation" among the amir's administrative partners in the region—can be considered part of the documents' afterlives, the focus of this article. Afterlife can be an ambiguous term. The responses drafted on the verso of the petitions might, after all, be considered to belong to the afterlife of the original documents.[43] I contend, however, that the rescript represented an intrinsic function of the initial text, despite constituting a separate phase in the document's material life.[44] It was not, therefore, part of its afterlife. In this article, I use the term afterlife to refer to all stages that took place after the completion of the initial functions for which the textual content of the document was produced. In the case of the decrees issued by amirs, this function was essentially a communicative one, ordering others to implement the decisions they had made.[45] Once this was done, the main purpose of the document was fulfilled, and it is from this point onward that we can speak of its afterlife. To glimpse these stages, we must leave the textual content behind, looking instead to the documents' materiality.

If we combine all the stages that are visible within the corpus used here, I see the typical life cycle of a single document to be made up of the following phases:

1) The drawing up of the petition. This took place outside the amir's *dīwān*. The petition was then presented to the amir.

2) The drawing up of the responding decree on the verso of the petition. This was carried out by the scribes in the amir's *dīwān*, visible to us from the trained, if highly cursive, chancery-style hands used.

3) The circulation of the decree, or a copy thereof, among the amir's relevant contacts in the region.

4) The document's archiving.

5) The reuse of the document's material support.

6) The document's deliberate destruction and disposal.

7) Preservation until the modern day.

---

43. Christian Sassmannshausen, for instance, defines the use of late Ottoman *sijill*s in a court setting as an afterlife, even though this could be considered one of the main purposes for which such documents were produced. Christian Sassmannshausen, "Mapping *Sijill* Landscapes: Family Monitoring and Legal Procedure in Late Ottoman Tripoli," in *Lire et écrire l'histoire ottomane*, ed. Vanessa Guéno and Stefan Knost, 173–206 (Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2015), 180–81.

44. That is, through the addition of a new text on its verso.

45. See also Christian Müller, *Der Kadi und seine Zeugen: Studie der mamlukischen Ḥaram-Dokumente aus Jerusalem* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 137–40.

This outline is clearly schematic and does not address the transitions between the different phases, discussed below. Not all documents found within the corpus underwent every one of these stages. Not all decrees were drafted on the verso of a petition; in such cases stage 2 represents the beginning of a document's life. Many of the documents do not display clear signs of reuse (stage 5), and some do not show signs of deliberate disposal (stage 6). Nonetheless, each of these stages emerges with some clarity within the corpus, and several extant documents exhibit evidence of them all.

According to the definition I have adopted, stages 4–7 constitute the document's afterlife. Stage 7, its preservation until the modern day, represents the broad backdrop against which we must situate each document's survival. Though it offers our firmest evidence that dossiers were at some point preserved together, it provides only limited insights into the documents' contemporary lives. It is therefore the three penultimate stages (4–6) that constitute the focus of the next part of this article. I address these stages in turn, exploring the material features the documents provide as evidence for each: the deliberate archiving of documents, their reuse, and their eventual disposal.

Archiving: The "Bundle Archive"

The deliberate archiving of the petitions and decrees that make up this corpus is undoubtedly the most intangible phase in the documents' lives. The documents do not show signs of archiving comparable to those that mark other extant documentary corpora. They do not contain the traces of formal recordkeeping in separate register archives that can be found on decrees issued by the chanceries of the Mamluk sultans and their predecessors.[46] Nor do they display any other notable traces of techniques designed to assist in their systematic storage and later retrieval, such as the archival filing notes present on legal documents from the Ḥaram al-Sharīf corpus of seventh-/fourteenth-century Jerusalem[47] or on deeds related to *waqf* endowments from Mamluk Cairo.[48] It may be tempting, then, to suggest that these documents were simply not archived at all.

Such an argument *ex silentio* is, however, problematic. The fact that we know little about the *muqṭaʿ*s' administration as an archival context does not mean that it was not one.

---

46. For a concise discussion of registration in Fatimid chancery decrees, see Samuel M. Stern, *Fāṭimid Decrees: Original Documents from the Fāṭimid Chancery* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), 166–75; Geoffrey Khan, "A Copy of a Decree from the Archives of the Fāṭimid Chancery in Egypt," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49, no. 3 (1986): 439–453, esp. 451; Rustow, *Lost Archive*, esp. 349–52, 368–77. For Mamluk documents, see Samuel M. Stern, "Petitions from the Mamlūk Period (Notes on the Mamlūk Documents from Sinai)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29, no. 2 (1966): 247–49; Malika Dekkiche, "Le Caire: carrefour des ambassades; Étude historique et diplomatique de la correspondance échangée entre les sultans mamlouks circassiens et les souverains timourides et turcomans (Qara Qoyunlu–Qaramanides) au XVe s. d'après le ms. ar. 4440 (BnF, Paris)" (PhD diss., University of Liège, 2011), 389–90. For register archives in Mamluk Cairo, see Hirschler, "From Archive to Archival Practices," 12–17.

47. See Müller, *Der Kadi*, e.g., 197–98; Livingston, "Managing Paperwork," esp. 141–46.

48. Livingston, "Managing Paperwork," esp. 71–72; Daisy Livingston, "Documentary Constellations in Late-Mamlūk Cairo: Property- and *Waqf*-related Archiving on the Eve of the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt," *Itinerario*, forthcoming.

In my view, these documents are, in fact, better viewed against the background of other, simpler methods of archiving that are well attested across the papyrological corpus: what I designate "bundle archives." As the name suggests, these are collections of documents in which each piece was tightly folded and which were held together by various means. Bundle archiving seems to have been particularly common for collections of documents that might be termed family or business archives.[49] One particularly well-contextualized example is the recently published archive of the Banū Bifām, an eleventh-century Christian landowning family living in the Fayyūm region. This archive, containing Arabic legal documents, tax receipts, and business letters, was unearthed in the excavation of the Naqlūn monastery in eastern Fayyūm, situated in domestic buildings adjoining the church.[50] The legal deeds that were written on parchment were rolled and stored within a leather pouch, while the tax receipts, business letters, and remaining legal documents that were written on paper were found in four small bundles of tightly folded documents, each wrapped in a strip of linen. The packages of documents were themselves preserved in a large earthenware jar.[51]

Few papyrological documents have been unearthed in such well-defined archival circumstances. These archival techniques nonetheless provide a possible indicator of the way less easily contextualized documents may have been kept. This is because bundle archiving left material traces on the documents, many of which are still visible today. The large corpus of seventh-/thirteenth-century business letters, notes, and accounts found in the excavation of a house in Quṣayr al-Qadīm on the Red Sea coast offers a revealing example. These documents relate closely to the activities of a family of businessmen and thus appear to have been part of a household business archive. Though discovered in a state that strongly suggests their deliberate disposal, several of the individual documents show signs of tight folding and some were even discovered tied with a cord.[52] Though the folding of documents was also related to their delivery, with addresses of letters often written on the outside of the folded document, the survival of bundles demonstrates that documents were also preserved in this state. The archival evidence from the Banū Bifām and that gleaned from the Quṣayr documents show that archival practices of this somewhat informal variety prevailed in family, household, and business settings.

The material traces that bundle archiving left behind are shared by documents in all the amirs' dossiers examined here as well as by many of the other individual documents and fragments emerging from this administrative context. Almost all of these documents show signs of having been tightly horizontally folded, and given the patterns of accidental damage such as wormholes on the documents, it is certain that many were preserved folded (traces of horizontal folding are visible in Fig. 1 above). The implication, then, is that the amirs also kept bundle archives.

---

49. See, for instance, Fournet, "Archives and Libraries," 178.

50. Christian Gaubert and Jean-Michel Mouton, *Hommes et villages du Fayyoum dans la documentation papyrologique arabe (Xe–XIe siècles)* (Geneva: Droz, 2014), 3–11.

51. Ibid., 5–6; see also images of the bundles, 305–6.

52. Li Guo, *Commerce, Culture, and Community in a Red Sea Port in the Thirteenth Century: The Arabic Documents from Quseir* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), esp. 108, 113, 115 (plates 2–3).

This method of archiving, though apparently rather informal, was presumably well suited to the purposes of *muqṭaʿ*s, whose careers in regions such as Ashmūnayn and Fayyūm were by their very nature peripatetic and time-limited. *Iqṭāʿ*s were, at least theoretically, not inheritable,[53] and amirs were usually granted multiple small portions in different locales.[54] Bundle archives would have been easy to transport from place to place or to preserve in an office, however rudimentary. This method of archiving also corresponded to the function of these particular documents, which was an immediate, communicative one. The need to refer to the documents after the commands they contained had been carried out was probably limited.[55] Ease of access was not, therefore, a priority in a bundle archive of this kind of material. Endorsements of petitions were certainly not the only kind of documentation used in the amir's *dīwān*, which would also have had to deal with records related to the amirs' other responsibilities, such as tax collection and the distribution of seed.[56] Nonetheless, the immediacy and overwhelmingly practical value of the petition and decree genres goes some way toward explaining the archival practices that we witness in such documents, determined above all by short-term needs.

The Reuse of Paper: Blazons and Snowflakes

Evidence for the next stage in the documents' lives comes in the form of traces of reuse. By the term "reuse" I refer, above all, to the secondary use of the paper supports on which documents were originally written. Like the concept of a document's afterlife, the concept of reuse has potential to be a rather ambiguous one. If defined broadly, it could cover an enormous variety of practices occurring at various stages in a document's life. This could include predictable reuses that were part of the normative practices of producing these genres of documents, such as the writing of a decree on the verso of an already-written petition. It also, however, includes less predictable reuses, which appear to have no clear connection to the documents' initial uses. This second kind of reuse can be roughly equated with the "recycling" of documents, also discussed in the scholarly literature, which implies

---

53. They were, however, sometimes handed down from father to son. For a concise discussion of this issue, see Yossef Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 21–22; Rabie, *Financial System*, 59–60; Jo van Steenbergen, *Order out of Chaos: Patronage, Conflict and Mamluk Socio-Political Culture, 1341–1382* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 78–82. Research on this question has largely focused on individuals who were probably higher up the social ladder than were the amirs discussed in this article. See, e.g., Ulrich Haarmann, "The Sons of Mamluks as Fief-Holders in Late Medieval Egypt," in *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. Tarif Khalidi, 141–68 (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1984); Ulrich Haarmann, "Joseph's Law: The Careers and Activities of Mamluk Descendants before the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Ulrich Haarmann, 55–84 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) .

54. See, e.g., Rapoport, *Rural Economy*, esp. 149–50.

55. Rustow has likewise noted the "short contractual time" of Fatimid decrees: Rustow, *Lost Archive*, e.g., 317.

56. Sato, *State and Rural Society*, 84–91; Rapoport, *Rural Economy*, 155–64.

the complete repurposing of a document and its support.[57] It is these kinds of reuse that are the most valuable for conceptualizing the life cycles of documents, as they reveal what happened to a document after it had performed the function for which it was initially produced. This form of reuse is the focus of the following section.

The documents emerging from the amirs' administration attest to a diverse and creative set of reuse practices. Though the corpus thus seems an ideal place to explore the question of reuse, its diversity poses some challenges, not least because it is rarely clear what function the reuses served. Perhaps the most fascinating, if puzzling, example is a single fragmentary document from the al-Azkā dossier.[58] The recto of this document contains two lines of a petition regarding the dispatch of four camel-couriers from the village of Itlīdim, 13 km north of Ashmūnayn, while the verso contains the responding decree, issued by Aḥmad b. al-Azkā. At a later date, the text of the petition was largely obscured by the addition of an illustrated blazon, containing an image of a sword on an upside-down-teardrop-shaped field whose central section was colored with red paint. On the verso, the text of the decree was covered by a circular decoration. Though the exact form of the decoration is difficult to discern as much of the paint has flaked away, it contains a circular border in red with a black design in the middle against a background of gold or ochre paint (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Endorsed petition from the al-Azkā dossier containing an illustrated blazon (A Ch 23075), recto (left) and verso (right). (Photograph: Papyrussammlung, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)

The artistic reuse of this endorsed petition is curious. Although doodles of various sorts appear with some regularity in the documents and fragments of the Vienna collection, this example is evidently not a casual scribble. The use of colored paint and the quality of the

execution indicate that it followed a thought-out design and was produced with a specific purpose in mind. The presence of the military blazon is especially noteworthy.[59] For one, it highlights the intrinsically military nature of the amir's administration; the *iqṭāʿ* was, after all, first and foremost a method of paying for the armies that the sultan relied on to fight his military campaigns. Bethany Walker has highlighted the importance of blazons as visible emblems of legitimacy within the Mamluk social hierarchy, especially from the early eighth/fourteenth century onward—contemporary, in fact, with the career of Aḥmad b. al-Azkā.[60] The blazon here brands the paperwork with a military identity, confirming the connection between the authority invested in the documentation and the person of the amir. This strongly suggests that the reuse of this document took place within the same documentary setting that initially issued the decree it contains, that is, the amir's own *dīwān*.

The blazon itself also provides indications of the time frame that we should envision for this particular example of reuse. The upside-down-teardrop-shaped field of the blazon is characteristic of those used by amirs who paid allegiance to the sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.[61] Aḥmad b. al-Azkā, to whom the initial petition was addressed, was himself in the service of this same sultan, as we know from his *nisba*. Diem dated the document to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's second reign: 698–708/1299–1309. Although we cannot determine whether the blazon belonged to Aḥmad, we can nonetheless be sure that both the production of the document and the addition of the blazon occurred within al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's reign.[62] We should probably not, therefore, envisage the period of this document's archival preservation between its initial use and its reuse as a very extended one. The appearance of the blazon allows us, to some degree, to locate the reuse of this document temporally as well as spatially.

These reflections do not, however, explain the reasons behind this creative reuse. What was the function of this attractively decorated piece of paper? It was evidently not a use for which the presence of legible traces of a rather mundane petition and its responding decree represented a hindrance. Despite this, some lengths were gone to in order to invest this small fragment with the visual trappings of military prestige. Perhaps the document should be interpreted as a practice illumination exercise, preparing images that were to adorn a

---

59. For a general discussion of Mamluk-era heraldic blazons, see L. A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry: A Survey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933). See also Nasser Rabbat, "Rank," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.; Bethany Walker, "The Ceramic Correlates of Decline in the Mamluk Sultanate: An Analysis of Late Medieval Sgraffito Wares" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1998), 223–25; Bethany Walker, "Ceramic Evidence for Political Transitions in Early Mamluk Egypt," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 8, no. 1 (2004): 54–68; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and Its Culture* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 38–39.

60. Walker, "Ceramic Correlates of Decline," 254–55; Walker, "Ceramic Evidence," 68.

61. Rachel Ward pointed this out in her conference presentation "Allegiance by Design: Mamluk Blazons" at the International Conference "Material Culture Methods in the Middle Islamic Period," Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg, University of Bonn, December 9, 2017.

62. However, we cannot be certain which reign. His final reign stretched over more than thirty years: 709–41/1310–41. Aḥmad b. al-Azkā's father, Yūsuf, was also in the service of the same sultan, but it is not clear from the extant documents whether his son took over his position, or whether they were active during the same period. We cannot, therefore, limit the period any further.

more illustrious object. Alternatively, the folding visible on the document suggests that it may have been intended for a more material use: to be wrapped around another object. The folding illustrated in the mock-up in Fig. 3 is vertical rather than the more usual horizontal.[63] It centers on the two roughly circular designs on the recto and the verso, meaning that when the document was folded one of these images would have been visible on the outside. The design on the verso was added to the document when its left side was folded, so the left-hand segment of the circular pattern appears on the recto of the unfolded document, to the right of the blazon (see Fig. 3a, b, and c).[64] The placement of the image across both sides of the paper is improbable, were this a simple example of painting practice. It is tempting to suggest, then, that it might have been used to wrap another folded document or a bundle thereof—serving as a label by which a small bundle archive was marked with the blazon of the amir. Any object wrapped up with this document would have to have been roughly the size and shape of a folded document. This one instance of creative document reuse offers an exceptional and surprising insight into the potential range of repurposing that documents underwent.
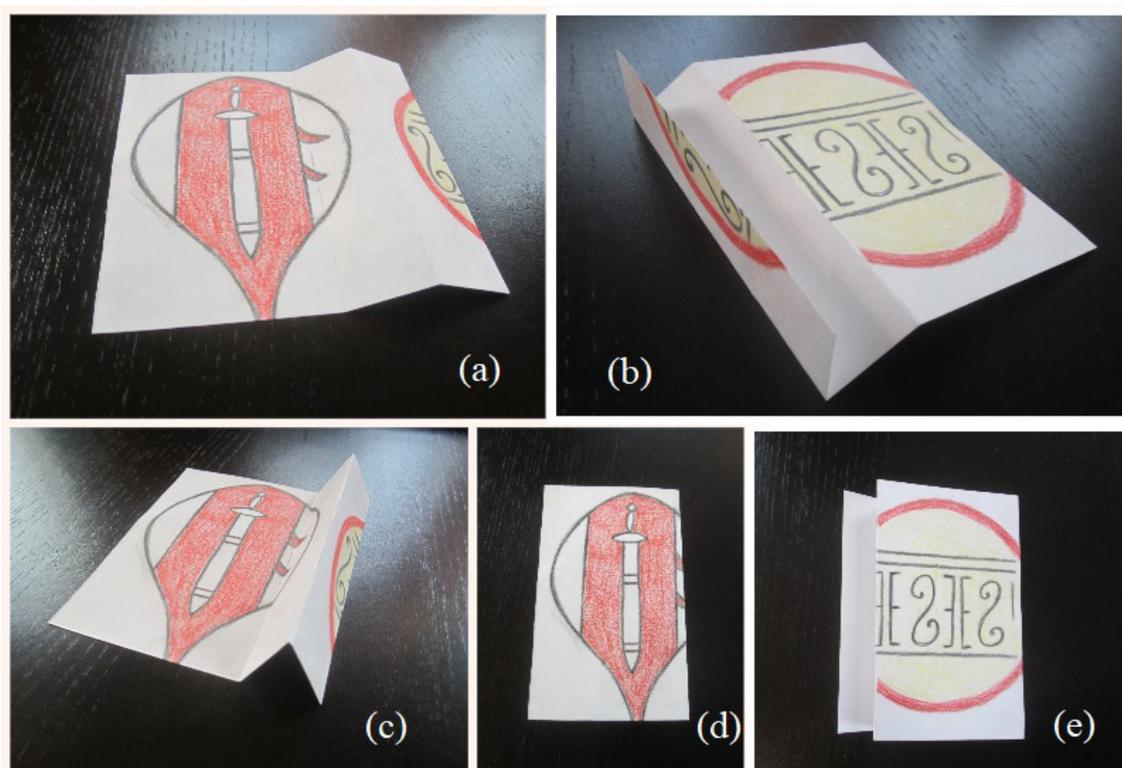

Figure 3: Mock-up of vertical folding pattern on A Ch 23075; (a) recto, (b) verso, (c) folding of recto, (d) recto folded, (e) verso folded. (Images by author)

---

63. Original horizontal folding is also visible.

64. Diem also described this physical layout, though he offered no comment on how these images should be interpreted. Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, 266.

It is also among the documents issued by Aḥmad b. al-Azkā that we find another kind of documentary reuse: the cutting of documents into shapes. This is, in fact, a reuse practice that appears with some prominence in the Vienna collection at large. The document in question is another of Aḥmad's endorsed petitions, this time dealing with the murder of a woman by her husband.[65] At some point, this document was cut into a triangular wedge shape, with a fold down the middle, and a large hole was pierced through the upper part of it (see Fig. 4). As with the blazon document, it is not clear what function the cutting of the document into this shape might have served. With the cutting of documents, we must be particularly careful in drawing conclusions, as it is impossible to establish when such reuse might have occurred. It could, in fact, represent the work of modern antiquities dealers. One Mamluk-era summons to the Ashmūnayn *qāḍī* court, for instance, has a peculiar diagonal cut across the bottom of the sheet of paper, which Diem suggested could have been made by a modern dealer to even out the damaged edges common to documents in the papyrological corpus.[66] Such "tidying up" of damaged documents does not seem to me to represent the same phenomenon as the practice of reshaping old documents into new forms, which is extremely widespread in the Vienna collection and thus seems to preclude an explanation based on modern interference.

Figure 4: Endorsed petition from the al-Azkā dossier cut into a wedge shape (A Ch 16220), recto (left) and verso (right). (Photograph: Papyrussammlung, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)

One of the major problems with cut-up documents is that thanks to their diminutive size, they furnish us with a smaller amount of text from which to glean context—to identify scripts or document types for dating purposes or to establish provenance. This is not always, however, an insurmountable obstacle. For instance, there are several other wedge-shaped documents or fragments thereof containing Mamluk-era chancery-style scripts that

---

65. A Ch 16220.

66. Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, no. 78.

are similar to those found in the amirs' dossiers.[67] The careful cutting of these documents suggests that they were intended for quite a precise purpose, though the specificities elude us. Beyond the wedge-shaped documents, more complex shaping is also visible. One document, probably originally an endorsed petition, was cut into an elaborate mirror-image fleur-de-lis shape (see Fig. 5).[68] Another was cut into a heart shape.[69] Yet others were fashioned into forms similar to paper "snowflakes," small pieces being cut out of a folded piece of paper multiple layers at a time.[70] It is difficult to get a meaningful grasp of this particular kind of document reuse. The wedge shapes bear superficial similarities to fragments of documents that were found reused as arrow flights during the excavation of the citadel of Damascus. These documents too were cut into triangular wedge shapes, in this case designed to improve the aerodynamic qualities of an airborne arrow or crossbow bolt.[71] There is no evidence to suggest that the Vienna documents were used in such a way.[72] Nonetheless, this usage alerts us to the possibly eclectic range of reuses to which old documents were put and at which the cut-up documents in the Vienna collection may hint. These documents may, for instance, have been cut up to provide structural or decorative

Figure 5: Endorsed petition (?) cut into a fleur-de-lis shape (A Ch 25002a), recto (probably upper) and verso (probably lower). (Photograph: Papyrussammlung, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)

---

67. A Ch 2434; 2143; 3196.

68. A Ch 25002a.

69. A Ch 25610. The function of the original document is unclear.

70. A Ch 25611; 25655. The context of the first of these is entirely uncertain; the second is almost certainly from the Mamluk era.

71. David Nicolle, *Late Mamlūk Military Equipment* (Damascus: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2011), esp. 151–65, 315.

72. David Nicolle, who first flagged this particular reuse phenomenon in the Damascus material, considered it unlikely that the wedge-shaped documents I found within the Vienna collection were used for this purpose; personal communication.

elements of book bindings or other objects.[73] Alternatively, they may represent the random fiddling of bored or procrastinating scribes in the amir's *dīwān*. Whatever the reality, the evidence of reuse that such documents offer provides yet another tantalizing glimpse into their complex and multifaceted life cycles.

The methods of reuse discussed here differ in two significant ways from those that have earned prominence in previous scholarly literature. First, most scholarship on the subject has emphasized textual reuses of documents; that is, cases in which an old document was used as a support for later written texts. This category includes the reuse of complete documents in the manufacture of manuscripts, such as in al-Maqrīzī's autograph manuscript identified by Frédéric Bauden and in the Damascene *majmūʿ* manuscripts investigated by Hirschler.[74] In these cases, old documents, some of which contained a considerable amount of blank paper, were used to build manuscript quires. Aside from these examples, probably the most famous example of the textual reuse of old documents is the Cairo Geniza. The main explanatory logic behind the preservation of many Arabic documents in the Geniza is their reuse by Jewish scribes for the writing of Hebrew-script liturgical and scriptural texts.[75] The older documents thus became a new writing support for texts that did not require a clean, new surface.[76] Examples of this kind of textual reuse can almost certainly be found within the Vienna collection, though few appear in the corpus examined here. Some documents containing texts of these administrative genres might be classified as scrap paper, containing drafts of documents or brief notes, though this represents a rather different phenomenon from the textual reuse of older documents.[77] In such cases, the document may have begun its life as scrap paper. The nontextual reuses identified above are challenging to interpret, but they serve to highlight a broader range of document reuses than has previously earned comment.

The second major difference between the reuse practices examined in this article and the other, better-known examples is that most of the latter have been found reused "in an unsuspected place," to borrow Bauden's expression.[78] That is, the context of their reuse is separate from that of their production and initial use. They were reused outside the

---

73. Such as examples found in bindings for quire supports, sewing guards, and binding filler: Hirschler, "Document Reuse," 36; Rustow, *Lost Archive*, 86. More obscurely, Mamluk-period documents have been found sewn into the lining of headgear, probably to stiffen the fabric. See, for instance, documents held in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin (inv. no. I. 6374) and in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (accession no. 46.156.11b). Thanks to Miriam Kühn, Irina Seekamp, and Shireen El Kassem for drawing my attention to this material.

74. Bauden, "Mamlūk Chancery Documents"; Hirschler, "Document Reuse."

75. Rustow, *Lost Archive*, e.g., 7–8, 383.

76. Reuse was also sometimes dictated by motivations beyond material practicality. See, e.g., Hirschler, "Document Reuse," 38–39.

77. One example is a decree issued by the amir and *dawādār* Sayf al-Dīn Tūghān whose verso contains a drafted receipt as well as a series of intriguing notes relating, if my reading is correct, to various mosques and other pious institution in Cairo: A Ch 8984. Diem edited the recto of this document and also offered a reading of the text of the receipt on the verso: Diem, *Arabische amtliche Briefe*, no. 4.

78. Bauden, "Mamlūk Chancery Documents."

setting of their original archiving. For the corpus examined here, on the other hand, the reuses I have identified seem likely to have occurred within the same setting that received and subsequently archived the original documents: the amir's *dīwān*. This conclusion is most strikingly illustrated by the blazon document but can, I believe, be extended to other documents whose long-term preservation together, and with the blazon document, implies shared origins in a common site. The difference in the locale of reuse between this and previously discussed corpora is not indicative of the existence of an entirely unique range of reuse practices occurring in the *muqṭa*'s' administration. Rather, the documents examined here simply represent a corpus of reused material the like of which has not survived within other collections.[79] Documents from an amir's *dīwān* may have been extracted for reuse outside this immediate setting, perhaps also for textual reuses like the better-known examples, but such documents were not then preserved alongside this corpus. It is worth pointing out that the documents that survived in this setting were potentially of limited use for textual reuse, being too small to offer substantial writing surfaces. Though any assertions about the site of these documents' reuse must remain tentative, the corpus seems to me to represent the flotsam and jetsam of a functioning office.

The material examined here thus highlights the fact that documents could progress through multiple life stages even within a single space or administrative domain. The discovery of documents in surprising locations seemingly distant from the initial sites of their production and archiving is tantalizing, compelling historians to solve real mysteries in the documents' life cycles. Nonetheless, the recognition of extended archival life cycles should not be confined to the investigation of such dramatic shifts. The reuse practices identified here allow us to trace the documents' evolution, even within a single setting, from records important for their textual content to objects of primarily material significance. Although the text of the original documents may have continued to hold some meaning, it was the physicality of these documents, that is, their material support, that offered the most promise and value to those intent on their reuse. The eccentric reuses that we see within this corpus, then, bear witness to the gradually shifting value that the documents assumed at different stages in their extended life cycles.

Destruction and Disposal

In the final stage of the documents' lives, it seems neither their textual nor their material value was significant enough to justify their continued preservation. At this point, the documents were deliberately destroyed and disposed of. We do not have direct evidence that the specific documents discussed here came to light through excavations of medieval rubbish heaps, but their materiality shows clear traces of deliberate destruction. Almost all the decrees and endorsed petitions were ripped, cut, or shredded. For many of the documents in the corpus, only the top half has been located within the collection. It is possible that many of the bottom halves are also contained in the collection, but in the absence of the amirs' distinctive signatures that adorn the top parts they are more

---

79. Except, for instance, in geniza-like collections. See more below.

challenging to identify.[80] It seems that the documents were destroyed in a relatively systematic way by being either torn in half or shredded into strips.[81]

Disposal indicates that a document's custodian made a conscious decision that there was no further need to preserve it. Nonetheless, the deliberate way in which the disposal was carried out also reveals something about the perceived value of the document's content. The picture that has emerged so far of these documents' life cycles suggests that the matters they dealt with were trivial from the point of view of the Mamluk administration. The deliberate destruction of documents, however, implies that their content still maintained some importance.[82] The need to rip the documents at the time of their disposal points to a fear that they retained some value: perhaps their content was deemed confidential, or there was a risk of forgery or other reuse not considered suitable for such documentation. This anxiety is clearer in the case of legal documents, since spurious claims made on the basis of out-of-date or counterfeit documentation might have led to real problems in the courts. Such concerns would also have been relevant in an administrative context, where documents containing details pertaining to taxation and criminal justice would have required similarly tactful handling.[83]

Alternatively, the shredding of documents might not reflect perceptions of the documents' content so much as represent a symbolic act of disposal. Instances of such symbolic practices can be found elsewhere, for instance in the Damascus papers, which include several marriage contracts that were ripped up at the time of divorce, with divorce documents composed on the verso of the remaining half.[84] In such cases, the tearing of the document in half seems to represent not the termination of the validity of the document's text but the breaking of the legal ties binding the husband and wife—a symbolic destruction that extended beyond the document itself to reflect the social reality of the legal situation recorded in it.[85] It is not clear whether we witness such direct symbolism within the corpus examined here. The documents in an amir's *dīwān* might have taken on a certain emblematic role, echoing the social capital that holding an *iqṭāʿ* endowed upon a lower-ranking amir. Perhaps the ripping up of these documents represented the end of an amir's tenure as *muqṭaʿ* and the corresponding decommissioning of his archive, or the accession

---

80. There are some fragments within the corpus examined here that do not contain the signature; e.g., A Ch 5156; 5847; 6467; 16196. Only two of the documents in the al-Azkā dossier, A Ch 12502 and 25677, and two in the Bahāʾ al-Dīn dossier, A Ch 366 and 25673c, preserve the full length of the document.

81. In this way, this corpus shows similarities with the Quṣayr corpus, many of whose documents were ripped up "by human hand" or "kneaded into a paper ball of sorts and then tossed away"; Guo, *Commerce, Culture, and Community*, 104.

82. See, e.g., Rustow, *Lost Archive*, 412–13.

83. See, for instance, the destruction of dates in decrees from the Fatimid chancery: ibid., 296–97.

84. Jean-Michel Mouton, Dominique Sourdel, and Janine Sourdel-Thomine, *Mariage et séparation à Damas au moyen âge: Un corpus de 62 documents juridiques inédits entre 337/948 et 698/1299* (Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2013), nos. 6, 38, 35.

85. The significance of marriage contracts as bearers of social and economic, as well as legal, status is discussed in Rapoport, *Marriage, Money, and Divorce*, 54–55.

of a different amir to the role.[86] Alternatively, we might interpret the deliberate shredding of documents as simply symbolic of the moment of disposal, rather as one might shred revision notes after sitting an exam. Whether done to prevent the reconstruction of the text or for more symbolic purposes, shredding can be seen as a conscious marker of the document's shift to another life stage, in which its archival value was ultimately lost.

Archival Spaces: Documents Lying Around?

Although the three life stages examined above emerge quite clearly in the corpus examined here, significant questions remain about some of the more concrete aspects of the documents' progression through these phases. The identification of extended documentary afterlives and the material ways in which the stages of these lives remain visible on the documents highlight the need to identify the physical spaces in which these lives played out. The preservation of documents, insofar as they constitute physical objects, necessarily requires physical spaces. Though the specific physical sites of these documents' medieval preservation are now lost to us, in the remainder of this article I explore the implications of their life cycles for understanding contemporary archival spaces.

The first point to note is that the documents provide insights into the nature of the amir's *dīwān* itself. The spaces in which they were drawn up constituted reasonably elaborate offices, suited to dealing with the paperwork that the amir's administrative roles entailed and boasting a well-trained and skillful staff. This is evident, first of all, in the pervasive presence of consistent cursive chancery-style scripts and in the amirs' attractively written calligraphic signatures. Beyond this, the blazon document reveals that resources and skills for illumination were also cultivated within these spaces—expertise that is unexpected within such a low-level administrative milieu. The amirs' administrative apparatus was clearly not merely practical and rudimentary. Document production and reuse took place in spaces that were fit for purpose, characterized by the presence of skilled scribal, even artistic, personnel.

The life cycles of the documents and especially the patterns of their reuse also shed some light on their longer-term preservation status. It appears that much of this material went through a phase of simply "lying around" before its deliberate disposal, a period of casual storage that was not necessarily deliberately calculated by the documents' custodians. In this state, the documents gradually lost their archival value as the perceived necessity of preserving their textual content progressively declined. By the time of their reuse, the material value of these old documents overshadowed their textual value to such an extent that reuse invested them only with new material meanings, not with textual ones.

Though the notion may appear rather vague, documents lying around are, in fact, profoundly important for understanding the nature of archival spaces in this milieu. These documents remained in a space, either deliberately deposited and kept or simply left there, long enough for their perceived value and meaning to transform. Casual bundle archives containing documents whose texts were of relatively immediate value and whose long-term preservation may have been of limited functional use might have been particularly prone

---

86. Thanks to Yossef Rapoport for this suggestion.

to this treatment. One can imagine such bundles kept on the shelves or the floor of a functioning office until such time as a clear-out took place or office staff requiring scrap paper saw fit to mine them for resources. The lying-around stage should, then, be envisaged as an important part of the spatial and temporal backdrop to the progressing life cycles of the documents.

The most fitting point of reference for documents lying around within this historical milieu is, of course, the Cairo Geniza and the wider canvas of geniza-like practices prevalent within the medieval (as well as ancient and modern) Middle East.[87] In genizas, documents lie around, sometimes for centuries. Indeed, that is theoretically the whole point of a geniza: preserving texts simply because it was not considered acceptable to destroy them, rather than because of a perceived functional value.[88] It is this element of geniza-like practices that has led to their characterization as "counter-archival," which highlights the fact that preservation in such depositories has no implications for the perceived archival value or future accessibility of their contents.[89] The comparison of archaeologically unearthed material with geniza collections is not new.[90] Mark Cohen, for instance, has suggested that the Quṣayr documents might be interpreted as an "Islamic Geniza" owing to the physical state in which the documents were found, which indicated that they had been deliberately shredded.[91] As we have already seen, the condition in which the Quṣayr documents were unearthed is not so different from that of the corpus examined here. Should we, then, see this corpus as constituting part of a geniza-like collection? What does this perspective imply for our understanding of the space in which the documents' lives were played out?

Certainly, the documents lay around somewhere: in a functioning office, a cupboard or storehouse, or perhaps even a dedicated geniza-like space designed more for the documents' entombment than for their accessibility. It is even possible that the documents were ultimately disposed of in a geniza-like depository, rather than being thrown onto a communal rubbish heap. In view of the ambiguities of the documents' modern discovery, it is possible that they remained in such a depository until they were unearthed from its ruins. Nineteenth-century archaeological excavations occurred alongside extensive digging for fertilizer (*sibākh*) by Egyptian farmers, an activity that also furnished documents for the antiquities market and often entailed the destruction of medieval buildings, whose organic

---

87. Joseph Sadan, "Genizah and Genizah-Like Practices in Islamic and Jewish Traditions: Customs Concerning the Disposal of Worn-Out Sacred Books in the Middle Ages, According to an Ottoman Source," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 43, no. 1–2 (1986): 36–58; Mark R. Cohen, "Geniza for Islamicists, Islamic Geniza, and the 'New Cairo Geniza,'" *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 7 (2006): 129–45.

88. Sadan, "Genizah-Like Practices," 36–58. For a welcome reappraisal of the motivations, both religious and social, behind geniza-like depositories, see Rustow, *Lost Archive*, 29–31.

89. Hirschler, "From Archive to Archival Practices," esp. 3–7; Jürgen Paul, "Archival Practices in the Muslim World Prior to 1500," in Bausi et al., *Manuscripts and Archives*, 339–60.

90. And, indeed, the other way round: Marina Rustow, *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), xx–xxi.

91. Cohen, "Geniza for Islamicists," 138.

construction materials served as excellent compost.[92] Given the nature of the Vienna collection, hypotheses regarding its documents' contemporary preservation and disposal must remain conjecture. Nonetheless, the ambiguous status of documents preserved in geniza-like depositories offers a fitting backdrop against which to frame and historically contextualize the phenomenon of documents lying around.

This kind of casual storage shows that it is the point in time when the documents lose their archival value that can reveal the most profound insights into the physical spaces they inhabited. This is because such moments left material traces on the documents, such as evidence of reuse or destruction, which by their very nature encourage us to situate them within a physical world. In addition, the recognition that periods of lying around may have punctuated the progression of these documents' life cycles highlights the human factors influencing archival preservation. Not all of these can be understood as well-planned, calculated, or deliberate.[93] From the little we know about it, the amir's *dīwān* seems just the kind of setting in which one might expect piles or bundles of documents to lie around and be ignored, gradually forgotten about, and later rediscovered. We should, then, seek to understand the archival spaces of the *muqṭaʿ*s' administration as such multifunctional sites of administrative and documentary activity in which the lives of documents sometimes haphazardly progressed.

Conclusion

In this article, I have relied primarily on the tool of materiality to examine the afterlives of documents pertaining to the administration of low-ranking Mamluk *muqṭaʿ*s in parts of Egypt distant from the political capital. In examining this small corpus of decrees and endorsed petitions my aim has not been to provide a definitive interpretation but instead to explore the documentary ecologies prevailing in this underexplored administrative milieu. The preservation context of the material in the Vienna collection makes it challenging, even impossible, to test many of the assertions I have made, and it is important to acknowledge that there are aspects of these documents' lives of which we can never be certain. Even so, I have shown that it is possible to outline the gradual progression of the documents through various life stages in spite of the fragmentary nature of this corpus, or indeed because of it.

The documents' afterlives reveal the shifting values attributed to documents at different stages of their lives. Documents initially preserved in bundle archives for the text they contained gradually took on a greater material significance, their supports offering raw material for a range of enigmatic reuses. Later, the deliberate shredding of much of the material indicates the symbolic end of one period of preservation or use, to be followed

---

92. Cuvigny, "Finds of Papyri," esp. 32–35. Compare also with the Quṣayr documents, which were unearthed in the excavation of a house. Guo, *Commerce, Culture, and Community*, xi–xii, 1–28.

93. It is instructive here to cite the archivist Terry Cook, who has flagged the way in which "archivists have ... traditionally masked much of the messiness of records ... from researchers, presenting instead a well-organized, rationalized, monolithic view of record collection ... that very often never existed that way in operational reality ..."; Terry Cook, "The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape," *Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (2009): 527–28.

by their disposal or discarding. The material way in which such shifts manifest on the documents foregrounds the physical aspects of documentary life cycles. This allows us to characterize the archival spaces utilized by the actors involved in administration. The Mamluk amir's *dīwān* emerges as a multifunctional administrative space. Well equipped and served by highly trained personnel, the *dīwān* was both an active office and a site of document storage, representing the spatial backdrop against which we witness the unfolding of these documents' lives. Identifying the life cycles of the documents is therefore valuable not only for its own sake but also for shedding further light on the still-mysterious documentary activities of Mamluk *muqṭaʿ*s.

The ordinarily overlooked moments in which documents were "lying around" have emerged as key to understanding these archival spaces. Comparable to discussions surrounding geniza-like practices, this phenomenon of casual storage encourages us to envisage various possible modes of preservation for these documents. Documents lying around can perhaps even offer a different way of thinking about genizas, moving beyond the characterization of such practices as simply "counter-archival." "Counter-archival" speaks above all to a scholarly endeavor to discern whether a document or collection is or is not an "archive" or, at the very least, "archival." As this article has tried to show, a more rewarding task is to investigate the full documentary ecology, the broader culture of documentation that prevailed in a particular historical and administrative context.[94] I argue that documents lying around are an important part of this ecology. They reveal the transitions in the meaning granted to documents over the course of their complex lives within the context of physical spaces whose characteristics were determined by specific human needs and activities. Above all, documents lying around bring to the fore the potential ambiguity of a document's value, even to its custodians. The producers, keepers, and reusers of documents may have been uncertain as to whether preservation was, or was going to become, necessary or profitable. Rustow's characterization of geniza-preserved documents as "in limbo" is thus a useful one, and it can be applied well beyond the corpus for which she intended it.[95] This limbo might be seen to refer not only to an intermediate stage between calculated archival preservation and definitive disposal or destruction but also to a state of uncertainty about the potential textual or material value of a document among the people in whose functional space it lay around. We witness what might be designated incidental archiving, whereby documents were kept long-term as a by-product of the preservation and daily use of other documents within the same spaces. Documents lying around may, ultimately, be key to avoiding an overly motive-driven and rationalistic view of archival practices, emphasizing instead the contingencies of circumstance and the potentially significant impact of human uncertainty.

---

94. For the question of "archives" versus "cultures of documentation," see James Pickett and Paolo Sartori, "From the Archetypical Archive to Cultures of Documentation," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 62 (2019): 773–98.

95. Rustow, *Lost Archive*, e.g., 1–2, 402.

Bibliography

Sources

Documents from the Vienna Papyrus Collection are cited using the abbreviation for Arabic paper documents in the collection (*Arabisch Charta*): A Ch.

The al-Azkā dossier:

A Ch 12502	A Ch 25676	A Ch 12503	A Ch 25966
A Ch 25677	A Ch 25674	A Ch 23075	A Ch 2007
A Ch 10809	A Ch 25672	A Ch 16220	A Ch 6239
A Ch 15499	Ch 25675	A Ch 6249	
A Ch 11584	A Ch 15915	A Ch 12531	

The Bahāʾ al-Dīn dossier:

A Ch 366	A Ch 25673c	A Ch 5864

The al-Būshī dossier:

A Ch 17306	A Ch 24993

Individual documents of similar genres:

A Ch 12495	A Ch 5847	A Ch 8984	A Ch 25002a
A Ch 5156	A Ch 6467	A Ch 16196	

Studies

Bauden, Frédéric. "Du destin des archives en Islam: Analyse des données et éléments de réponse." In *La correspondance entre souverains, princes et cités-états: Approches croisées entre l'Orient musulman, l'Occident latin et Byzance (XIIIe–début XVIe siècle)*, edited by Denise Aigle and Stéphane Péquignot, 27–49. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.

———. "The Recovery of Mamlūk Chancery Documents in an Unsuspected Place." In *The Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, edited by Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni, 59–76. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Behrens-Abouseif, Doris. *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and Its Culture.* London: I. B. Tauris, 2007.

Berkel, Maaike van. "Reconstructing Archival Practices in Abbasid Baghdad." *Journal of Abbasid Studies* 1 (2014): 7–22.

Cahen, Claude. "L'évolution de l'iqṭaʿ du IXe au XII siècle: Contribution à une histoire comparée des sociétés médiévales." *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 8, no. 1 (1953): 25–52.

Cohen, Mark R. "Geniza for Islamicists, Islamic Geniza, and the 'New Cairo Geniza.'" *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 7 (2006): 129–45.

Cook, Terry. "The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape." *Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (2009): 497–534.

Cuvigny, Hélène. "The Finds of Papyri: The Archaeology of Papyrology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, edited by Roger Bagnall, 30–58. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Dekkiche, Malika. "Le Caire: carrefour des ambassades; Étude historique et diplomatique de la correspondance échangée entre les sultans mamlouks circassiens et les souverains timourides et turcomans (Qara Qoyunlu–Qaramanides) au XVe s. d'après le ms. ar. 4440 (BnF, Paris)." PhD dissertation, University of Liège, 2011.

Diem, Werner. *Arabische amtliche Briefe des 10. bis 16 Jahrhunderts aus der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek in Wien.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996.

El-Leithy, Tamer. "Living Documents, Dying Archives: Towards a Historical Anthropology of Medieval Arabic Archives." *Al-Qanṭara* 32, no. 2 (2011): 389–434.

Fournet, Jean-Luc. "Archives and Libraries in Greco-Roman Egypt." In *Manuscripts and Archives: Comparative Views on Record-Keeping*, edited by Alessandro Bausi, Christian Brockmann, Michael Friedrich, and Sabine Kienitz, 171–99. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018.

Garcin, Jean-Claude. *Un centre musulman de la Haute-Égypte médiévale, Qūṣ.* Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1976.

Gaubert, Christian, and Jean-Michel Mouton. *Hommes et villages du Fayyoum dans la documentation papyrologique arabe (Xe–XIe siecles).* Geneva: Droz, 2014.

Guo, Li. *Commerce, Culture, and Community in a Red Sea Port in the Thirteenth Century: The Arabic Documents from Quseir.* Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Haarmann, Ulrich. "Joseph's Law: The Careers and Activities of Mamluk Descendants before the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt." In *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, edited by Thomas Philipp and Ulrich Haarmann, 55–84. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

———. "The Sons of Mamluks as Fief-Holders in Late Medieval Egypt." In *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, edited by Tarif Khalidi, 141–68. Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1984.

Hagen, Fredrik, and Kim Ryholt. *The Antiquities Trade in Egypt 1880–1930: The H. O. Lange Papers.* Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2018.

Hirschler, Konrad. "Document Reuse in Medieval Arabic Manuscripts." *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Bulletin* 3, no. 1 (2017): 33–44.

———. "From Archive to Archival Practices: Rethinking the Preservation of Mamlūk Administrative Documents." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136, no. 1 (2016): 1–28.

———. "Studying Mamluk Historiography: From Source-Criticism to the Cultural Turn." In *Ubi Sumus? Quo Vademus? Mamluk Studies—State of the Art*, edited by Stephan Conermann, 159–86. Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2013.

Karabacek, Josef von. *Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer: Führer durch die Ausstellung.* Vienna: Hölder, 1894.

Khan, Geoffrey. "A Copy of a Decree from the Archives of the Fāṭimid Chancery in Egypt." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49, no. 3 (1986): 439–53.

Livingston, Daisy. "Documentary Constellations in Late-Mamlūk Cairo: Property- and *Waqf*-Related Archiving on the Eve of the Ottoman Conquest of Egypt." *Itinerario*, forthcoming.

———. "Managing Paperwork in Mamlūk Egypt (c. 1250–1517): A Documentary Approach to Archival Practices." PhD dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2019.

Loebenstein, Helene. "'Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer': Zur Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek; 100 Jahre sammeln, bewahren, edieren." In *Die Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek: Katalog der Sonderausstellung 100 Jahre Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer*, edited by Helene Loebenstein and Hermann Harrauer, 3–39. Vienna: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 1983.

Loiseau, Julien. "Le silence des archives: Conservation documentaire et historiographie de l'État dans le sultanat mamelouk (XIIIe–XVI siècle)." In *L'autorité de l'écrit au Moyen Âge: Orient-Occident*, edited by Société des Historiens Médiévistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur Public (SHMESP), 285–98. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2009.

Mayer, L. A. *Saracenic Heraldry: A Survey.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.

Mouton, Jean-Michel, Dominique Sourdel, and Janine Sourdel-Thomine. *Mariage et séparation à Damas au moyen âge: Un corpus de 62 documents juridiques inédits entre 337/948 et 698/1299.* Paris: Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 2013.

Müller, Christian. *Der Kadi und seine Zeugen: Studie der mamlukischen Ḥaram-Dokumente aus Jerusalem.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013.

Nicolle, David. *Late Mamlūk Military Equipment.* Damascus: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2011.

Paul, Jürgen. "Archival Practices in the Muslim World Prior to 1500." In *Manuscripts and Archives: Comparative Views on Record-Keeping*, edited by Alessandro Bausi, Christian Brockmann, Michael Friedrich, and Sabine Kienitz, 339–60. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018.

Pickett, James, and Paolo Sartori. "From the Archetypical Archive to Cultures of Documentation." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 62 (2019): 773–98.

Rabie, Hassanein. *The Financial System of Egypt AH 564–741/AD 1169–1341*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Rapoport, Yossef. *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

———. *Rural Economy and Tribal Society in Islamic Egypt: A Study of al-Nābulusī's "Villages of the Fayyum."* Turnhout: Brepols, 2018.

Rustow, Marina. "The Fatimid Petition." *Jewish History* 32 (2019): 351–72.

———. *Heresy and the Politics of Community: The Jews of the Fatimid Caliphate*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008.

———. *The Lost Archive: Traces of a Caliphate in a Cairo Synagogue*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020.

Sadan, Joseph. "Genizah and Genizah-Like Practices in Islamic and Jewish Traditions: Customs Concerning the Disposal of Worn-Out Sacred Books in the Middle Ages, According to an Ottoman Source." *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 43, no. 1–2 (1986): 36–58.

Sassmannshausen, Christian. "Mapping *Sijill* Landscapes: Family Monitoring and Legal Procedure in Late Ottoman Tripoli." In *Lire et écrire l'histoire ottomane*, edited by Vanessa Guéno and Stefan Knost, 173–206. Beirut: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2015.

Sato, Tsugitaka. *State and Rural Society in Medieval Islam: Sultans, Muqtaʿs, and Fallahun*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.

Sijpesteijn, Petra. "The Archival Mind in Early Islamic Egypt: Two Arabic Papyri." In *From al-Andalus to Khurasan: Documents from the Medieval Muslim World*, edited by Petra Sijpesteijn, Lennart Sundelin, Sofía Torallas Tovar, and Amalia Zomeño, 163–86. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Steenbergen, Jo van. *Order out of Chaos: Patronage, Conflict and Mamluk Socio-Political Culture, 1341–1382*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Stern, Samuel M. *Fāṭimid Decrees: Original Documents from the Fāṭimid Chancery*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964.

———. "Petitions from the Mamlūk Period (Notes on the Mamlūk Documents from Sinai)." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29, no. 2 (1966): 233–76.

Vandorpe, Katelijn. "Archives and Dossiers." In *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, edited by Roger S. Bagnall, 216–55. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Walker, Bethany. "The Ceramic Correlates of Decline in the Mamluk Sultanate: An Analysis of Late Medieval Sgraffito Wares." PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 1998.

———. "Ceramic Evidence for Political Transitions in Early Mamluk Egypt." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 8, no. 1 (2004): 1–114.

Being Persian in Late Mamluk Egypt: The Construction and Significance of Persian Ethnic Identity in the Salons of Sultan Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 906–922/1501–1516)*

CHRISTIAN MAUDER
University of Bergen

(christian.mauder@uib.no)

Abstract

People identified as Persians constituted one of the most prominent groups of nonlocal inhabitants in Mamluk Egypt, and earlier scholarship has paid considerable attention to Egyptian-Persian relations. Nevertheless, the determining factors that made someone Persian in Mamluk Egyptian contexts remain poorly understood. Accounts of the majālis, *or learned salons, convened by the penultimate Mamluk Sultan Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 906–922/1501–1516) offer a unique opportunity to examine which factors, agents, and motivations were decisive in the construction of what it meant to be Persian during the late Mamluk period. An examination of these sources demonstrates that language, cultural capital, and region of origin were the most important elements in the process of Persian identity construction at al-Ghawrī's court.*

The key actors in this process were persons who identified themselves as Persians and sought to make strategic use of the benefits their identity could entail within the patronage context of al-Ghawrī's court. In contrast to what is known about other ethnic identities within the Mamluk Sultanate, neither persons who identified as Persians nor their local interlocutors considered ancestry a defining factor of being Persian.

Introduction

At the beginning of an article entitled "Pharaonic History in Medieval Egypt," published in 1983, Michael Cook asked whether there was something that could be considered an

---

Egyptian identity during what he called the medieval period.[1] Cook's approach to this question focused on whether, and to what degree, premodern Egyptian Muslims knew about and identified with the pre-Islamic, in particular Pharaonic, history of the country they inhabited. Although Cook concluded that there was little evidence in favor of the assumption that what premodern Egyptian Muslims knew about Pharaonic times formed a significant part of their identity,[2] the guiding question of his article still deserves attention. One alternative way to approach it is to ask how the premodern Muslim inhabitants of Egypt constructed the identity of those whom they perceived as others—that is, foreigners or non-Egyptians.

In his article, Cook repeatedly contrasted the Egyptian case with the Iranian one[3]— a comparison that would probably have made sense also to the inhabitants of Mamluk Egypt, given that they came into direct contact with Iranians often enough. As Carl Petry noted, immigrants to Cairo from Iran and its environs were outnumbered only by those from Syria and Palestine. He argued that "Iranians, in fact, attained a preeminence in the Cairene elite disproportionate to their [. . .] numbers. They remained conscious exponents of the Persian intellectual tradition in Cairo and were respected for this by their contemporaries."[4] When first published, Petry's findings were particularly noteworthy because they refuted an earlier view of the Mamluk Sultanate, in general, and Egypt, in particular, as unaffected by political, intellectual, and cultural developments in the Mongol and post-Mongol Iranian lands.[5]

This recognition of the importance of the entanglements between Greater Iran and the Mamluk Sultanate notwithstanding, Mamlukists studying Persian-Mamluk interactions have so far largely focused on military, economic, and diplomatic encounters[6] or on the

---

1. M. Cook, "Pharaonic History in Medieval Egypt," *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983): 67–103, at 67.

2. Cook, "Pharaonic History," 99–100. See also the older study referenced in Cook's article: U. Haarmann, "Regional Sentiment in Medieval Islamic Egypt," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43, no. 1 (1980): 55–66.

3. Cook, "Pharaonic History," 68, 90, 100–101. See also Haarmann, "Regional Sentiment," 56–57.

4. C. Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 61, 67–68.

5. E.g., U. Haarmann, "Miṣr: 5. The Mamlūk Period 1250–1517," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. J. Bearman et al., 7:164–177 (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2009), 165.

6. Given the recent boom in the study of Mamluk diplomacy, the following list of relevant studies does not claim to be exhaustive: M. Ağalarlı, "XVI. Yüzyılın Başlarında Safevi Devletiyle Memlük Devleti Arasında Siyasi İlişkilere Genel Bir Bakiş," *Uşak Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 3, no. 2 (2010): 124–135; R. Amitai, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260–1281* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); multiple contributions in R. Amitai, ed., *The Mongols in the Islamic Lands: Studies in the History of the Ilkhanate* (Aldershot, Ashgate Variorum, 2007); R. Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260–1335)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); A. F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); W. W. Clifford, "Some Observations on the Course of Mamluk-Safavid Relations (1502–1516/908–922): I and II," *Der Islam* 70 (1993): 245–278; M. Dekkiche, "Le Caire: Carrefour des ambassades; Étude historique et diplomatique de la correspondance échangée entre les sultans mamlouks circassiens et les souverains timourides et turcomans (Qara-Qoyunlu-Qaramanides) au XVᵉ s. d'après le ms. ar 4440 (BnF, Paris)" (PhD diss., University of Liège, 2011); M. Dekkiche, "New Source, New Debate: Re-evaluation of the Mamluk-Timurid Struggle for Religious Supremacy

presence in Mamluk lands of individual figures, texts, objects, cultural techniques, practices, or bodies of knowledge that were considered Persian in one way or another.[7] Yet rarely, if at all, have scholars asked what the term "Persian" and its Arabic equivalents, such as *fārisī* or *ʿajamī*, actually meant in Mamluk contexts.[8]

---

in the Hijaz (Paris, BnF MS ar. 4440)," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 18 (2014–15): 247–272; C. Mauder, "A Severed Head, a Poetry Slam, and a Shiʿī Visiting al-Shāfiʿī's Tomb: Symbolic and Literary Communication in Mamluk-Safawid Diplomatic Encounters," in *Studies on the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517): Proceedings of a German-Japanese Workshop Held at Tokyo, November 5–6, 2016*, ed. S. Conermann and T. Miura (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, forthcoming); M. Melvin-Koushki, "The Delicate Art of Aggression: Uzun Hasan's *Fathnama* to Qaytbay of 1469," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2011): 193–214; H. Rabie, "Political Relations Between the Safavids of Persia and the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria in the Early Sixteenth Century," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 15 (1978): 75–81; and most recently the pertinent contributions in F. Bauden and M. Dekkiche, eds., *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); R. Amitai and S. Conermann, eds., *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History* (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019).

7. See, e.g., D. Behrens-Abouseif, "Sultan al-Ghawrī and the Arts," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 6 (2002): 71–94, at 75, 82–83, 85; A. Bodrogligeti, *A Fourteenth Century Turkic Translation of Saʿdī's "Gulistān": Sayf-i Sarāyī's "Gulistān biʾt-turkī"* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969); J. Eckmann, "The Mamluk-Kipchak Literature," *Central Asiatic Journal* 8 (1963): 304–319, at 307–309, 317; K. D'hulster, "Some Notes on Sayf-Sarāyī's *Gülistān bi t-Türkī*," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras V*, ed. U. Vermeulen and K. D'hulster, 451–70 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007); K. D'hulster, "'Sitting with Ottomans and Standing with Persians': The *Šāhnāme-yi Türkī* as a Highlight of Mamluk Court Culture," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras VI*, ed. U. Vermeulen and K. D'hulster, 229–256 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010); B. Flemming, "Šerīf, Sultan Ġavrī und die ‚Perser'," *Der Islam* 45 (1969): 81–93; Y. Frenkel, *Is there a Mamlūk Culture?* (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014), 29–30; Y. Frenkel, "The Mamlūk Sultanate and Its Neighbors: Economic, Social and Cultural Entanglements," in Amitai and Conermann, *Mamluk Sultanate*, 39–60, at 43–45; U. Haarmann, "Yeomanly Arrogance and Righteous Rule: Fażl Allāh Rūzbihān Khunjī and the Mamluks of Egypt," in *Iran and Iranian Studies: Essays in Honor of Iraj Afshar*, ed. K. Eslami, 109–124 (Princeton, NJ: Zagros, 1998); U. Haarmann, "The Late Triumph of the Persian Bow: Critical Voices on the Mamluk Monopoly on Weaponry," in *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, ed. T. Philipp and U. Haarmann, 174–187 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 183–187; A. Schimmel, "Some Glimpses of the Religious Life in Egypt during the Later Mamluk Period," *Islamic Studies* 4 (1965): 353–392, at 378.

8. More research has been done on other ethnic identities in the Mamluk Sultanate. See, e.g., S. Conermann, "Volk, Ethnie oder Stamm? Die Kurden aus Mamlukischer Sicht," in *Mamlukica: Studies on the History and Society of the Mamluk Period*, ed. S. Conermann, 317–57 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2013); R. Irwin, "How Circassian Were the Circassian Mamluks?," in Amitai and Conermann, *Mamluk Sultanate*, 109–122; B. Lellouch, "Qu'est-ce qu'un Turc? (Égypte, Syrie, xvie siècle)," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (2013): 1–20; J. Loiseau, *Les Mamelouks XIIIe–XVIe siècle: Une expérience du pouvoir dans l'Islam médiéval* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2014), 173–203; K. Yosef, *Ethnic Groups, Social Relationships and Dynasty in the Mamluk Sultanate* (Bonn: Annemarie-Schimmel-Kolleg, 2012), especially 3–4; J. van den Bent, "None of the Kings on Earth Is Their Equal in ʿAṣabiyya: The Mongols in Ibn Khaldūn's Works," *Al-Masāq* 28, no. 2 (2016): 171–186; J. van den Bent, "Mongols in Mamluk Eyes: Representing Ethnic Others in the Medieval Middle East" (PhD diss. University of Amsterdam, 2020); K. Yosef, "*Dawlat al-Atrāk* or *Dawlat al-Mamālīk*: Ethnic Origin or Slave Origin as the Defining Characteristic of the Ruling Elite in the Mamlūk Sultanate," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012): 387–410; K. Yosef, "Cross-Boundary Hatred: (Changing) Attitudes towards Mongol and 'Christian' *Mamlūks* in the Mamluk Sultanate," in Amitai and Conermann, *Mamluk Sultanate*, 149–214; Frenkel, "Neighbors," 45–48. On Persia and Persian identities in the early Islamicate period, see S. B. Savant, *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); on how Muslims of the early ʿAbbasid period remembered pre-Islamic Persia and its conquest, see S. Savran, *Arabs and Iranians in the*

The present article seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Persian presence in Mamluk Egyptian society, in general, and in Cairo-based late Mamluk court life, in particular. To this end, it elucidates first and foremost how key figures in a late Mamluk court understood and constructed Persian ethnic identity. Behind this question stands a concept of identity that is informed by insights from research on ethnicity in other premodern societies, especially in late antique and medieval Europe. These studies indicate that ethnic identity is not a fixed and naturally given quality but the result of constructive social processes of labeling and negotiation in which both the labeled person or group and others can partake. Such relational processes typically occur when different groups separated by cultural, linguistic, or other boundaries come into contact and interact with each other. In these processes, various agents can attribute different ethnic identities to one and the same person or group in different contexts and at different times. These identities, in turn, can entail a multitude of social, legal, and political consequences, and they should be seen as both situational and strategic.[9] The social significance of ethnic identities is based on their shared recognition and acceptance as true. As Peter Webb puts it: "Ethnicities must be believed in to become real."[10]

Various factors contribute to the construction of an ethnic identity. In Latin medieval Europe, membership in a group defined through blood ties and shared ancestry (*gens*), legal traditions (*leges*), language (*lingua*), and customs (*mores*) were often seen as characterizing ethnic groups, although European nationalists from the nineteenth century onward typically focused primarily on the aspect of blood ties.[11] Another important observation

---

Islamic Conquest Narrative: Memory and Identity Construction in Islamic Historiography, 750–1050 (London: Routledge, 2018); and on ethnonyms for Persians in non-Persian languages, see O. Kommer, S. Liccardo, and A. Nowak, "Comparative Approaches to Ethnonyms: The Case of the Persians," *Hungarian Historical Review* 7, no. 1 (2018): 18–56.

9. R. Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001), 39–56, at 40, 42; T. Reuter, "Whose Race, Whose Ethnicity? Recent Medievalists' Discussions of Identity," in *Medieval Polities and Modern Mentalities*, ed. J. L. Nelson, 100–108 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 101, 103; J. A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 4–6. See also P. Geary, "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages," *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 113 (1983): 15–26, at 18, 21; W. Pohl, "Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity," in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, ed. W. Pohl and H. Reimitz, 17–69 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 21–22; F. Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, ed. F. Barth, 9–38 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 9–10, 13–16, 33–34; N. Adlparvar and M. Tadros, "The Evolution of Ethnicity Theory: Intersectionality, Geopolitics and Development," *IDS Bulletin* 47 (2016): 123–136, at 125–126.

10. P. Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 11.

11. Bartlett, "Concepts," 44–54. See also Geary, "Construct," 17–21; W. Pohl, *Die Völkerwanderung: Eroberung und Integration* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002), 17–18; W. Pohl, "Introduction: Strategies of Distinction," in Pohl and Reimitz, *Strategies of Distinction*, 1–15, at 4, 7–9; W. Pohl, "Introduction: Ethnicity, Religion and Empire," in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1100*, ed. W. Pohl, C. Gantner, and R. Payne, 1–23 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 9–10; W. Pohl, "Introduction: Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile," in *Strategies of Identification: Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. W. Pohl and G. Heydemann, 1–64 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 3, 6–8, 10; Pohl, "Telling," 17–19, 22–61.

from the European context is that the attribution of specific ethnic identities is often especially pronounced in the case of high-ranking political actors. As Timothy Reuter put it: "Ethnicity appears to have lit up in the presence of rulers in much the same way as fluorescent clothing does in the presence of street lighting."[12]

Given that these insights have been obtained through the study of European societies, we cannot tacitly assume that they necessarily apply also to ethnic groups beyond the indistinct borders of Europe. However, Peter Webb's recent work on Arab ethnicity has demonstrated that theoretical findings derived from the study of European ethnicities can be fruitfully applied to Islamicate contexts.[13] Moreover, earlier research on the specific case of premodern Persian identity suggests that many of the factors that historians of late antique and medieval Europe have identified as defining ethnic identities also play a role in the Persian case.[14] This is perhaps most obvious for what medieval European sources call *lingua*. In his much noted monograph *Die „Persophonie": Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens*, Bert G. Fragner argues forcefully for the importance of language as a constitutive factor of Persian identity and a Persian cultural sphere.[15] His point of view is in accord with our knowledge about ethnicity in the greater Mediterranean world more broadly[16] and with the findings of other specialists in premodern Persian history.[17] It thus seems worthwhile to explore whether and to what degree other insights derived from the study of premodern European ethnicities can likewise be applied to the Persian case.

A noteworthy similarity between publications on ethnicity in Europe and those on the Islamicate world is that they often remain on a rather general level and relatively rarely engage with the construction of particular ethnic identities in a specific time and place.[18] In this, they reflect the fact that the construction of specific ethnic identities in premodern societies often evades historical analysis because of a lack of appropriate sources.[19] We are thus fortunate to have at our disposal a set of texts that allows a deeper understanding of the

---

12. Reuter, "Race," 103–104. See also Geary, "Construct," 23–25.

13. Webb, *Imagining*, especially 4, 9–15. For an earlier study likewise arguing for the applicability of findings on ethnicity in Europe to the Islamicate world, see Armstrong, *Nations*, especially 3, and for comparative reflections on ethnicity in Europe and the Islamicate world, see Pohl, "Ethnicity."

14. See, e.g., Savant, *Muslims*, whose primary theoretical focus, however, is "memory" rather than "ethnicity."

15. B. G. Fragner, *Die „Persophonie": Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999), especially 16–23.

16. E.g., H. Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 41–45.

17. E.g., M. Cooperson, "'Arabs' and 'Iranians': The Uses of Ethnicity in the Early Abbasid Period," in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, ed. A. Q. Ahmed et al., 364–382 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 368–375, 377, 382; A. Amanat, "Remembering the Persianate," in *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, ed. A. Amanat and A. Ashraf, 15–62 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 32–41. On the connection between language and (ethnic) identity, see in detail M. Bucholtz and K. Hall, "Language and Identity," in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. A. Duranti, 369–94 (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), especially 371–374.

18. On arguments for the usefulness of broader general approaches, see, e.g., Armstrong, *Nations*, 3–4; and on the need to study ethnicities in a specific time and place, see Webb, *Imagining*, 7.

19. Geary, "Construct," 21. See also Reuter, "Race," 101.

construction and the significance of Persian ethnic identity at a late Mamluk court—namely, the literary representations of the *majālis*, or learned salons, convened by the penultimate Mamluk Sultan Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 906–922/1501–1516). They repeatedly attest to the prominent roles played by persons, texts, and cultural techniques labeled "Persian" in the life of his court in general, as earlier scholarship has already noted.[20] However, the deep insights that these sources offer into late Mamluk processes of constructing, claiming, and affirming ethnic identities have so far largely escaped scholarly attention.

The present article seeks to shed light on these processes within a specific and comparatively well-documented social context. Following a short synopsis of the historical background and the available sources, I aim to answer to the following questions: What made a person Persian in al-Ghawrī's *majālis*? Who could make someone Persian? And why would one want to be Persian? In particular, the article shows that language, cultural capital, and region of origin were the most important factors in the process of Persian identity construction at this late Mamluk court. The key actors in this process were persons who identified themselves as Persians and sought to make strategic use of the benefits that their identity could entail within the patronage context of al-Ghawrī's court.[21]

Historical Background and Sources

The late Mamluk Sultan Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī (also sometimes erroneously spelled "Qānṣūh al-Ghūrī") is today best known as the loser of the Battle of Marj Dābiq of 922/1516, in which he met his death after witnessing the invading Ottoman forces rout the Mamluk army north of Aleppo—an event that heralded the complete conquest of the Mamluk realm at the hands of Selīm the Grim one year later. Thanks to the work of Carl Petry, Albrecht Fuess, and others, historians with an interest in the Mamluk Sultanate are today also aware of the innovative means through which al-Ghawrī sought to adjust the political, fiscal, and military structures of the Mamluk Sultanate to address the domestic and transregional challenges of the early tenth/sixteenth century, such as the rise of the Safawids, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, and the sudden appearance of Portuguese ships in the vicinity of the Arabian Peninsula. In response, al-Ghawrī significantly expanded the number of firearms available to the Mamluk army, experimented with disentangling late Mamluk patterns of landholding from the structure of the military, and established revolving sources of funds reserved for his personal use by manipulating religious endowments, among other actions.[22]

---

20. See, e.g., R. Irwin, "The Political Thinking of the 'Virtuous Ruler,' Qansuh al-Ghawri," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2008): 37–49; D'hulster, "'Sitting'"; Flemming, "Šerif"; B. Flemming, "Aus den Nachtgesprächen Sultan Ġaurīs," in *Folia rara: Wolfgang Voigt LXV. diem natalem celebranti ab amicis et catalogorum codicum orientalium conscribendorum collegis dedicata*, ed. H. Franke, W. Heissig, and W. Treue, 22–28 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976); Behrens-Abouseif, "Arts," 73.

21. On the related topic of Ottoman Turkish elements in the *majālis*, see C. Mauder, "Ottomanization before the Conquest? Mamluk-Ottoman Religious and Cultural Entanglements in the Courtly Salons of Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī and Post-Conquest Gatherings," in *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition: Continuity and Change in Egypt and Bilad al-Sham in the Sixteenth Century II*, ed. S. Conermann and G. Şen (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, forthcoming).

22. See especially A. Fuess, "Dreikampf um die Macht zwischen Osmanen, Mamlūken und Safawiden

Concomitantly and, as I argue, complementarily to these innovative steps in the realm of state organization, al-Ghawrī engaged in multiple large-scale projects of patronage. Best known among these is the construction of several buildings, including his lavish funeral complex in the heart of Cairo, which integrated novel architectural elements originating from the Islamicate East into a Mamluk framework of sultanic architecture.[23] Moreover, al-Ghawrī made a name for himself as the sponsor of the first complete versified translation of the Persian verse epos *Shāhnāma* into Turkish, a project to which I will return below.[24]

Less well known, at least until recently, is al-Ghawrī's practice of convening *majālis* at the Cairo Citadel once to several times a week. At these sessions he discussed scholarly, religious, and at times also political issues with members of the local scholarly establishment, administrative officials, itinerant scholars, litterateurs, envoys, and foreign dignitaries as well as marginal figures such as musicians and jesters. In terms of scholarly disciplines, questions of Islamic law clearly predominated, followed by Quranic exegesis, creedal and rational theology, stories about the prophets before Muḥammad, various forms of poetry and prose literature, prophetic traditions and accounts of the life of the Prophet, non-prophetic history, philosophy, and various other fields of knowledge, including the natural sciences.[25]

Although references to al-Ghawrī's *majālis* appear in various late Mamluk and post-Mamluk sources,[26] most of our data about these events stem from three late Mamluk works

(1500–1517): Warum blieben die Mamlūken auf der Strecke?," in *Die Mamlūken: Studien zu ihrer Geschichte und Kultur; Zum Gedenken an Ulrich Haarmann (1942–1999)*, ed. S. Conermann and A. Pistor-Hatam, 239–250 (Schenefeld: EB-Verlag, 2003); A. Fuess, "Les janissaires, les mamelouks et les armes à feu: Une comparaison des systèmes militaires ottoman et mamelouk à partir du milieu du XVᵉ siècle," *Turcica* 41 (2009): 209–227; C. Petry, *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamlūk Sultans al-Ashraf Qāytbāy and Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī in Egypt* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993); C. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

23. K. A. Alhamzah, *Late Mamluk Patronage: Qansuh al-Ghūrī's Waqfs and His Foundations in Cairo* (Boca Raton, FL: Universal Publishers, 2009); Behrens-Abouseif, "Arts," 79–84.

24. On this translation, see, e.g., Flemming, "Šerif"; D'hulster, "'Sitting'" (with detailed references to earlier studies); A. Zajączkowski, "Treny filozofów na śmierć Iskendera: Podług mamelucko-tureckiej wersji *Šāh-nāme*," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 28, no. 2 (1965): 13–57; A. Zajączkowski, "La plus ancienne traduction turque (en vers) du *Šāh-nāme* de l'État Mamelouk d'Égypte (XV–XVIᵉ siècles)," *Türk Dili Araştırmaları Yıllığı Belleten* (1966): 51–63; A. Zajączkowski, "Şeh-Name'nin Ilk Türkçe Manzumesinde Atasözleri ve Deylimler (Özet)," in *XI. Türk Dil Kurultayında Okunan Bilimsel Bildiriler 1966*, ed. Türk Dil Kurumu, 1–7 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1968); S. Bağci, "From Translated Word to Translated Image: The Illustrated *Şehnâme-i Türkî* Copies," *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 162–176; N. Atasoy, "Un manuscrit Mamlūk illustré du *Šāhnāma*," *Revue des études islamiques* 37 (1969): 151–58. For editions, see A. Zajączkowski, ed., *Turecka wersja Šāh-nāme z Egiptu mameluckiego* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawn, 1965); Z. Kültüral and L. Beyreli, eds., *Şerîfî Şehnâme Çevirisi* (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu, 1999).

25. See, in detail, Mauder, *Salon*, chap. 4.

26. E.g., Kültüral and Beyreli, *Şehnâme Çevrisi*, 1990–1992; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Iyās al-Ḥanafī, *Die Chronik des Ibn Ijās: Mujallad 5, Min sana 922 ilā sana 928 h. (1516–1522)*, 2nd ed., ed. M. Muṣṭafā (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1961), 89; Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Ḥanbalī, *Durr al-ḥabab fī tārīkh aʿyān Ḥalab*, ed. M. M. al-Fākhūrī and Y. ʿAbbāra (Damascus: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1972–1973), 2(1):48; Muṣṭafā ʿAlī, *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century: Mustafa Âli's "Mevaʾidüʾn-Nefaʾis fī Kavaʿidiʾl-Mecalis";*

claiming to constitute eyewitness accounts of what was said and done during the meetings.[27] Two of these works, *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya fī ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-Qurʾāniyya* by one Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, known as al-Sharīf, and *al-Kawkab al-durrī fī masāʾil al-Ghawrī* of unknown authorship, have been known to scholarship since the mid-twentieth century and are available in incomplete editions.[28] The third, likewise anonymous, account of the *majālis*, *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya fī al-nawādir al-Ghawriyya*, was rediscovered only recently, as announced in the present journal.[29] Each of the three sources exhibits a distinct thematic and chronological focus, but their accounts of the *majālis* are remarkably consistent. In the case of *al-Kawkab al-durrī* and *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya*, this consistency is the result of textual interdependence between the two texts, which could share the same (presently unknown) author. *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya*, however, is not textually related to the other two works and thus represents an independent literary tradition of writing about al-Ghawrī's *majālis*. The fact that its account of the sultan's salons nevertheless largely agrees in content, though typically not in wording (beyond five dozen instances), allows the conclusion that both literary traditions about al-Ghawrī's salons are based on and reflect what took place during these meetings. It is therefore justified to use these texts as historical sources on late Mamluk court culture, including the identities of its participants.[30]

When relying on the accounts of al-Ghawrī's *majālis* for historical information, we nevertheless have to bear in mind who wrote them, and for what reasons. The fact that we know almost nothing about the author(s) of the two anonymous works *al-Kawkab al-durrī* and *al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya* makes answering these questions particularly difficult, as I show elsewhere.[31] For the purposes of the present article, we therefore focus on al-Sharīf's *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya*, which is also the source that provides the most information on Persian ethnic identity at al-Ghawrī's court.

Even in al-Sharīf's case, all that we know about him and his work comes from the text itself, as other Mamluk authors, according to our present knowledge, found neither him

---

"*Tables of Delicacies Concerning the Rules of Social Gatherings*," ed. and trans. D. S. Brookes (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 2003), 95.

27. On these texts in detail, see Mauder, *Salon*, chap. 3.1.

28. The first publication providing detailed information on the works was M. Awad, "Sultan al-Ghawri: His Place in Literature and Learning (Three Books Written under His Patronage)," in *Actes du XXᵉ Congrès International des Orientalistes: Bruxelles 5–10. September 1938*, 321–322 (Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1940). The edition of both texts—ʿA. ʿAzzām, ed., *Majālis al-Sulṭān al-Ghawrī: Ṣafaḥāt min tārīkh Miṣr min al-qarn al-ʿāshir al-hijrī* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Lajnat al-Taʾlīf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1941)—has been reprinted several times. The unicum manuscripts of the texts are MS Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi, Ahmet III 2680 (*Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya*) and MS Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi, Ahmet III 1377 (*al-Kawkab al-durrī*). Hereinafter, references to the manuscripts of the two works are preceded by "(MS)" and use the pagination in the manuscripts. Page numbers in the edition are indicated by "(ed. ʿAzzām)." All quotations for which references to both the edition and the manuscripts are given are based on the manuscripts.

29. C. Mauder and C. A. Markiewicz, "A New Source on the Social Gatherings (*majālis*) of the Mamluk Sultan Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 24 (2016): 145–148. All quotations from this work refer to the two-volume unicum manuscript MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Ayasofya 3312 and 3313.

30. See Mauder, *Salon*, chap. 3.1.5.

31. See Mauder, *Salon*, chaps. 3.1.2 and 3.1.3.

nor his work worthy of mention.[32] This might have to do with his origins. Al-Sharīf was an outsider who hailed from the *bilād al-ʿajam* (lands of the Persians).[33] His work reveals that he was literate in Persian, Turkish, and Arabic, although his knowledge of Arabic was somewhat imperfect, if we are to judge from the numerous linguistic peculiarities that *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya* exhibits. Learned in Ḥanafī jurisprudence, al-Sharīf seems to have come to Cairo in the period of political instability in Greater Iran that saw the rise to power of the Shīʿī Safawids, and it seems plausible that his decision to leave his homeland was connected to the political, economic, religious, and social transformations that characterized the turn from the ninth/fifteenth to the tenth/sixteenth century.[34] Al-Sharīf moved to Cairo, where he managed to attract the attention of Sultan al-Ghawrī, who made him a member of his *majālis*. According to his work, this step must have taken place in or before Ramaḍān 910/ February 1505.[35] Over the subsequent months, up to Shaʿbān 911/December 1505,[36] al-Sharīf was a regular, and, if we are to trust his text, very active participant in the sultan's *majālis*, as his work, which is written from a first-person perspective, attributes to him the second-largest number of recorded contributions to the *majālis* discussions. Only the sultan himself is portrayed as engaging more actively in the discussions.

In addition to being a regular member of the sultan's circle, al-Sharīf also benefited from al-Ghawrī's patronage by being appointed to the paid position of a Sufi in the latter's funeral complex.[37] Yet al-Sharīf's position as the ruler's client, and the benefits that came with it, were highly dependent on the sultan's favor, as became clear during a series of debates about a question of Quranic exegesis in which al-Sharīf so vehemently defended his opinions against the majority of the participants that tensions grew to the point where the sultan summarily banished all those present, including al-Sharīf, from his presence and temporarily discontinued the holding of *majālis*.[38] In reaction to this development,

---

32. For more on what is known about this text and its author, see Mauder, *Salon*, chap. 3.1.1.

33. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 221; (ed. ʿAzzām) 101. On the translation of *ʿajam* as "Persian" in the present context, see below.

34. On the emigration of Iranian Sunnis in the period of the Safawid rise to power, see, e.g., E. Glassen, "Krisenbewusstsein und Heilserwartung in der islamischen Welt zu Beginn der Neuzeit," in *Die islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Festschrift für Hans Robert Roemer zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. U. Haarmann and P. Bachmann, 167–79 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1979), 175; B. Flemming, "Turks: Turkish Literature of the Golden Horde and of the Mamlūks," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 10:716–18, at 718; L. Berger, *Gesellschaft und Individuum in Damaskus 1550–1791: Kultur, Recht und Politik in muslimischen Gesellschaften* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2007), 161–63.

35. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 3, 6; (ed. ʿAzzām) 2, 5.

36. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 263; (ed. ʿAzzām) 141.

37. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 115; (ed. ʿAzzām) 36. See also Behrens-Abouseif, "Arts," 77; Flemming, "Nachtgesprächen," 24. On al-Ghawrī's relationship with Sufi communities, see also C. Mauder, "Der Sultan, sein geschwätziger Barbier und die Sufis: Ibn Iyās über den Fall des Kamāl ad-Dīn b. Šams im Kairo des 16. Jahrhunderts," in *Macht bei Hofe: Narrative Darstellungen in ausgewählten Quellen; Ein interdisziplinärer Reader*, ed. S. Conermann and A. Kollatz, 79–98 (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2020).

38. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 259–68; (ed. ʿAzzām) 135–144. On this debate, see also Mauder, *Salon*, chap. 4.2.2; C. Mauder, "Does a Mamluk Sultan Hold Religious Authority? Quranic Exegesis and Hadith Studies in Late Mamluk Courtly *majālis*," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* (forthcoming).

which posed a direct threat to al-Sharīf's newly found influence and livelihood, he presented the ruler with his work *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya*, which, after a detailed chronological account of the *majālis* in which al-Sharīf participated in 910–911/1505, ends with a plea for the sultan's forgiveness.[39] Whether al-Sharīf succeeded in his attempt to regain the sultan's favor by penning a literary work is unknown, but the information we have about him and his work makes it clear that we have to understand it as part of a strategic effort to regain and maintain sultanic patronage in a time of political turmoil and personal insecurity. We must also bear this fact in mind when we examine how al-Sharīf, as an immigrant from the "lands of the Persians," addresses and portrays Persian ethnicity, especially when we discuss below the question of why one would want to be Persian as a member of al-Ghawrī's court.

Al-Sharīf was certainly not the first person from the Islamicate East who came to Egypt in hope of a better life. Earlier periods of Mamluk history, including especially the eighth/fourteenth century with the long third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 709–741/1310–1341) and the reigns of Barqūq (r. 784–792/1382–1389 and 793–802/1390–1399), likewise saw extensive migration to Cairo by Persians, some of whom attained high office and rank.[40] Yet al-Sharīf's predecessors often had to face strong anti-Persian stereotypes in Egypt, as Petry and others have shown. Persians were seen as openly or clandestinely siding with religious communities understood to be deviant, including antinomian Sufi groups.[41] Mamluk sultans sometimes even ordered all Persians to leave Cairo under threat of capital punishment, regarding them as possible traitors or supporters of rival foreign powers. In times of crisis, graffiti throughout the city called for the killing of all Persians found therein

---

39. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 268–70; (ed. ʿAzzām) 145–46.

40. On Persians in the Mamluk realm during the eighth/fourteenth century, see, e.g., O. Amir, "Niẓām al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Ṭayyārī: An Artist in the Court of the Ilkhans and Mamluks," *Asiatische Studien* 71, no. 4 (2018): 1075–1091; E. I. Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), especially 112–136; U. Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33, no. 1 (1988): 81–114, at 92; C. Juvin, "A Mamluk Qurʾānic *Ǧuzʾ* and Its Connection with *Amīr* ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ǧazāʾirī," *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 10 (2019): 105–135, at 111, 115–116; A. Levanoni, "A Supplementary Source for the Study of Mamluk Social History: The *Taqārīẓ*," *Arabica* 60 (2013): 146–177, at 170–173, 175; M. Melvin-Koushki, "How to Rule the World: Occult-Scientific Manuals of the Early Modern Persian Cosmopolis," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 11 (2018): 140–154, at 150; M. Melvin-Koushki, "In Defense of Geomancy: Šaraf al-Dīn Yazdī Rebuts Ibn Ḥaldūn's Critique of the Occult Sciences," *Arabica* 64 (2017): 346–403, passim; M. Melvin-Koushki, "Powers of One: The Mathematicalization of the Occult Sciences in the High Persianate Tradition," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 5 (2017): 127–199, at 131–132; M. Melvin-Koushki, "Imperial Talismanic Love: Ibn Turka's *Debate of Feast and Fight* (1426) as Philosophical Romance and Lettrist Mirror for Timurid Princes," *Der Islam* 96, no. 1 (2019): 42–86, passim; J. van Steenbergen, "The Amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī, the Qalāwūnid Sultanate, and the Cultural Matrix of Mamlūk Society: A Reassessment of Mamlūk Politics in the 1360s," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131, no. 3 (2011): 423–443, at 440; Yosef, "Hatred," 179–180. For a particularly well-documented case from the early ninth/fifteenth century, see C. Petry, "'Travel Patterns of Medieval Notables in the Near East' Reconsidered: Contrasting Trajectories, Interconnected Networks," in *Everything Is on the Move: The Mamluk Empire as a Node in (Trans-)Regional Networks*, ed. S. Conermann, 165–179 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2014), 170–173. For the broader context, Petry's early groundbreaking study, *Civilian Elite*, especially 61–68, is still of fundamental importance.

41. For a reflection of this view in the *majālis* accounts, see *al-ʿUqūd*, 2: fol. 46v.

in the name of Islam. Locals particularly disliked those Persians who had managed to enter the highest echelons of the Mamluk ruling apparatus.[42] Against this background, the case of Persians at al-Ghawrī's court is particularly noteworthy, as it seems to point to markedly different and, as far as we can say, less hostile ways in which Mamluk Egyptians and their Persian interlocutors perceived and interacted with each other.

Who Could Make Someone Persian?

On the basis of the three *majālis* accounts, we can identify three key factors in the construction of Persian ethnic identity in al-Ghawrī's *majālis*: first, proficiency in the Persian language; second, mastery of knowledge as well cultural techniques understood to be Persian; and third, a Persian place of origin that was indicated, among other things, through proper names.

To members of al-Ghawrī's court, being Persian meant first and foremost that one could speak Persian. To be sure, Persians were not the only ones who knew this language. For example, Sultan al-Ghawrī himself claimed to have a good command of Persian, among other languages such as Arabic, Turkish, and Circassian.[43] The fact that the corpus of poetry attributed to the sultan includes some Persian verses lends credibility to this claim.[44] Yet what distinguished Persian native speakers from others was their higher level of language proficiency, including a broader vocabulary that outshone even that of the sultan, who had to accept the superior knowledge of native speakers, although a source from his court credits him with knowing Persian better than a Persian.[45] A case in point is a situation described in al-Sharīf's *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya* at which a sweetmeat made of flour and honey known as *fālūdaj* in Arabic was served. Interested in improving his Persian vocabulary, the sultan asked al-Sharīf, the first person-narrator of the work who, as we have seen, hailed from the "lands of the Persians," what the dish was called in Persian. The latter told him that its Persian name was *pālūda*.[46]

That al-Sharīf was of Persian-speaking background is confirmed not only by his knowledge of the niceties of Persian vocabulary but also by the abovementioned linguistic

---

42. C. Petry, *The Criminal Underworld in a Medieval Islamic Society: Narratives from Cairo and Damascus under the Mamluks* (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2012), 260–262. See also Petry, "'Travel Patterns," 173–74; L. Fernandes, "Mamluk Politics and Education: The Evidence from Two Fourteenth Century Waqfiyya," *Annales islamologiques* 23 (1987): 87–98, at 96.

43. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 257; (ed. ʿAzzām) 132–133.

44. E.g., M. Yalçın, ed. and trans., *The Dîvân of Qânsûh al-Ghûrî: Kansu Gavri Divanı* (Istanbul: Bay, 2002), 76–78. On the poems attributed to the sultan, with references to earlier studies, see C. Mauder, "Legitimating Sultanic Rule in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian: Late Mamluk Rulers as Authors of Religious Poetry," in *Rulers as Authors in the Islamic World: Knowledge, Authority and Legitimacy*, ed. M. Fierro, S. Brentjes, and T. Seidensticker (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

45. Flemming, "Šerīf," 84; D'hulster, "'Sitting,'" 249.

46. A "kind of sweet beverage made of water, flour and honey (according to others, a mixture of grated apples with sugar and cardamoms)"; F. Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary: Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to Be Met with in Persian Literature*, 3rd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), 233. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 253; (ed. ʿAzzām) 131. See also Flemming, "Nachtgesprächen," 25.

peculiarities in his work, which, while not in line with the rules of Classical Arabic, are perfectly understandable from a native speaker of Persian who had learned Arabic as a second language. Even the title of the work, *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya fī ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-Qurʾāniyya* instead of *Nafāʾis **al**-majālis al-sulṭāniyya fī ḥaqāʾiq **al**-asrār al-Qurʾāniyya*, indicates a less than perfect command of Classical Arabic. It seems possible that the author considered the first two words of both parts of the title to be connected not through an Arabic *iḍāfa* or genitive construction, which would have required the second element to be in the *status determinativus*, but rather by means of a Persian *eẓāfe* as *nafāʾis-i majālis* and *ḥaqāʾiq-i asrār*.[47] Further examples of the same feature can be found throughout the text.[48] Furthermore, the author does not consistently feminize adjectives referring to things in the plural,[49] uses unidiomatic phrases that seem to constitute largely verbatim translations of Persian expressions,[50] and employs Persian words in otherwise Arabic passages for no apparent reason.[51] Taken together, these observations strongly suggest that al-Sharīf's Arabic was heavily influenced by his native Persian. These particularities of his Arabic, however, apparently did not diminish al-Sharīf's standing in the sultan's salons, where he was valued for his Persian language skills, which formed part of his identity.

As mentioned earlier, modern sociological and historical research supports the idea that language is a crucial element in the construction of identity. The same view was also voiced in al-Ghawrī's salons. In a discussion about proper behavior in the presence of rulers, one of the *majālis* attendees narrated an anecdote about how the famous philosopher al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) had insulted the Ḥamdānid ruler Sayf al-Dawla (r. 333–356/945–967) by claiming a seat above that of the ruler in the latter's *majlis*. When Sayf al-Dawla's retainers thereupon planned to kill al-Fārābī and discussed their scheme in his presence in Persian (*al-lisān al-ʿajamī*), al-Fārābī interrupted them in the same language and told them to wait until the *majlis* had ended. In the ensuing debates, the philosopher bested all the assembled scholars, thus proving himself worthy of the place he had claimed at the outset and averting the retainers' punishment.[52] After narrating this story, *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya* credits al-Ghawrī with making the following comment about it: "The only thing that saved al-Fārābī from being killed at Sayf al-Dawla's [court] was the Persian language. Therefore, it is said: 'A human being's language (*lisān*) is [his] second self.'"[53] It is difficult to imagine a more clear-cut statement about the relationship between language and identity as understood by members of al-Ghawrī's court.

---

47. My thanks to Thomas Bauer (Münster) for pointing this out to me. We do not know whether al-Sharīf sought to allude with this title to the anthology *Majālis al-nafāʾis* by Mīr ʿAlī Shīr Nawāʾī (d. 906/1501), on which see, e.g., C. G. Lingwood, *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran: New Perspectives on Jāmī's "Salāmān va Absāl"* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 32–33.

48. On this point, see also ʿAzzām, *Majālis*, 49; D'hulster, "'Sitting,'" 239.

49. E.g., al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 4, 157.

50. See, e.g., the editor's comments on al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 157; (ed. ʿAzzām) 60; (MS) 165; (ed. ʿAzzām) 61; (MS) 174; (ed. ʿAzzām) 68; (MS) 194; (ed. ʿAzzām) 80.

51. E.g., al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 247, 273; (ed. ʿAzzām) 126, 141.

52. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 252; (ed. ʿAzzām) 129.

53. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 253; (ed. ʿAzzām) 129.

The ambiguous phrase a*l-lisān al-ʿajamī*, which repeatedly appears in the *majālis* accounts and literally means "the non-Arabic language," typically denotes what is understood in English as "Persian," a point that becomes clear in a *majālis* debate about the language skills of the Prophet Muḥammad, as narrated in *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya*.[54] When the first-person narrator—possibly in an attempt to boost the prestige of his mother tongue—affirmed that the Prophet had known *ʿajamī*, al-Ghawrī objected and stated that one had to differentiate between the two meanings of *ʿajamī*: it could denote either the Persian (*fārisī*) language or any language spoken by non-Arabs, such as Turks or Indians. Relevant in the present case was the former meaning, and one had to acknowledge that there was no clear evidence that the Prophet ever spoke Persian.[55] In addition to shedding light on the connection between prophetic history and linguistic identity, this passage also exemplifies the common trait of the sources on al-Ghawrī's *majālis* to refer to the Persian language as *fārisī* only when necessary for reasons of clarity or disambiguation; otherwise, the term *ʿajamī* predominates. The latter is also clearly the more important term to denote Persian ethnic identity, whereas *fārisī* is used primarily as a linguistic label.[56]

Yet although the Prophet apparently did not know Persian in the sense of *fārisī*, as a language of literary and religious significance it did enjoy a special status among the members of al-Ghawrī's court. It was exalted above all other languages except Arabic in that, according to the Ḥanafī legal school, it was permissible to perform one's ritual prayers in either Persian or Arabic, as confirmed in the course of one of the many legal discussions during the *majālis*.[57] Moreover, right after his account of the debate about the Prophet's language skills, al-Sharīf added the following aphorism he attributed to al-Ṣāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād (d. 385/995): "Arabic is eloquence (*faṣāḥa*), Persian is gracefulness (*malāḥa*), Turkish is rulership (*siyāsa*), and the rest is filth (*najāsa*)"[58]—a noteworthy statement from a man whose patron confidently identified as a Circassian native speaker. It clearly underscores the prestige associated with Persian at the late Mamluk court.

This attribution of special qualities to the Persian language leads us to the second key factor defining Persian ethnic identity in the *majālis* texts: the mastery of knowledge and cultural techniques—that is, cultural capital—that were understood as specifically Persian.[59]

---

54. For another interpretation of the term *ʿajam* as meaning both Persians and Turcomans from Greater Iran in the present context, see Flemming, "Šerīf," 84; Behrens-Abouseif, "Arts," 73.

55. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 81–82. On this passage, see also Flemming, "Nachtgesprächen," 25.

56. On *fārisī* and *ʿajamī*, see also, e.g., T. E. Zadeh, *The Vernacular Qurʾan: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 73; Savant, *Muslims*, 9, 148.

57. *Al-Kawkab*, (MS) 11–12; (ed. ʿAzzām) 10–11. On this Ḥanafī position, see Zadeh, *Vernacular Qurʾan*, 1–2, 53–63, 66–73, 92–93, 103–119, 122–23, 162–163, 288–290, 476–478. On the dissenting opinion of the other schools of law, see Zadeh, *Vernacular Qurʾan*, 72–80, 104, 123–126.

58. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 82. On this passage, see also Flemming, "Nachtgesprächen," 25. I have not been able to locate this saying in any of Ibn ʿAbbād's available writings. On the negative connotations of Persian in Arabic literature, see Zadeh, *Vernacular Qurʾan*, 74–76.

59. On this type of cultural capital as typically Persian, see also, e.g., L. Richter-Bernburg, "Linguistic Shuʿūbīya and Early Neo-Persian Prose," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no. 1 (1974): 55–64, at 59–60; Amanat, "Remembering the Persianate," 29–32.

Persians were expected to be well versed in the history of the pre-Islamic Iranian kings and the political wisdom associated with them. Throughout his account of the *majālis*, al-Sharīf showcases his familiarity with the deeds and sayings of the Iranian kings Anūshīrwān, Shāpūr, Ardashīr, and the wise *wazīr* Buzurgmihr. Often these figures were used to communicate mirrors-for-princes material. For example, Ardashīr was quoted with the famous maxim of Persian political thought that religion (*dīn*) and kingship (*mulk*) were twins,[60] while King Anūshīrwān was credited with the aphorism that it was better to treat one's subjects well than it was to command many soldiers.[61] Although little of this material was connected to traditions perceived as genuinely Islamic, *majālis* participants sometimes discussed connections between Quranic visions of history and the Persian pre-Islamic past, for example, when they debated the relationship between the prophet Noah and Gayūmarth, the first human being according to the Avesta.[62]

Material about ancient Iran, its kings, and its mythology was presented in the *majālis* almost exclusively by those identified as Persians. The only clear exception is Sultan al-Ghawrī himself, who, despite his Circassian origins, is portrayed as highly knowledgeable in ancient Iranian lore. This applies especially to everything related to the Persian *Shāhnāma*, of which al-Ghawrī, as we recall, commissioned a Turkish translation. In the accounts of his *majālis*, and especially those of a session held in celebration of the completion of the translation,[63] al-Ghawrī is credited with quoting at length anecdotes about the original context of the *Shāhnāma* and about its author's patron, Maḥmūd of Ghazna (r. 388–421/998–1030). Of particular interest here is a story about the stinginess of Maḥmūd's reward for Firdawsī for his composition of the *Shāhnāma* and the latter's retribution in the form of satiric verses inserted into the work.[64] Although this anecdote is widely attested in different versions in Persian literature,[65] its inclusion in an Arabic work from the Mamluk period is noteworthy. What is more, the rather simple Arabic in which the anecdote is narrated and its close similarity to the Persian version included in Aḥmad b. ʿUmar al-Samarqandī's (d. after 556/1161) collection of anecdotes, *Chahār maqāla*,[66] suggests that we are most likely dealing here with an ad hoc translation or a paraphrasing re-narration of an originally

---

60. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 164.

61. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 243; (ed. ʿAzzām) 122. For further examples from this work, see al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 4, 21, 33, 49, 51–52, 61, 66–67, 84, 92, 105, 133, 140, 142–143, 146–147, 155–156, 159, 161–162, 170–171, 183, 212–213, 227–228, 235–237, 247; (ed. ʿAzzām) 2, 23, 58, 65–66, 74, 107–109, 114–115, 126; and for examples from the other *majālis* accounts, see *al-Kawkab*, (MS) 4–6, 189–190; (ed. ʿAzzām) 2–4, 62–63; *al-ʿUqūd*, 1: fol. 86r–86v; 2: fols. 10r, 16r, 38v. See also Irwin, "Thinking," 43–46. On the engagement of the *majālis* participants with historical material in general, see C. Mauder, "'And They Read in That Night Books of History': Consuming, Discussing, and Producing Texts about the Past in al-Ghawrī's *majālis* as Social Practices," in *New Readings in Arabic Historiography from Late Medieval Egypt and Syria*, ed. J. van Steenbergen (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

62. *Al-Kawkab*, (ed. ʿAzzām) 90.

63. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 195–199; (ed. ʿAzzām) 81–84.

64. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 195–196; (ed. ʿAzzām) 81–82.

65. See, in detail, A. Khāṭibī, *Āyā Firdawsī Maḥmūd-i Ghaznavī rā hajv guft? Hajvʾnāmah-i mansūb bih Firdawsī: Barʾrasī-yi taḥlīlī, taṣḥīḥ-i intiqādī, va sharḥ-i baytʾhā* (Tehran: Pardīs-i Dānish, 2016).

66. Aḥmad b. ʿUmar b. ʿAlī al-Samarqandī, *Chahār maqāla*, ed. M. Muḥammad (Leiden: Brill, 1910), 48–51.

Persian anecdote in an Arabic-speaking context. As we have seen, al-Ghawrī's court society included individuals who had the necessary language skills to produce such translations and re-narrations.

The participants of the *majālis* seemed to take it almost for granted that Persians were familiar with the glorious history of Iranian kings and therefore did not refer explicitly to this important element of Persian identity. What they did address directly, however, was Persian proficiency in a second field of knowledge and cultural techniques: the creative interplay of learning and entertainment typical of the *majālis* of Persian rulers of their day. As previous scholarship has already noted, Persian court culture was an important point of reference for al-Ghawrī and those around him in their efforts to stage a court life on par with that of their Islamicate neighbors.[67] Therefore, information on how past and present Persian rulers held court was highly valued in the *majālis*. Note, for example, the following instance, in which al-Ghawrī asked al-Sharīf to compare his experiences in Cairo to other *majālis* he had attended: "Question: Our Lord the Sultan said: 'You have attended the *majālis* of the Persian sultans (*salāṭīn al-ʿajam*) and you have seen our *majālis*.' Answer: 'Yes, but before long the former became irksome to me, because they indulged themselves all day in wine and music.'"[68]

Although al-Sharīf here cast the *majālis* of the Persian rulers in an unfavorable light, much of what happened in them set a pattern for the *majālis* in the Mamluk capital. Learned discussions that had taken place in front of the Timurids of Herat[69] or the rulers of Tabrīz[70] or Shirvān[71] were taken as models, continued, and at times quoted at the Cairo Citadel. When al-Ghawrī, for example, asked where the *nisba* "al-Shāfiʿī" came from, al-Sharīf replied with reference to the Timurid ruler Shahrukh (r. 807–850/1405–1447): "Sultan Shahrukh asked the very same question in Persian." He then narrated the anecdote about al-Shāfiʿī's alleged eponymous intercession (*shafāʿa*) that had been told to Shahrukh.[72]

Moreover, participants shared highlights of Persian literature, including texts such as Saʿdī's (d. 691/1292) *Gulistān*.[73] Pride of place was accorded to Persian poetry by the contemporary Timurid Sultan Ḥusayn Bayqarā (r. 875–912/1470–1506), whom the Persian participants in al-Ghawrī's *majālis* presented as a praiseworthy model of educated rulership.[74]

---

67. Irwin, "Thinking," 40–41. For the broader context, see also D. Behrens-Abouseif, "The Citadel of Cairo: Stage for Mamluk Ceremonial," *Annales islamologiques* 24 (1989): 25–79, at 30; H. T. Norris, "Aspects of the Influence of Nesimi's Hurufi Verse, and His Martyrdom, in the Arab East between the 16th and 18th Centuries," in *Syncrétismes et hérésies dans l'Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVᵉ–XVIIIᵉ siècle): Actes du colloque du Collège de France, octobre 2001*, ed. G. Veinstein, 163–82 (Paris: Peeters, 2005), 163–164.

68. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 224; (ed. ʿAzzām) 105.

69. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 13–14; (ed. ʿAzzām) 12–13.

70. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 174–175; (ed. ʿAzzām) 68–70.

71. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 17–18; (ed. ʿAzzām) 17; *al-Kawkab*, (MS) 302; (ed. ʿAzzām) 87.

72. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 13–14; (ed. ʿAzzām) 12–13.

73. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 204–205; (ed. ʿAzzām) 89. See also (MS) 145–46; (ed. ʿAzzām) 56. On the reception of the *Gulistān* in the Mamluk Sultanate, see also D'hulster, "Notes" (with references to earlier studies); Bodrogligeti, *Translation*.

74. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 152–153, 258; (ed. ʿAzzām) 134. See also *al-ʿUqūd*, 2: fol. 38r-38v; Flemming,

That the classics of Persian poetry likewise enjoyed popularity at al-Ghawrī's court is confirmed by the poems attributed to the sultan, which include intertextual references to works by luminaries such as Niẓāmī (d. before 613/1217) and Ḥāfiẓ (d. 792/1390).[75]

The third decisive factor in the construction of Persian identity in the *majālis* was a person's place of origin. Members of al-Ghawrī's circle perceived the non-Mamluk, Muslim-ruled world as consisting of multiple sultanates that in turn formed overarching regions such as the Maghrib, Anatolia (*bilād al-Rūm*), Yemen, and the lands of the Persians (*bilād al-ʿajam*).[76] The latter encompassed, among others, the territories ruled by the Timurid Shahrukh[77] and the Qarā Qoyunlu Muẓaffar al-Dīn Jahānshāh b. Yūsuf (r. 841–872/1438–1467).[78]

At least one member of the *majālis* indicated his region of origin by stating simply that he had been born in the *bilād al-ʿajam*,[79] but in most cases we must rely on onomastic evidence as a prime indicator. This is hardly surprising, since participants in the *majālis* typically communicated important aspects of their personal identities through their names, including ancestry, place of residence, legal allegiance, and ethnic origin.[80] Although no *majālis* participant appears in the available accounts with an unambiguous *nisba* such as "al-ʿAjamī" or even "al-Fārisī," some names clearly point to Persian origins. An example is a certain Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dihdār, who attended at least one of the sultan's meetings in Shawwāl 910/March 1505. His *laqab* "Ghiyāth al-Dīn" is rather unusual within a Mamluk context and immediately raises the question of his provenance. "Dihdār," meaning "village headman"[81] in Persian, in turn clearly points to a Persian background, as does the distinctive Persian form of the writing of the name in the unicum manuscript of *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya*, where the *hāʾ* remains unconnected to the second *dāl*.

We are fortunate to have access to additional information about the origins of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dihdār in the array of biographical writings that circulates under the name of Mīr ʿAlī Shīr Nawāʾī (d. 906/1501). These texts include information about a man of exactly the same name who hailed from Azerbaijan, was knowledgeable about the Quran and Persian poetry, and served in Khurāsān as a boon companion of the Timurid Ḥusayn Bayqarā.[82] Given the exact match in name, period, and social context, it seems highly plausible that the Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dihdār known from the Timurid biographical tradition is the same as the

---

"Nachtgesprächen," 25; R. Irwin, *Night and Horses and the Desert: The Penguin Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature* (London: Penguin, 2000), 441; Irwin, "Thinking," 40–41.

75. Yalçın, *Dîvân*, 129, 133. See also Flemming, "Nachtgesprächen," 23.

76. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 221, 232; (ed. ʿAzzām) 101, 113. For the Mamluk view of the Islamicate world according to diplomatic sources, see also M. Dekkiche, "Diplomatics, or Another Way to See the World," in Bauden and Dekkiche, *Mamluk Cairo*, 185–213; on the lands of the Persians, see Yosef, "Hatred," 178–179.

77. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 13; (ed. ʿAzzām) 13.

78. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 221; (ed. ʿAzzām) 101–102.

79. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 221, 223–24; (ed. ʿAzzām) 101, 104–105.

80. On names and ethnic identity, see Pohl, "Distinction," 10.

81. H. F. J. Junker and B. Alavi, *Persisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 9th ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 335.

82. Mīr ʿAlī Shīr Nawāʾī, *Majālis al-nafāʾis*, ed. ʿA. A. Ḥikmat (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi Bānk-i Millī Īrān, 1945), 99; S. Niyāz Kirmānī, *Ḥāfiẓ-shināsī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Pāzanj, 1987), 7:51–52.

one mentioned by al-Sharīf in *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya*. If this identification is correct, we may furthermore assume that Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dihdār's relocation to Cairo reflected his search for a new patron in the wake of the disintegration of the Timurid realm and the rise of the Shīʿī Safawids, which, as mentioned earlier, is known to have driven many learned Sunnis out of Greater Iran and into neighboring regions, including the Mamluk Sultanate. In his new social environment at the Mamluk court, his name clearly identified him as a Persian in the sense of someone who came from a Persian place of origin.

The important role of territorial factors in the construction of Persian identity in Mamluk Cairo is not entirely surprising, given that earlier scholarship about what it meant to be Persian in premodern Islamicate societies has already pointed to the significance of such factors. In his now classic study on the social history of the *shuʿūbiyya* movement under the early ʿAbbasids, Roy P. Mottahedeh speaks of the "territorial understanding of peoplehood among the non-Arabs"[83] in general, and among Persians in particular.[84] Similarly, Ahmad Ashraf notes, concerning the identity of Iranians during the Islamicate middle period, that it "was largely drawn from their territorial ties. They were identified, for the most part, with their places of birth or residence."[85] It appears that these observations about the prominent role of regional parameters apply not only to the Persian-speakers of Iran, but also to those who came to Egypt.[86]

A factor notably absent in our sources from the construction of the Persian ethnic identity of Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dihdār and others who shared the same background is ancestry. This finding stands in contrast to both the medieval European situation and what we know about the construction of other ethnic identities at al-Ghawrī's court, such as the Circassian one, which was explicitly defined in terms of lineage (*aṣl*) and offspring (*nasl*).[87] However, to the *majālis* participants, it seemed to be rather unimportant who a Persian's forefathers had been.[88] Indeed, Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, who appears in his *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya* almost as the spokesperson of the Persian members of al-Ghawrī's salon, was in terms of his lineage labeled a *sharīf*, or descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad, and thus was

---

83. R. P. Mottahedeh, "The Shuʿûbîyah Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (1976): 161–182, at 171.

84. See, in detail, Mottahedeh, "Controversy," 167–173, 181.

85. A. Ashraf, "Iranian Identity III: Medieval Islamic Period," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online ed., ed. E. Yarshater (http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iranian-identity-iii-medieval-islamic-period, last updated March 30, 2012). On the importance of regional origin for Persian identity, see also Fragner, „Persophonie", 11–16, 20–21.

86. On the relationship between geographical origin and ethnic identity in general, see, e.g., Geary, "Construct," 18–19, 23; Pohl, "Identification," 16–17.

87. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 200; (ed. ʿAzzām) 85.

88. This finding stands in contrast to the general importance of genealogy in Islamicate societies. See, e.g., S. B. Savant and H. de Felipe, "Introduction," in *Genealogy and Knowledge in Muslim Societies: Understanding the Past*, ed. S. B. Savant and H. de Felipe, 1–7 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 1–4; Cooperson, "'Arabs,'" 369–370, 372, 375–376, 382. On different versions of the genealogy of the Persians in Islamicate learning, see S. B. Savant, "Genealogy and Ethnogenesis in al-Masʿudi's *Muruj al-dhahab*," in Savant and de Felipe, *Genealogy and Knowledge*, 115–129; S. B. Savant, "Isaac as the Persians' Ishmael: Pride and the Pre-Islamic Past in Ninth and Tenth-Century Islam," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 2 (2006): 5–25; Savant, *Muslims*, 31–60.

understood to be of at least partly Arab ancestry. According to *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya*, his status as a *sharīf* was at times a mixed blessing for al-Ḥusaynī, as it prevented him from traveling through territories inhabited by Kurdish tribes. Allegedly, these tribesmen were in the habit of killing *sharīf*s passing through their lands in order to use their remains for religious practices.[89] Moreover, Sultan al-Ghawrī stipulated that in accordance with Islamic law, al-Ḥusaynī as a *sharīf* was not allowed to accept alms (*ṣadaqa*).[90] These negative implications notwithstanding, the finding that al-Sharīf could be a Persian and a *sharīf* at the same time accords with the theoretical insight mentioned earlier—that a person can hold multiple ethnic identities in different contexts.

This relative lack of interest in ancestral origins might also explain why the term *jins* (pl. *ajnās*) that features very prominently in other Mamluk sources that address issues of ethnicity does not hold an important place in the *majālis* accounts as far as the construction of Persian identity is concerned. Josephine van den Bent's groundbreaking work on Mongol ethnicity has shown that Mamluk authors could use the term *jins* to refer to subgroups within a certain ethnic group, although the meaning of the term clearly went beyond that of *aṣl*.[91] On the basis of van den Bent's findings, one may conclude that *jins* could refer both to larger ethnic groups such as the Turks or the Mongols and to smaller units within these groups that were seen as sharing a common ancestry. At least to the authors of the accounts of al-Ghawrī's *majālis*, such ancestral subdivisions or *ajnās* among the Persians seem to have been of little interest, and they hence did not use the technical term *jins* to discuss them. This fact lends further credibility to the interpretation that ancestry was not a prime factor in the construction of Persian ethnicity at al-Ghawrī's court.

Who Could Make Someone a Persian?

Now that we have examined the decisive factors in the construction of Persian ethnic identity in al-Ghawrī's *majālis*, we must ask who could label someone a Persian. Put differently, how can we describe the interplay between self-labeling and the influence of others when it comes to the construction of Persian identity in al-Ghawrī's *majālis*?[92]

One might expect that, being foreigners from a distant land, people identified or identifying as Persians would inhabit a marginal social position that would prevent them from constructing and affirming their own ethnic identity. As a result, Persians would be subject to heteronomous labeling processes they could not control.

As it turns out, however, nothing could be further from the truth, according to the picture painted by the sources on al-Ghawrī's *majālis*. The Persians of high standing who participated in al-Ghawrī's meetings appear in these texts as confidently defining, affirming, enacting, and, when necessary, defending their identity with regard to all three of the

---

89. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 203–204; (ed. ʿAzzām) 88. On al-Sharīf's lineage, see also ʿAzzām, *Majālis*, 48. Yosef, "Hatred," 179, shows that persons of Mongol descent were labeled "Persians" in Mamluk sources.

90. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 217; (ed. ʿAzzām) 98.

91. Van den Bent, "Mongols," 30–31. See also Yosef, "Hatred," 174; Yosef, "*Dawlat al-Atrāk*," 394–395. On *jins* in the broader context of the theory of ethnicity, see Pohl, "Ethnicity," 12.

92. On the importance of this question in the study of Islamicate ethnicities, see Webb, *Imagining*, 14–15.

previously identified key factors. In the area of Persian language proficiency, they not only feature as natural experts on Persian vocabulary and literature, as seen earlier, but also define and uphold the cultural significance of their native language. Note the following case, in which al-Sharīf confidently underlines the status of Persian as a royal language on par with the Turkish dialects spoken by members of the Mamluk military elite: "The kings of Persia (*mulūk al-Fars*) spoke Turkish (*al-turkī*) on days of war, Pahlavi (*al-fahlawī*) when commanding and forbidding, and Persian (*al-fārisī*) when partying and socializing."[93] Although our sources do not contain any evidence of Persians belittling the special status of Arabic as the language of the Quran, there can be no doubt that, as speakers of a prestigious language, this group of foreign participants forcefully asserted and defined their place in the sultan's *majālis*.

The situation is similar for the second factor, mastery of knowledge and cultural techniques viewed as Persian. The Persian participants identified in our sources appear as vigorous advocates of their native tradition of political thought and rulership. Its emblematic figures, such as King Anūshīrwān, received ample praise, to the point that it was accepted as common knowledge that he would not receive punishment in the hereafter, although he had led the life of a polytheist (*mushrik*).[94]

These displays of respect for the Persian royal tradition could reach levels at which they annoyed local Mamluk interlocutors, who were at times weary of the constant comparisons between their own achievements and those of the famous rulers of Greater Iran, both ancient and contemporaneous. In *al-Kawkab al-durrī*, we read the following anecdote about al-Ghawrī's predecessor, Sultan al-Malik al-Ashraf Barsbāy (r. 825–841/1422–1438):

> It has been narrated about a descendant of the Mamluk slave soldiers (*shakhṣ min awlād al-nās*) that he traveled during his [Barsbāy's] time to Herat. When he returned to Egypt, he mentioned every day the greatness of Shāhrukh and [the Persians'] numbers and possessions. News [about him] then reached the sultan. He summoned [the man] and said: "O so-and-so, if you mention again this story about the lands of the Persians and their kingdom, I will cut [your] tongue off. Have you come here from the land of the Persians only to strike fear among my army?"[95]

Notwithstanding this cautionary anecdote, which seems to have been narrated by a learned Egyptian, the Persian members of al-Ghawrī's salons could generally expect a favorable reception for the distinct knowledge and cultural techniques associated with their origin. Moreover, they apparently enjoyed a kind of quasi-monopoly over these forms of cultural capital, given that the only person not clearly identified as a Persian in our sources who regularly expounded Persian historical and political narratives was Sultan al-Ghawrī himself—a fact that underscores the high social status attributed to Persians.

---

93. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 258–259; (ed. ʿAzzām) 134. On this passage, see also Flemming, "Nachtgesprächen," 25, who interprets *fahlawī* as "dialect, vernacular."

94. *Al-Kawkab*, (MS) 90.

95. *Al-ʿUqūd*, 2: fol. 50r.

With regard to their home region, our sources document a similar level of commitment to and pride in their origins among the Persian members of the *majālis.* They saw their place of origin as a decisive element of their identity, and they defended it vehemently against anyone who tried to belittle it. This was obvious in a debate during the *majālis* in which a person of apparently local Egyptian background argued that all legal transactions, including marriages, that had been contracted in the territories of Persian rulers were void, as the latter had not been invested by the ʿAbbasid caliphs of Cairo. The implications of this view were far-reaching, since it entailed that all children born in Persian lands were illegitimate. The Persians' reaction to the claim was severe. One of the Persian participants even openly challenged the legitimacy of the ʿAbbasids by referring to a *ḥadīth* according to which the caliphate would last only thirty years after the Prophet's death.[96]

Taken together, our sources clearly depict the Persian participants in al-Ghawrī's *majālis* as an ethnic group whose members, rather than being subjected to processes of heteronomous labeling, confidently exercised agency in their affirmation of their own identity with reference to its three constitutive factors of language, cultural capital, and region of origin.[97] However, these affirmations did not necessarily take place against the background of positive evaluations of the Persian lands and their inhabitants, as the debate about the legitimacy of Persia-born children shows. Why, then, were members of al-Ghawrī's *majālis* so eager to label themselves as Persians?

Why Would One Want to Be Persian?

Given that recent research on processes of ethnic labeling tells us that ethnic identities are both situational and strategic,[98] any explanation that locates the reason for the Persians' affirming their identity in al-Ghawrī's *majālis* simply in their "being Persian" appears overly simplistic. Instead, we have to ask what meanings Persian ethnic identity carried in the social context of al-Ghawrī's salons, with regard to both late Mamluk Cairo in general and the sultanic court in particular.

As discussed above, earlier periods of Mamluk history had seen the spread of strong anti-Persian stereotypes and even episodes of government-supported violence against Persians. Compared to that earlier situation, al-Ghawrī's court must have seemed a safe haven to Persians who came to Cairo in the early tenth/sixteenth century. Several contemporaneous historiographers noted the sultan's unusual inclination toward men from the Islamicate East. The chronicler Ibn Iyās (d. after 928/1522), for example, writes that al-Ghawrī "was favorably disposed toward (*yamīl ilā*) the sons of the Persians."[99]

---

96. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 220–225; (ed. ʿAzzām) 100–107. On the context, see also Irwin, "Thinking," 46–47; Mauder, *Salon*, chap. 6.2.3. Other demonstrations of esteem for the Persian lands could be less confrontational, as when the *majālis* participants agreed that the Persian ant (*al-naml al-fārisī*) was the strongest animal on earth as it could lift items sixty times its own weight; see *al-Kawkab*, (MS) 61.

97. On agency in the claiming of ethnic identities, see Pohl, "Identification," 12.

98. In this context, see also Geary, "Construct," 25, on the idea that ethnic identities are expressed for specific reasons.

99. Ibn Iyās, *Chronik*, 88.

In his biographical dictionary, Muḥammad Ibn al-Hanbalī (d. 971/1563) writes at length about al-Ghawrī's closeness to an unnamed Persian confidant who allegedly inspired in him love for the Persian ruler Shāh Ismāʿīl.[100] Other aspects of al-Ghawrī's interest in all things Persian, such as his sponsoring of the translation of the *Shāhnāma* or his writing of Persian verses, were noted above. We also know that al-Ghawrī was the only Mamluk ruler to have himself referred to with the Persian title "king of kings," or *shāhanshāh*,[101] and described as "exercising the rule of Kisrā" in panegyric and epistolary sources.[102] It is thus not surprising that Robert Irwin concludes that al-Ghawrī was "famous [. . .] for the favor he showed to Persian and Persian-speaking religious figures and literati,"[103] while Doris Behrens-Abouseif notes that "[o]ne of the features of al-Ghawrī's court life was his predilection for the *aʿjām*, who were numerous in his entourage."[104] While al-Ghawrī's interest in Persian culture and its bearers is certainly not unprecedented among Mamluk rulers, the extent to which it resulted in actual patronage projects, the attention it received among contemporaneous historiographers, and the fact that it translated into the sultan himself actively composing Persian poetry make it particularly noteworthy.

Moreover, the sultan seems to have regarded the ancient "mythological" Persians and their culture as portrayed, for example, in the *Shāhnāma* as closely connected to the living and breathing Persians of his own time.[105] Although the latter were, of course, not identical to the former, it appears that the ruler perceived the Persians of his time as cultural heirs of and natural experts on their famed forefathers of old. Hence they were also well qualified to support and orchestrate his efforts to present himself as the *shāhanshāh* of his time.

Given the sultan's interests in Persian culture and in the ethnic groups perceived as its representatives, it is not surprising that Persians would migrate to Cairo and seek patronage at al-Ghawrī's court, especially in light of the political turmoil infesting their home region. For at least some of them, the sultan's fondness for Persian literature and learning gave rise to benefits in the form of profitable assignments and positions. The sultan not only rewarded the translator of the Persian *Shāhnāma* generously upon completion of the work but also appointed him in 908/1503 to the lucrative post of *shaykh* and *mudarris* of Ḥanafī jurisprudence in the Mosque of Muʾayyad Shaykh.[106] Al-Sharīf, the Persian author of *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya*, received a paid position as a Sufi in the sultan's funeral complex, as we have seen. In addition, he was later able to negotiate a significant pay raise during one of

---

100. Ibn al-Ḥanbalī, *Durr*, ii.1, 48–49.

101. B. Qurqūt, *al-Wathāʾiq al-ʿarabiyya fī Dār al-Maḥfūẓāt bi-madīnat Dūbrūfnīk* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-l-Thaqāfa, 2008), 135.

102. *Al-ʿUqūd*, 2: fol. 107r.

103. Irwin, "Thinking," 39.

104. Behrens-Abouseif, "Arts," 73. See also D'hulster, "'Sitting,'" passim; Y. Frenkel, "The Mamluks among the Nations: A Medieval Sultanate in Its Global Context," in Conermann, *Everything Is on the Move*, 61–79, at 69; Alhamzah, *Patronage*, 38; E. Geoffroy, *Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie sous les derniers Mamelouks et les premiers Ottomans: Orientations spirituelles et enjeux culturels* (Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1995), 214; Flemming, "Šerīf," 82–84; Flemming, "Nachtgesprächen," 24.

105. On this typical perception of ethnic identities as stable across time, see also Pohl, "Identification," 5.

106. Flemming, "Šerif," 87, 89–90; Flemming, "Nachtgesprächen," 24. See also D'hulster, "'Sitting,'" 238–239.

the *majālis* meetings by threatening to leave Cairo sooner than originally planned to go on the pilgrimage.[107]

These two examples stand out for their particularly detailed level of documentation in our sources, but the evidence from the historiographical literature indicates that they formed part of a larger pattern of patronage that al-Ghawrī was willing to provide to well-lettered Persians who came to his court. Hence, it is understandable why, in al-Ghawrī's presence, Persian identity "lit up [. . .] in much the same way as fluorescent clothing does in the presence of street lighting,"[108] to recall Reuter's formulation. For Persians, highlighting their ethnic identity when interacting with the sultan was a wise choice, as they could be optimistic that it would be to their advantage economically and in terms of social status—even within the otherwise sometimes hostile climate of Mamluk Cairo.

Taking this line of argumentation one step further, we may also assume that the sultan's interests and the cultural climate at his court constituted an important reason individuals such as al-Sharīf or the abovementioned Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dihdār chose to focus in their self-representation on their ethnic identity rather than other characteristics that might have qualified them as potential recipients of patronage in other social contexts. Ghiyāth al-Dīn Dihdār, for example, was, as mentioned above, a noted scholar of the Quranic sciences, yet this expertise seems to have played no discernible role in his status as a participant in the sultan's *majālis*, possibly because in the competitive world of patronage in late Mamluk Cairo, Quranic learning was in much greater supply than were the forms of cultural capital associated with Persian ethnicity. Similarly, neither al-Sharīf's work nor his contributions to the sultan's *majālis* were, as far as we can discern, primarily intended to underline his Ḥanafī legal learning or his prophetic lineage—both of which were likewise potentially valuable on the patronage market. Instead, he foregrounded his Persian background and the skills that were seen as connected to it. We can thus conclude that for Persians at al-Ghawrī's court, such as al-Sharīf and Ghiyāth al-Dīn, emphasizing their Persian ethnic identity was a strategic decision not only in the sense that they undertook it at all but also in the degree that they chose to highlight this aspect of their identity and the cultural capital that came with it relative to other qualities and abilities they possessed. This finding suggests that when studying ethnic identities in Mamluk society, scholars should not focus exclusively on the ways in which they were constructed and performed but also analyze how, when, and why ethnicity came to the fore in relation to other, intersecting aspects of personal and collective identity.[109]

With regard to the sultan, it stands to reason that, in acting as a patron to Persian scholars and littérateurs, al-Ghawrī did not just follow his personal whims, or at least did not do so exclusively. As demonstrated in detail elsewhere, Sultan al-Ghawrī and those around him were very much aware that early tenth/sixteenth-century Mamluk sultanic rule was undergoing a manifest crisis caused by both domestic factors, such as the

---

107. Al-Sharīf, *Nafāʾis*, (MS) 205–206; (ed. ʿAzzām) 90–91.

108. Reuter, "Race," 103–104.

109. For the insight that ethnicity can hardly ever be studied on its own, see also Pohl, "Ethnicity," 12; Pohl, "Identification," 26, 50; Adlparvar and Tadros, "Evolution," 128, 133.

pronounced contraction of the Mamluk economy and the extended succession conflicts preceding al-Ghawrī's investiture, and transregional developments, such as the rise of the rival Safawids and Ottomans, who combined far-reaching claims to legitimate leadership with military successes and a lively court culture.[110] Against this background, al-Ghawrī and the members of his court sought to demonstrate that despite all their internal problems, the Mamluks were still a power to be reckoned with, particularly in terms of cultural patronage. Projects such as the translation of the *Shāhnāma* and the cultivation of a circle of learned foreigners well versed in Persian court culture constituted promising strategies to attain this goal, especially since these endeavors would be more readily understandable to the Mamluks' transregional interlocutors and competitors than would more distinctly Mamluk cultural undertakings.[111] We can thus interpret the flocking of Persians who openly performed their ethnic identity to al-Ghawrī's court as a mutually beneficial situation in which al-Ghawrī gained cultural prestige through the Persians' presence and activities while the latter benefited from the sultan's generosity.

Conclusion

As Ulrich Haarmann noted many years ago, a "cosmopolitan atmosphere"[112] and an "intercultural perspective"[113] were important features of late Mamluk court culture. But even in this cosmopolitan atmosphere, ethnic identities did matter, as the case of the Persian participants in the *majālis* of Sultan al-Ghawrī exemplifies. Language, cultural capital, and place of origin—but, remarkably, not ancestry—were important factors in the construction of their identity. Persians themselves used these criteria to confidently affirm their identity, which could provide them with a number of social and economic benefits under al-Ghawrī's rule. For the sultan, the presence of Persians at his court was an important aspect of his politically inspired program of cultural patronage.

Further research may shed light on how these results relate to the construction of ethnic identities in other Islamicate social contexts. Studies of court culture seem to be a particularly promising starting point in this regard, as ethnic identities are known to have been of special importance in the elite circles of premodern societies. It seems promising to examine, inter alia, how Egyptian and Syrian identities were constructed and performed in Mamluk courtly circles, where men born within the sultanate necessarily had to interact with people whose origins lay elsewhere. Future research will also have to ask whether language, cultural capital, and place of origin were constitutive of these and other identities in diverse Islamicate contexts, or whether other factors, such as ancestry, legal traditions, or religious loyalties, played more important roles.

---

110. See Mauder, *Salon*, chap. 6.1.

111. For a similar interpretation, see Behrens-Abouseif, "Arts," 84–86; C. Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 109–110.

112. Haarmann, "Miṣr," 175. See also D'hulster, "'Sitting,'" 229; Markiewicz, *Crisis*, 108.

113. Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech," 85.

Another worthwhile next step in light of the current state of research about Mamluk society would be to compare the ways in which Persian identity was constructed and performed with the construction and performance of other ethnic identities that have already received scholarly attention, such as the Mongol, Turkish, and Kurdish ones. Preliminary findings suggest that the means and strategies through which these identities were claimed and perceived differed in each specific case, with variance in, for example, the importance attributed to common ancestry or the significance of internal divisions within ethnic groups. Thus, instead of studying "ethnicity" in Mamluk society in general, scholars should adopt an approach that analyzes specific "ethnicities" individually in a given time and space and then use their findings to develop a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of Mamluk society.[114] It is clear, however, that within the field of Mamluk history and beyond, the question of how premodern inhabitants of the Islamicate world constructed and affirmed their respective identities remains as relevant today as it was more than thirty-five years ago when Michael Cook posed it.

---

114. On this need to study each case of the construction of ethnic identity separately, see also Cooperson, "'Arabs,'" 383.

Bibliography

Adlparvar, N., and M. Tadros. "The Evolution of Ethnicity Theory: Intersectionality, Geopolitics and Development." *IDS Bulletin* 47 (2016): 123–136.

Ağalarlı, M. "XVI. Yüzyılın Başlarında Safevi Devletiyle Memlük Devleti Arasında Siyasi İlişkilere Genel Bir Bakiş." *Uşak Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 3, no. 2 (2010): 124–135.

Alhamzah, K. A. *Late Mamluk Patronage: Qansuh al-Ghūrī's Waqfs and His Foundations in Cairo.* Boca Raton, FL: Universal Publishers 2009.

Amanat, A. "Remembering the Persianate." In *The Persianate World: Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, edited by A. Amanat and A. Ashraf, 15–62. Leiden: Brill, 2019.

Amir, O. "Niẓām al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Ṭayyārī: An Artist in the Court of the Ilkhans and Mamluks." *Asiatische Studien* 71, no. 4 (2018): 1075–1091.

Amitai, R. *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260–1335).* Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.

———. *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260–1281.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

———, ed. *The Mongols in the Islamic Lands: Studies in the History of the Ilkhanate.* Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum 2007.

——— and S. Conermann, eds. *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History.* Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019.

Armstrong, J. A. *Nations before Nationalism.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.

Ashraf, A. "Iranian Identity III: Medieval Islamic Period." In *Encyclopædia Iranica.* Online ed. Edited by E. Yarshater. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iranian-identity-iii-medieval-islamic-period, last updated March 30, 2012.

Atasoy, N. "Un manuscrit Mamlūk illustré du Šāhnāma." *Revue des études islamiques* 37 (1969): 151–158.

Awad, M. "Sultan al-Ghawri: His Place in Literature and Learning (Three Books Written under His Patronage)." In *Actes du XXe Congrès International des Orientalistes : Bruxelles 5–10. September 1938*, 321–322. Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1940.

ʿAzzām, ʿA., ed. *Majālis al-Sulṭān al-Ghawrī: Ṣafaḥāt min tārīkh Miṣr min al-qarn al-ʿāshir al-hijrī.* Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Lajnat al-Taʾlīf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1941.

Bağci, S. "From Translated Word to Translated Image: The Illustrated *Şehnâme-i Türkî* Copies." *Muqarnas* 17 (2000): 162–176.

Barker, H. *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.

Barth, F. "Introduction." In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, edited by F. Barth, 9–38. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969.

Bartlett, R. "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001), 39–56.

Bauden, F., and M. Dekkiche, eds. *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics.* Leiden: Brill, 2019.

Behrens-Abouseif, D. "The Citadel of Cairo: Stage for Mamluk Ceremonial." *Annales islamologiques* 24 (1989): 25–79.

———. "Sultan al-Ghawrī and the Arts." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 6 (2002): 71–94.

Berger, L. *Gesellschaft und Individuum in Damaskus 1550–1791: Kultur, Recht und Politik in muslimischen Gesellschaften.* Würzburg: Ergon, 2007.

Binbaş, E. I. *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Bodrogligeti, A. *A Fourteenth Century Turkic Translation of Saʿdī's "Gulistān": Sayf-i Sarāyī's "Gulistān biʾt-turkī."* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969.

Broadbridge, A. F. *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Bucholtz, M., and K. Hall. "Language and Identity." In *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, edited by A. Duranti, 369–394. Malden: Blackwell, 2004.

Clifford, W. W. "Some Observations on the Course of Mamluk-Safavid Relations (1502–1516/908–922): I and II." *Der Islam* 70 (1993): 245–278.

Conermann, S. "Volk, Ethnie oder Stamm? Die Kurden aus Mamlukischer Sicht." In *Mamlukica: Studies on the History and Society of the Mamluk Period*, edited by S. Conermann, 317–57. Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2013.

Cook, M. "Pharaonic History in Medieval Egypt." *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983): 67–103.

Cooperson, M. "'Arabs' and 'Iranians': The Uses of Ethnicity in the Early Abbasid Period." In *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, edited by A. Q. Ahmed et al., 364–382. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

D'hulster, K. "'Sitting with Ottomans and Standing with Persians': The *Šāhnāme-yi Türkī* as a Highlight of Mamluk Court Culture." In *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk eras VI*, edited by U. Vermeulen and K. D'hulster, 229–256. Leuven: Peeters, 2010.

———. "Some Notes on Sayf-Sarāyī's *Gülistān bi t-Türkī*." In *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras V*, edited by U. Vermeulen and K. D'hulster, 451–470. Leuven: Peeters, 2007.

Dekkiche, M. "Le Caire: Carrefour des ambassades; Étude historique et diplomatique de la correspondance échangée entre les sultans mamlouks circassiens et les souverains timourides et turcomans (Qara-Qoyunlu-Qaramanides) au XVᵉ s. d'après le ms. ar 4440 (BnF, Paris)." PhD dissertation, University of Liège, 2011.

———. "Diplomatics, or Another Way to See the World." In *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies: Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics*, edited by F. Bauden and M. Dekkiche, 185–213. Leiden: Brill, 2019.

———. "New Source, New Debate: Re-evaluation of the Mamluk-Timurid Struggle for Religious Supremacy in the Hijaz (Paris, BnF MS ar. 4440)." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 18 (2014–2015): 247–272.

Eckmann, J. "The Mamluk-Kipchak Literature." *Central Asiatic Journal* 8 (1963): 304–319.

Fernandes, L. "Mamluk Politics and Education: The Evidence from Two Fourteenth Century Waqfiyya." *Annales islamologiques* 23 (1987): 87-98.

Flemming, B. "Aus den Nachtgesprächen Sultan Ġaurīs." In *Folia rara: Wolfgang Voigt LXV. diem natalem celebranti ab amicis et catalogorum codicum orientalium conscribendorum collegis dedicata*, edited by H. Franke, W. Heissig, and W. Treue, 22–28. Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976.

———. "Šerīf, Sultan Ġavrī und die ‚Perser'." *Der Islam* 45 (1969): 81–93.

———. "Turks: Turkish Literature of the Golden Horde and of the Mamlūks." In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., edited by P. J. Bearman et al., 10:716–718. Leiden: Brill, 1960–2009.

Fragner, B. G. *Die „Persophonie": Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens.* Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999.

Frenkel, Y. *Is There a Mamlūk Culture?* Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2014.

———. "The Mamlūk Sultanate and Its Neighbors: Economic, Social and Cultural Entanglements." In *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History*, edited by R. Amitai and S. Conermann, 39–60. Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019.

———. "The Mamluks among the Nations: A Medieval Sultanate in Its Global Context." In *Everything Is on the Move: The Mamluk Empire as a Node in (Trans-)Regional Networks*, edited by S. Conermann, 61–79. Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2014.

Fuess, A. "Dreikampf um die Macht zwischen Osmanen, Mamlūken und Safawiden (1500–1517): Warum blieben die Mamlūken auf der Strecke?" In *Die Mamlūken: Studien zu ihrer Geschichte und Kultur; Zum Gedenken an Ulrich Haarmann (1942–1999)*, edited by S. Conermann and A. Pistor-Hatam, 239–250. Schenefeld: EB-Verlag, 2003.

———. "Les janissaires, les mamelouks et les armes à feu: Une comparaison des systèmes militaires ottoman et mamelouk à partir du milieu du XVe siècle." *Turcica* 41 (2009): 209–227.

Geary, P. "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages." *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 113 (1983): 15–26.

Geoffroy, E. *Le Soufisme en Égypte et en Syrie sous les derniers Mamelouks et les premiers Ottomans: Orientations spirituelles et enjeux culturels.* Damascus: Institut français de Damas, 1995.

Glassen, E. "Krisenbewusstsein und Heilserwartung in der islamischen Welt zu Beginn der Neuzeit." In *Die islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Festschrift für Hans Robert Roemer zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by U. Haarmann and P. Bachmann, 167–79. Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1979.

Haarmann, U. "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamluks and Their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 33, no. 1 (1988): 81–114.

———. "The Late Triumph of the Persian Bow: Critical Voices on the Mamluk Monopoly on Weaponry." In *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, edited by T. Philipp and U. Haarmann, 174–187. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

———. "Miṣr: 5. The Mamlūk Period 1250–1517." In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, edited by P. J. Bearman et al., 7:164–177. Leiden: Brill, 1960–2009.

———. "Regional Sentiment in Medieval Islamic Egypt." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43, no. 1 (1980): 55–66.

———. "Yeomanly Arrogance and Righteous Rule: Faẓl Allāh Rūzbihān Khunjī and the Mamluks of Egypt." In *Iran and Iranian Studies: Essays in Honor of Iraj Afshar*, edited by K. Eslami, 109–124. Princeton: Zagros, 1998.

Ibn al-Ḥanbalī, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm. *Durr al-ḥabab fī tārīkh aʿyān Ḥalab.* Edited by M. M. al-Fākhūrī and Y. ʿAbbāra. Damascus: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1972–1973.

Ibn Iyās al-Ḥanafī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad. *Die Chronik des Ibn Ijās: Mujallad 5, Min sana 922 ilā sana 928 h. (1516–1522).* 2nd ed. Edited by M. Muṣṭafā. Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1961.

Irwin, R. "How Circassian Were the Circassian Mamluks?" In *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History*, edited by R. Amitai and S. Conermann, 109–22. Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019.

———. *Night and Horses and the Desert: The Penguin Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature.* London: Penguin, 2000.

———. "The Political Thinking of the 'Virtuous Ruler,' Qansuh al-Ghawri." *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12, no. 1 (2008): 37–49.

Junker, H. F. J., and B. Alavi. *Persisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch.* 9th ed. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002.

Juvin, C. "A Mamluk Qurʾānic *Ǧuzʾ* and Its Connection with *Amīr* ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ǧazāʾirī." *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts* 10 (2019): 105–135.

Al-Kawkab al-durrī fī masāʾil al-Ghawrī. MS Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi, Ahmet III 1377.

Khāṭibī, A. *Āyā Firdawsī Maḥmūd-i Ghaznavī rā hajv guft? Hajvʾnāmah-i mansūb bih Firdawsī: Barʾrasī-yi taḥlīlī, taṣḥīḥ-i intiqādī, va sharḥ-i baytʾhā.* Tehran: Pardīs-i Dānish, 2016.

Kirmānī, S. Niyāz. *Ḥāfiẓ-shināsī.* Tehran: Intishārāt-i Pāzanj, 1987.

Kommer, O., S. Liccardo, and A. Nowak. "Comparative Approaches to Ethnonyms: The Case of the Persians." *Hungarian Historical Review* 7, no. 1 (2018): 18–56.

Kültüral, Z., and L. Beyreli, eds. *Şerîfî Şehnâme Çevirisi.* Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu, 1999.

Lellouch, B. "Qu'est-ce qu'un Turc ? (Égypte, Syrie, XVIᵉ siècle)." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (2013): 1–20.

Levanoni, A. "A Supplementary Source for the Study of Mamluk Social History: The *Taqārīẓ*." *Arabica* 60 (2013): 146–177.

Lingwood, C. G. *Politics, Poetry, and Sufism in Medieval Iran: New Perspectives on Jāmī's "Salāmān va Absāl."* Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Loiseau, J. *Les Mamelouks XIIIᵉ–XVIᵉ siècle: Une expérience du pouvoir dans l'Islam médiéval.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2014.

Markiewicz, C. *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Mauder, C. "'And They Read in That Night Books of History': Consuming, Discussing, and Producing Texts about the Past in al-Ghawrī's *majālis* as Social Practices." In *New Readings in Arabic Historiography from Late Medieval Egypt and Syria*, edited by J. van Steenbergen. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.

———. "Does a Mamluk Sultan Hold Religious Authority? Quranic Exegesis and Hadith Studies in Late Mamluk Courtly *majālis*." *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* (forthcoming).

———. *In the Sultan's Salon: Learning, Religion and Rulership at the Mamluk Court of Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501–1516)*. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.

———. "Legitimating Sultanic Rule in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian: Late Mamluk Rulers as Authors of Religious Poetry." In *Rulers as Authors in the Islamic World: Knowledge, Authority and Legitimacy*, edited by M. Fierro, S. Brentjes, and T. Seidensticker. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.

———. "Ottomanization before the Conquest? Mamluk-Ottoman Religious and Cultural Entanglements in the Courtly Salons of Qāniṣawh al-Ghawrī and Post-Conquest Gatherings." In *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition: Continuity and Change in Egypt and Bilad al-Sham in the Sixteenth Century II*, edited by S. Conermann and G. Şen. Göttingen: Bonn University Press, forthcoming.

———. "A Severed Head, a Poetry Slam, and a Shiʿī Visiting al-Shāfiʿī's Tomb: Symbolic and Literary Communication in Mamluk-Safawid Diplomatic Encounters." In *Studies on the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517): Proceedings of a German-Japanese Workshop Held at Tokyo, November 5–6, 2016*, edited by S. Conermann and T. Miura. Göttingen: Bonn University Press, forthcoming.

———. "Der Sultan, sein geschwätziger Barbier und die Sufis: Ibn Iyās über den Fall des Kamāl ad-Dīn b. Šams im Kairo des 16. Jahrhunderts." In *Macht bei Hofe: Narrative Darstellungen in ausgewählten Quellen; Ein interdisziplinärer Reader*, edited by S. Conermann and A. Kollatz, 79–98. Berlin: EB-Verlag 2020.

——— and C. A. Markiewicz. "A New Source on the Social Gatherings (*majālis*) of the Mamluk Sultan Qānṣawh al-Ghawrī." *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 24 (2016): 145–148.

Melvin-Koushki, M. "The Delicate Art of Aggression: Uzun Hasan's *Fathnama* to Qaytbay of 1469." *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2011): 193–214.

———. "How to Rule the World: Occult-Scientific Manuals of the Early Modern Persian Cosmopolis." *Journal of Persianate Studies* 11 (2018): 140–154.

———. "Imperial Talismanic Love: Ibn Turka's *Debate of Feast and Fight* (1426) as Philosophical Romance and Lettrist Mirror for Timurid Princes." *Der Islam* 96, no. 1 (2019): 42–86.

———. "In Defense of Geomancy: Šaraf al-Dīn Yazdī Rebuts Ibn Ḫaldūn's Critique of the Occult Sciences." *Arabica 64* (2017): 346–403.

———. "Powers of One: The Mathematicalization of the Occult Sciences in the High Persianate Tradition." *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 5 (2017): 127–199.

Mottahedeh, R. P. "The Shuʿûbîyah Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (1976): 161–182.

Muṣṭafā ʿAlī. *The Ottoman Gentleman of the Sixteenth Century: Mustafa Âli's "Mevaʾidüʾn-nefaʾis fi kavaʿidiʾl-mecalis"; "Tables of Delicacies concerning the Rules of Social Gatherings."* Edited and translated by D. S. Brookes. Cambridge: Harvard University, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 2003.

Nawāʾī, Mīr ʿAlī Shīr. *Majālis al-nafāʾis.* Edited by ʿA. A. Ḥikmat. Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi Bānk-i Millī Īrān, 1945.

Norris, H. T. "Aspects of the Influence of Nesimi's Hurufi Verse, and His Martyrdom, in the Arab East Between the 16th and 18th Centuries." In *Syncrétismes et hérésies dans l'Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVᵉ–XVIIIᵉ siècle): Actes du colloque du Collège de France, octobre 2001*, edited by G. Veinstein, 163–182. Paris: Peeters, 2005.

Petry, C. *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Later Middle Ages.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981.

———. *The Criminal Underworld in a Medieval Islamic Society: Narratives from Cairo and Damascus under the Mamluks.* Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2012.

———. *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

———. "'Travel Patterns of Medieval Notables in the Near East' Reconsidered: Contrasting Trajectories, Interconnected Networks." In *Everything Is on the Move: The Mamluk Empire as a Node in (Trans-)Regional Networks*, edited by S. Conermann, 165–79. Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2014.

———. *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamlūk Sultans al-Ashrāf Qāytbāy and Qanṣūh al-Ghawrī in Egypt.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993.

Pohl, W. "Introduction: Ethnicity, Religion and Empire." In *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1100*, edited by W. Pohl, C. Gantner, and R. Payne, 1–23. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012.

———. "Introduction: Strategies of Distinction." In *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, edited by W. Pohl and H. Reimitz, 1–15. Leiden: Brill, 1998.

———. "Introduction: Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile." In *Strategies of Identification: Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe*, edited by W. Pohl and G. Heydemann, 1–64. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013.

———. "Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity." In *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, edited by W. Pohl and H. Reimitz, 17–69. Leiden: Brill, 1998.

———. *Die Völkerwanderung: Eroberung und Integration.* Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002.

Qurqūt, B. *Al-Wathāʾiq al-ʿarabiyya fī Dār al-Maḥfūẓāt bi-madīnat Dūbrūfnīk*. Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-l-Thaqāfa, 2008.

Rabie, H. "Political Relations between the Safavids of Persia and the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria in the Early Sixteenth Century." *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 15 (1978): 75–81.

Richter-Bernburg, L. "Linguistic Shuʿūbīya and Early Neo-Persian Prose." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no. 1 (1974): 55–64.

Al-Samarqandī, Aḥmad b. ʿUmar b. ʿAlī. *Chahār maqāla*. Edited by M. Muḥammad. Leiden: Brill, 1910.

Savant, S. B. "Genealogy and Ethnogenesis in al-Masʿudi's *Muruj al-dhahab*." In *Genealogy and Knowledge in Muslim Societies: Understanding the Past*, edited by S. B. Savant and H. de Felipe, 115–129. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

———. "Isaac as the Persians' Ishmael: Pride and the Pre-Islamic Past in Ninth and Tenth-Century Islam." *Comparative Islamic Studies* 2 (2006): 5–25.

———. *The New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran: Tradition, Memory, and Conversion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

——— and H. de Felipe. "Introduction." In *Genealogy and Knowledge in Muslim Societies: Understanding the Past*, edited by S. B. Savant and H. de Felipe, 1–7. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

Savran, S. *Arabs and Iranians in the Islamic Conquest Narrative: Memory and Identity Construction in Islamic Historiography, 750–1050*. London: Routledge, 2018.

Schimmel, A. "Some Glimpses of the Religious Life in Egypt During the Later Mamluk Period." *Islamic Studies* 4 (1965): 353–392.

Al-Sharīf, Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī. *Nafāʾis majālis al-sulṭāniyya fī ḥaqāʾiq asrār al-Qurʾāniyya*. MS Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi, Ahmet III 2680.

Steingass, F. *Persian-English Dictionary: Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to Be Met with in Persian Literature*. 3rd ed. London: Kegan Paul, 1947.

Al-ʿUqūd al-jawhariyya fī al-nawādir al-Ghawriyya. MS Istanbul, Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Ayasofya 3312 and 3313.

Van den Bent, J. "Mongols in Mamluk Eyes: Representing Ethnic Others in the Medieval Middle East." PhD dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2020.

———. "None of the Kings on Earth Is Their Equal in ʿAṣabiyya: The Mongols in Ibn Khaldūn's Works." *Al-Masāq* 28, no. 2 (2016): 171–186.

Van Steenbergen, J. "The Amir Yalbughā al-Khāṣṣakī, the Qalāwūnid Sultanate, and the Cultural Matrix of Mamlūk Society: A Reassessment of Mamlūk Politics in the 1360s." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131, no. 3 (2011): 423–443.

Webb, P. *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.

Yalçın, M., ed. and trans. *The Dîvân of Qânsûh al-Ghûrî: Kansu Gavri Divanı.* Istanbul: Bay, 2002.

Yosef, K. "Cross-Boundary Hatred: (Changing) Attitudes towards Mongol and "Christian" *mamlūk*s in the Mamluk Sultanate." In *The Mamluk Sultanate from the Perspective of Regional and World History*, edited by R. Amitai and S. Conermann, 149–214. Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2019.

———. "*Dawlat al-Atrāk* or *Dawlat al-Mamālīk*: Ethnic Origin or Slave Origin as the Defining Characteristic of the Ruling Elite in the Mamlūk Sultanate." *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 39 (2012): 387–410.

———. *Ethnic Groups, Social Relationships and Dynasty in the Mamluk Sultanate.* Bonn: Annemarie-Schimmel-Kolleg, 2012.

Zadeh, T. E. *The Vernacular Qur'an: Translation and the Rise of Persian Exegesis.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Zajączkowski, A. "La plus ancienne traduction turque (en vers) du *Šāh-nāme* de l'État Mamelouk d'Égypte (XV-XVIᵉ siècles)." *Türk Dili Araştırmalari Yıllığı Belleten* (1966): 51–63.

Zajączkowski, A. "Şeh-Name'nin Ilk Türkçe Manzumesinde Atasözleri ve Deylimler (Özet)." In *XI. Türk Dil Kurultayinda Okunan Bilimsel Bildiriler 1966*, edited by Türk Dil Kurumu, 1–7. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1968.

———. "Treny filozofów na śmierć Iskendera: Podług mamelucko-tureckiej wersji *Šāh-nāme*." *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 28, no. 2 (1965): 13–57.

———, ed. *Turecka wersja Šāh-nāme z Egiptu mameluckiego.* Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawn, 1965.

Teaching Note

Why Do We Need a New Textbook?

Jo Van Steenbergen
Ghent University
Belgium

(Jo.VanSteenbergen@UGent.be)

Back in early 2007, when I started teaching an undergraduate survey course on Islamic history, I was frustrated in my search for teaching materials that would align with how I had come to appreciate that history. There definitely were great history textbooks out there (Hodgson, Lapidus, Hourani, Endress & Hillenbrand, Egger, Choueiri, Noth & Paul, Haarmann, Garcin, et al.). Islamic history research had, however, been expanding rapidly, and its diversifying fields of specialization continued to generate exciting new insights and interpretations, which even the more recent of these textbooks had not yet managed to fully acknowledge. I therefore became one of the many colleagues who take it upon themselves to integrate this ongoing research into their lectures and generate their own comprehensive overviews. This gargantuan task first took shape in the default format of annually updated and upgraded personal lecture notes, but it soon transformed into a textbook publication project that took the challenge to keep our teaching materials up to date more seriously. Now, more than a decade later, this project has finally borne the desired fruit.[1]

A History of the Islamic World, 600–1800 presents one of the ways in which today a history of the Islamic world can be written and taught. This involved making several key decisions. The temporal and geographical parameters that define and connect the chapters of this textbook emphasize the intense Asian connectedness of the landscapes ranging from the Nile in the southwest

---

1. Jo Van Steenbergen, *A History of the Islamic World, 600–1800. Empire, Dynastic Formations, and Heterogeneities in Pre-Modern Islamic West-Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

and the Bosporus in the northwest to the Oxus (Amu Darya) and Jaxartes (Syr Darya) in the northeast and the Indus in the southeast between the seventh and eighteenth centuries CE. This means that I made the choice to tell only the story of what Marshall Hodgson called the pre-Technical and Theocratic age, defined here as the late antique and 'medieval'–early modern periods, in Islamic West Asia's history. Central to the framework of historical interpretation that I use to tell this story is the argument of the mutually constitutive interaction between dynastic reconfigurations and cultural efflorescence and, in particular, between practices of power and discourses of belonging in the making and remaking of premodern Islamic West Asia's diverse social and cultural landscapes. This connected social and cultural history approach enables the reconstruction of a particular, but also meaningful, framework narrative about different waves in premodern Islamic history's ocean of events, people, and stories. Not only did each of these waves carry diverse but related sets of leadership groups; they also continued to do so defined by multifarious but equally related sets of practices and discourses. The analytical grid—insufficiently specified in many textbooks—used to reconstruct the narrative of these leaderships, practices, and discourses combines a Khaldunian reading of the historical interaction between nomads and urban dwellers with a Weberian conceptual framework of different types of legitimate authority.

A History of the Islamic World, 600–1800 explains how two major historical waves in the Khaldunian movement of nomadic-urban interaction can be usefully identified as coherent time-space units of social

and cultural history. A first, late antique imperial wave started swelling during the Arabian expansion from the early seventh century and lost momentum in the course of the complete disintegration of the Abbasid imperial formation in the tenth century. A second, 'medieval'–early modern dynastic wave then took over in the polycentric form of a long series of invasions by Inner Asian Turkic- and Mongolian-speaking leaderships from the early eleventh century onward, and the social and cultural effects of their conquest practices and (post-)nomadic stabilizations appeared to peter out only with the radical transformations of the region's early modern dynastic formations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The first wave is traditionally, and rightly, deemed of enormous importance and relevance. The second wave, however, is often considered to represent only a 'postclassical' shadow of the first. One of the contentions of this textbook is that this stereotype does not hold true and, therefore, this second period of dynastic polycentrism, creative heterogeneity, and being Islamic also deserves full attention and appreciation in its own right. Only when one understands the intensity, innovativeness, and decisive impact of leadership configurations, social and cultural practices, and discourses of belonging in both periods can one fully estimate the further, modern trajectories of these regions' social and cultural histories. The two chronological parts and fourteen illustrated chapters of *A History of the Islamic World, 600–1800* therefore invite students and teachers as well as general readers and specialists to be acquainted with, and reflect on, such new understandings of Islamic history.

Teaching Note

Teaching Medieval Slavery and Captivity: An Online Pedagogical Resource

Hannah Barker
Arizona State University

(Hannah.Barker.1@asu.edu)

Pulling together enough primary sources in translation to sustain an undergraduate course on slavery in the medieval period is difficult. If the students need to write research papers, it becomes even more difficult. After my first attempt at teaching such a class, I decided to create a permanent and easily accessible place to share the translations I had done for my own students and to enable colleagues to share theirs. A website, *Teaching Medieval Slavery and Captivity* (www.medievalslavery.org), turned out to be the best way to meet these twin goals of sharing resources and making it easier to teach about the long history of slavery and captivity, whether as the focus of an entire course or as the topic for a single day's discussion.

To make the website useful across disciplines, I decided that the geographical scope should be global and that the medieval era should be interpreted broadly. I also used thematic categories to connect sources from disparate regions and time periods that might be interesting to teach in comparative perspective. Consulting with scholars in areas beyond my expertise was great fun (and valuable for incorporating slavery into my global history survey), but as a scholar of the Mamluks, I also wanted to have a robust collection of sources on slavery in a variety of Islamicate societies. If you access the website today, most of these have been gathered under regional headings (Middle East and North Africa, Africa, Europe, and Russia and Central Asia), but there are also some short passages formatted for the AP World History exam that could be adapted for other purposes.

For those of us teaching the medieval Middle East, I hope that this website will help address three pedagogical

challenges. First, I hope that it will add interdisciplinary richness to our classes. As a historian, I am used to working with written texts, but in teaching I want to include art, architecture, music, archaeology, and many other angles into the past. Enslaved and manumitted people were involved in so many aspects of cultural and artistic life in the medieval Middle East, as creators and patrons as well as objects of depiction or description, that it makes sense to use their status as the focus of an interdisciplinary discussion.

Second, given some of the lurid stories that circulate about practices of slavery in medieval Muslim societies, I hope that a comparative perspective will help undergraduates reexamine their assumptions in this area. For example, it is worth reminding students that slave ownership, including sexual exploitation and physical abuse, was normal among medieval Christians and Jews as well as Muslims, in the Middle East and elsewhere, and that tensions surrounding the treatment of slaves were connected to the policing of social boundaries. For this purpose, I might pair a source such as "The Slave Women of al-Manṣūr Ḥajjī," in which political boundaries are at stake, with "A Legal Query to Moses Maimonides" and "Felix Fabri's Wanderings in the Holy Land," in which the boundaries between religious communities are threatened. For a course with a global/comparative element, I also recommend the bioarchaeological work of Tiffiny Tung[1] on Peru and Debra Martin[2] on the American Southwest. On a more mundane level, I also have students compare the contractual formulas used in sale documents for slaves, such as "A Deed of Sale of Yumn" and "Slave Sale Contracts from Genoa." This helps them both compare practices of slavery and understand the distinction between the fixed and variable elements of a contract.

Finally, I hope that presenting a broad array of sources will enable students to have more nuanced discussions about the ways in which slavery intersected with religion, race, and gender within medieval Islamicate societies. The complex positionality of eunuchs between power ("The Sabīl-Kuttāb of Yūsuf Āghā Dār al-Saʿadāt) and vulnerability ("The Guide Book for Obtaining Divine Favors") is one example; the contrast between the honored mother of a former mamluk and the domestic slave who killed her is another ("Execution of a Mamluk Slave Woman").

I plan to continue adding materials to this website for the foreseeable future. If you would like to contribute a source to the collection, or if you use the website in your class and would like to write a teaching reflection about your experiences, please get in touch.

---

1. Tiffiny Tung, "Violence against Women: Differential Treatment of Local and Foreign Females in the Heartland of the Wari Empire, Peru," in *The Bioarchaeology of Violence*, ed. Debra Martin, Ryan Harrod, and Ventura Pérez, 180–98 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012).

2. Debra Martin, "Ripped Flesh and Torn Souls: Skeletal Evidence for Captivity and Slavery from the La Plata Valley, New Mexico, AD 1100–1300," in *Invisible Citizens: Captives and Their Consequences*, ed. Catherine Cameron, 159–80 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008).

Book Review

Amikam Elad, *The Rebellion of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya in 145/762: Ṭālibīs and Early ʿAbbāsīs in Conflict*. Islamic History and Civilization 118 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 527 pp., map. ISBN 978-9-00422-989-1. Price: $257 (cloth or e-book).

Matthew S. Gordon
*Miami University,
Oxford, Ohio*

(gordonms@miamioh.edu)

Is an exhaustive treatment of the life and career of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya warranted? A quick browse of recent secondary literature—Maher Jarrar's bibliography ("Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbdallāh," *EI³*) is very useful in this regard—suggests that the need has been long-standing.[1] Does the present volume thus fill a lacuna? To my mind, only partly so. Elad has gone further than any other modern scholar in collecting the material required for the sort of book that would satisfy. For this reason, he deserves much credit. But I would have had him proceed many steps further. He has effectively cataloged what one can only think are the most relevant references in the early and medieval Arabic canon. But he holds back from drawing out full conclusions and,

thus, from providing an account for any but the most interested specialists.

Most modern discussions center on the rebellion organized by al-Nafs al-Zakiyya ("the Pure Soul") and his reportedly talented full brother (Ibrāhīm) against the new Abbasid caliph, Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr, in 145/762. The Abbasids had only recently donned the caliphal mantle, and thus a concerted challenge from members of a key circle of elite Islamic society was no minor matter. To the contrary: it brought into question the very claims to office of the new regime. The episode also contributed an early and significant chapter to the long history of Middle Eastern messianism; we owe a goodly portion of the extant literature on al-Nafs al-Zakiyya to the interest of later Muslim

---

1. Maher Jarrar, "Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbdallāh," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson (Leiden: Brill Online), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/ibrahim-b-abdallah-COM_32328.

writers in the messianic element of his rebellion. A puzzling feature of the present volume is that Elad says little about Ibrāhīm, despite the many indications that, like Raúl for Fidel, he sustained much of his brother's activity and, indeed, pressed on following Muḥammad's demise until his own death months later (Jarrar's reference to al-Yaʿqūbī's *Taʾrīkh* is to be amended).[2]

That modern scholarship is mostly concerned with the rebellion itself makes sense. The events of the uprising and, especially, its connection with messianic and sectarian patterns of early Islamic society are properly situated at the center of any account. Elad provides the stuff of a richer context, however, in bringing together a wealth of detail on, for example, the person and family of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya. The man's stutter, which he tried to control by slapping his thigh (pp. 34–36), and his prominent black mole, a sign of the Mahdi for biographers and followers alike (pp. 44–46), are details one is happy to have. They enrich the picture one has of the man and his career and of the ingredients of a nascent Arabic sectarian literary tradition; as with so much else in early Arabic letters, one is left to choose how best to account for such seemingly intimate information. Elad fills out our picture of the sociopolitical as well as the personal scene, very helpfully bringing together what the Arabic canon says of the seemingly profound impact that the uprising had upon local, that is, Hijazi/Medinan society (chapters 7 and 8). Clansmen and kin took sides, and thus civil divisions ensued, with both immediate and long-term consequences across subsequent local and imperial (Abbasid) history. Elad, in fact, concludes the volume (pp. 361–62) on this very point.

But for stutter and social antagonism alike, Elad declines the opportunity to tell us what to think of all this personal detail and social furor. He leaves it instead to "a future study" (p. 233), presumably to be written by other hands, to fill in the color, action, and, above all, conclusions. The book is in this sense a catalog. Is this right? One cannot, of course, insist that it be otherwise: we write the books we write. It is also the case that history is written ultimately in collaboration with the generations that follow (who may, of course, raise objections) as well as with those that precede. One throws out arguments and ideas for younger colleagues to chew on. On this score, Elad has performed a valuable service, and one cannot but be impressed by the doggedness with which he has worked through the Arabic sources. The volume is thick with references, nearly every page crowded with notes. A brief description of his method (pp. 11–12) points to his use of such large repositories of Arabic texts as *al-Maktaba al-Shāmila* and others. So he has prepared the way for a rounded recounting of an episode deeply significant to the rise of the Abbasid polity, to early Islamic sectarian history, and to the more local history of the Hijaz.

But, again, why stop so abruptly? Elad probably knows more about al-Nafs al-Zakiyya than any living scholar and,

---

2. Aḥmad b. Abī Yaʿqūb al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma as *Ibn Wadhih qui dicitur al-Jaʾqubi Historiae*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1883). The correct reference is 2:246.

thus, would certainly seem to have much more to tell us. The many indications are there; in brief comments scattered through the book, he suggests perfectly cogent ways in which to consider the different "data" that he has so carefully collected. But there is also the view that we—scholars of Arab, Middle Eastern, and Islamic history, society, and religion—ought to do our utmost to reach an audience beyond our own circles. Consider quite a different version, Hugh Kennedy's pithy account of the uprising in *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World*.[3] Granted, Kennedy wrote his book for a wider audience than that sought by Elad. The point, though, is that it is accessible

and dramatic: one engages, so to speak, with al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and his challenge to the existing imperial order. But it has its problems. To my mind, Kennedy's version is too quick and too easy, and says little by way of conclusion regarding, say, the shaping of distinct models of Arabo-Islamic leadership or, more specifically, the Alid-Abbasid confrontation. Kennedy, quite unlike Elad, is also far too content to parrot one version—namely, al-Ṭabarī's—of the events. This is really the point: Elad is positioned to offer a nuanced and contextualized rendition of the rebel and his rebellion, in which we would grapple with a body of full and often disparate references. It would make for fine history.

---

3. Hugh Kennedy, *When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World: The Rise and Fall of Islam's Greatest Dynasty* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006), 21–26.

Book Review

Mālik b. Anas, *Al-Muwaṭṭaʾ: The Recension of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Laythī; A Translation of the Royal Moroccan Edition.* Translated with notes by Mohammad Fadel and Connell Monette. Harvard Series in Islamic Law 8 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 858 pp. Price: $95.00 (cloth).

Adday Hernández

CSIC – Instituto de Lenguas y Culturas del Mediterráneo y Oriente Próximo (ILC)

(adday.hernandez@cchs.csic.es)

This is a high-quality translation of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ*, not only because the translators are renowned scholars in the field of Islamic studies but also—and mainly—because the participation of Mohammad Fadel, who specializes in Islamic law, ensures the accuracy of the terminology employed.

This English translation of the Royal Moroccan Edition of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* responds to a series of initiatives started in Morocco aimed at producing academic English translations of the *ummahāt* (foundational texts) of the Mālikī school of law. Since the author of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ*, Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796), was the eponym of the school and one of the most prominent figures in the formation of early Sunni identity,[1] the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* is a reasonable starting point, particularly as the previous translations into English are of a non-academic character.

The translation is based on the Royal Moroccan Edition of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* published in 2013, which in turn is based on "some of the most ancient North African and Andalusian manuscripts available."[2] Six manuscripts are mentioned in the Arabic introduction to the Royal Moroccan Edition (pp. 39–72), namely, (1) a manuscript from al-Zāwiya al-Ḥamzawiyya preserved in Tunis that was copied in 487/1094, which was taken as the base manuscript for the edition;[3]

---

1. Jonathan A. C. Brown, "Mālik, the Muwaṭṭaʾ, and Sunni Identity," *Muwaṭṭaʾ Roundtable*, Islamic Law Blog, December 7, 2019, https://islamiclaw.blog/2019/12/07/malik-muwatta-sunni-identity/.

2. Mālik b. Anas, *Al-Muwaṭṭaʾ*, 2. At least twenty manuscripts have been preserved of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā's recension of Mālik's *Muwaṭṭaʾ*. See *History of Andalusi Authors and Transmitters* (HATA), 3. *Fiqh*: 9, http://kohepocu.cchs.csic.es/flipbooks/3/#p=8.

3. This was collated with the manuscripts of Abū ʿUmar al-Muntajālī (d. 350/961) and the autograph

(2) the copy of Abū ʿAbd Allāh b. al-Ṭallāʿ (d. 497/1103), copied at the beginning of the seventh/thirteenth century; (3) the copy of Abū Muḥammad Shurayḥ al-Ruʿaynī (d. 539/1144), one of the companions of Ibn Ḥazm, who wrote the manuscript in his own hand for his son Muḥammad b. Shurayḥ (d. 567/1171), probably copied during the first half of the sixth/twelfth century; (4) a manuscript copied in 595/1198; (5) a manuscript copied by ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Labbād (d. 613/1216); (6) a final manuscript copied around the same time as the latter. Unfortunately, the places where these manuscripts are kept are rarely mentioned (see pp. 67–72).[4] Moreover, the editors report consulting previous editions as well, namely, (1) the Egyptian edition of Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, (2) the edition of Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf,[5] and (3) the edition of Muṣṭafā al-Aʿẓamī.

Preceding the translation, we find three introductory chapters which helpfully situate the work in its context, although the titles of the first two are quite similar, making it somewhat difficult to distinguish their respective content.

First, "The English Translation of the Royal Moroccan Edition" (pp. 1–6), the author of which is not specified, offers background to the initiative that led to the translation of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ*, as well as an account of the previous translations, the translation team, the process followed in the translation work, and the editorial conventions.

Second, "Introduction to the Translation of the Royal Moroccan Edition of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ*, Recension of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Laythī" (pp. 7–38) provides readers with a biography of Mālik b. Anas and the role he played within the Sunni tradition. It also contains a subsection on the place of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* in modern scholarship and, finally, an overview of the work's contents.

Third, "Arabic Introduction to the Royal Moroccan Edition of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ*" (pp. 39–72) is an English translation of the introduction to the Arabic edition from which the present translation has been made.

Regarding the language and style, the unsigned first introduction states that "the translation has sometimes adopted a very formal, even archaic tone, while at other times, a colloquial style was deemed more appropriate" (p. 3). This variation notwithstanding, the language is always clear and idiomatic. As stated in the first introductory chapter, the text was initially translated by Drs. Ali Azeria and Mohamed Ouakrime of Al Akhawayn University, with the help of the editors of the Royal Moroccan Edition and two graduate assistants, Lahoucine Amedjar and Dawud Nasir. This initial translation relied on primary and secondary Mālikī sources. In a second stage, in order

---

manuscript of Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Abī ʿĪsā (d. 339/950), chief judge of Cordoba and a relative of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā, the transmitter of this recension of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ*.

4. In the electronic resource *History of Andalusi Authors and Transmitters* it is possible to find a list of manuscripts of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā's recension of Mālik's *Muwaṭṭaʾ* with references to the libraries where they are kept and the catalogs in which these copies are listed (3.*Fiqh*: 9, http://kohepocu.cchs.csic.es/flipbooks/3/#p=8).

5. His critical edition of Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr's *Tamhīd* has been recently published. Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd li-mā fī al-Muwaṭṭaʾ min al-maʿānī wa-l-asānīd*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf, 17 vols. (London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2017).

to make the text accessible to modern legal scholars, nonspecialists in Islamic law, and English-speaking Muslims, Fadel adapted the translation to contemporary legal terminology in English. In a third stage, Fadel and Monette modified the translation to produce an easily readable text, which occasionally led them to depart from the original structure and sense of the Arabic. Both the decision to translate every term into English and the specific translation choices made for each term can be debated.[6] For example, whereas the term *ribā* has usually been translated as "usury," it is here translated as "unlawful profit." Although it is true that "usury" is not an accurate translation,[7] a profit obtained from selling wine or pork is also unlawful but does not constitute *ribā*, so perhaps "interest" would have been a more appropriate translation. This kind of critique, however, does not detract from the merit of the translation, which constitutes, in my view, a valuable scholarly accomplishment.

There is little to say about the structure of the translation, since it retains the structure of the original work, which is the same as that followed by the later manuals of Mālikī *fiqh*.

One does note, however, the absence of information on the transmitter of this version of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ*, Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Laythī (d. 234/848): his origins, his powerful position in Cordoba, and how his many disciples accorded him fame and spread his recension of the work. It would also have been helpful for the volume to have offered a more detailed account of the introduction of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* in the Islamic West, a process linked to the spread of Mālikism.

According to Hady Roger Idris,[8] and contrary to what Muʾnis affirms,[9] the introduction of Mālik's doctrine was not supported by the Umayyad dynasty of Cordoba. Instead, it was adopted independently by *ʿulamāʾ* educated in the Islamic East who transmitted it after their return and was only later endorsed by the Umayyads.[10] Of the two main legal

---

6. Kecia Ali, for instance, has questioned the decision to translate into English terms that are not objects of comparative legal study. In particular, she focused on the translation of the terms *ama* and *jāriya* as "handmaiden," a term that she considers archaic and ambiguous and one that does not reflect the reality of slavery in the period in which the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* was composed. Kecia Ali, "The Handmaiden's Tale," *Muwaṭṭaʾ Roundtable*, Islamic Law Blog, December 6, 2019, https://islamiclaw.blog/2019/12/06/muwa%e1%b9%ad%e1%b9%ada%ca%be-roundtable-the-handmaidens-tale/.

7. On the meaning of *ribā* and usury, see Adday Hernández, *El valor del tiempo: Doctrina jurídica de la usura (ribā) en el Occidente islámico medieval* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2016).

8. Hady Roger Idris, "Reflections on Mālikism under the Umayyads of Spain", in *The formation of al-Andalus. Part 2: Language, religion, culture and the sciences*, ed. Maribel Fierro and Julio Samsó, 85–101, (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1998), 92–95.

9. Ḥusayn Muʾnis (Hussain Monès), "The role of men of religion in the history of Muslim Spain up to the end of the caliphate," in *The formation of al-Andalus. Part 2: Language, religion, culture and the sciences*, ed. Maribel Fierro and Julio Samsó (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1998), 51–84.

10. Maribel Fierro, "Proto-Malikis, Malikis and Reformed Malikis," in *The Islamic School of Law: Evolution, Devolution, and Progress*, ed. Peri J. Bearman, Rudolph Peters, and Frank E. Vogel, 57–76 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 62; Alfonso Carmona, "The Introduction of Malik's Teachings in al-Andalus," in Bearman, Peters, and Vogel, *Islamic School of Law*, 41–56.

trends found between the late second/ eighth and the early third/ninth centuries, Mālikism was the only possible choice, since Ḥanafism had been adopted by the Abbasids and was thus perceived by the Umayyads, who opposed its introduction in al-Andalus, as the doctrine of the enemy. In addition, the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* had a series of features that dovetailed with fit the ideological program of the Umayyads. For instance, according to Maribel Fierro, the criticisms of the "East" (*al-mashriq*, a reference to Iraq) found in the text fit the Umayyads' anti-Abbasid policies, and the report included in the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* on the taxes taken by ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān from the Berbers of the Maghrib demonstrated that their conversion to Islam took place under Umayyad rule, an argument that was used to fight the spread of Fāṭimid influence in North Africa.[11]

There is an academic debate about whether we can talk about a real affiliation by the Andalusī jurists to the Mālikī *madhhab* as such in Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā's times, or whether it would be more appropriate to talk about geographical schools, the Medinese/Egyptian school

in this particular case.[12] However, the influence exerted by Mālik b. Anas in the Islamic West at the time is undeniable, regardless of whether the Mālikī school had already taken form. During the fourth/ tenth century, the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* became the canonical *ḥadīth* compilation in al-Andalus, although apparently it did not influence *fiqh* substantially in that period.[13] Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā, who had transmitted it to al-Andalus, was then regarded as the introducer of the orthodox canon, which included both the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* in relation to *ḥadīth* and Nāfiʿ's (d. 169/785) *qirāʾa* (reading variant) of the Qurʾan.[14]

Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā was an Andalusī scholar of Berber origin (belonging to the Maṣmūda from Tangier and Ceuta) whose family, known as the Banū Abī ʿĪsā,[15] had settled in al-Andalus at the time of the conquests and supported the Umayyads. By Yaḥyā's generation, the family had already reached a high degree of Arabization and Islamization and was very well situated in Andalusī society. Yaḥyā is said to have studied with Mālik, Nāfiʿ, and al-Layth b. Saʿd (d. 174/791), but the contradictions

---

11. Maribel Fierro, "Medina, the Mashriq, and the Maghrib in the Recension of Mālik's Muwaṭṭaʾ by the Cordoban Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Laythī," *Muwaṭṭaʾ Roundtable*, Islamic Law Blog, December 6, 2019, https://islamiclaw.blog/2019/12/06/muwa%E1%B9%AD%E1%B9%ADa%CA%BE-roundtable-medina-the-mashriq-and-the-maghrib-in-the-recension-of-maliks-muwa%E1%B9%AD%E1%B9%ADa%CA%BC-by-the-cordoban-ya%E1%B8%A5ya-b-ya%E1%B8%A5ya-al/.

12. See, for instance, Knut Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan: A History of Islamic Law* (London: Hurst and Co., 2005), 98; Ana Fernández Félix, "Biografías de alfaquíes: La generación de al-ʿUtbī," in *Biografías y género biográfico en el occidente islámico*, ed. María Luisa Avila Navarro, 141–75 (Granada: CSIC, 1997), 165; Miklos Muranyi, "A Unique Manuscript from Kairouan in the British Library: The *Samāʿ*-Work of Ibn al-Qāsim al-ʿUtaqī and Issues of Methodology," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, ed. Herbert Berg, 325–68 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Fierro, "Proto-Malikis," 65.

13. Maribel Fierro, "El alfaquí beréber Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Laytī (m. 234/848), 'El inteligente de al-Andalus,'" in Ávila Navarro, *Biografías y género biográfico*, 269–344, at 334.

14. Fierro, "El alfaquí beréber," 330.

15. Manuela Marín, "Una familia de ulemas cordobeses: Los Banū Abī ʿĪsà," *Al-Qanṭara* 6 (1985): 291–320.

found in the sources, together with the fact that the formal criteria followed in Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā's time regarding the transmission of texts were not as strict as those imposed from the third/ninth century onward, have led some scholars, such as Maribel Fierro, if not to deny, at least to question this direct contact.[16] There are no doubts, however, about the fact that he attended the lessons of the Egyptian disciples of Mālik, including Ibn al-Qāsim (d. 191/806), whose doctrine would become the most widely followed in al-Andalus.

After the "traditionalization" of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) initiated by al-Shāfiʿī,[17] the *Muwaṭṭaʾ*, whose transmission chains (*isnād*s) do not conform to the strict standards imposed by the supporters of this traditionalization, was used by those ʿ*ulamāʾ* who sought an intermediate position between *raʾy* (personal opinion) and *ḥadīth*, such as Ibn Waḍḍāḥ (d. 286/900). The fact that the *isnād*s were not complete meant that the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* was not considered a valid source of *ḥadīth* after the canonization of Muslim's and Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥayn*.[18] However, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071) managed to complete all the chains except four in his *Kitāb al-Tamhīd li-mā fī al-Muwaṭṭaʾ min al-maʿānī wa-l-*

asānīd, with the aim of adapting the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* to the principles established by the discipline of *ḥadīth* (ʿ*ilm al-ḥadīth*) and providing Mālik's work with the same legitimacy that had been granted to the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*.

In summary, this is a highly welcome contribution, especially for researchers working on subjects related to Islamic law in the premodern Islamic West, and there is no doubt that it will become one of the main reference sources in this field. The content is clear and accurate and the Arabic technical terms related to the key concepts discussed in each chapter are provided in transcription between brackets the first time they appear, which not only makes it easier to locate the specific expression in the Arabic text but also eases the reading of the English. The indexes are extremely useful for finding specific names and terms and allow the reader to identify both the chapters specifically devoted to particular concepts and the occasional occurrences of those concepts in other chapters.

This trustworthy translation will contribute to raising the quality of future studies by helping academic researchers in Islamic studies interpret Mālik's work.

---

16. Fierro, "El alfaquí beréber," 329–330.

17. See, for instance, Joseph E. Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The "Risāla" of Muhammad Ibn Idrīs Al-Shāfiʿī* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 165–205 (chap. 3: "Prophetic Sunna and Hadith in the *Risāla*"); Ahmed El Shamsy, *The Canonization of Islamic Law: A Social and Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 65–68 ("Al-Shāfiʿī's Critique of Mālik").

18. Jonathan Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 232–234.

Book Review

Mónika Schönléber

Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies
(Piliscsaba/Budapest, Hungary)

(schonleber@avicenna-kkki.hu)

The book under review is a new, partial edition of Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī's *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, made by Qays al-ʿAṭṭār and printed in 2017 in Karbalāʾ, Iraq.[1] Although the *Kitāb al-futūḥ* has been edited several times over the past half-century, the present volume deserves special attention as it is based on a manuscript—MS Ankara (Saib 5418), kept in Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Kütüphanesi of Ankara University—that has not been used for any of the work's previous printed editions.

Until the middle third of the twentieth century, scholars of Arabic historiography wishing to use this work had to rely, besides manuscripts, on a later nineteenth-century lithograph edition of the work's Persian translation.[2] Although the most extensive extant Arabic manuscript of the work had already been found in 1925,[3] it remained unedited for almost half a century. This shortcoming was finally remedied, at least in part, by the publication of the hitherto most reliable and complete printed text, published in Hyderābād in 1968–1975

---

1. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Mahdi Mojtahedi, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, for calling my attention to this edition and making a copy of it available to me. Al-Shaykh Qays al-ʿAṭṭār, the editor of the book, is the director of Markaz al-Imām al-Ḥasan li-l-Dirāsāt al-Takhaṣṣuṣiyya Farʿ Mashhad (see https://imamhassan.org/contents/view/details?id=135).

2. Mustawfī, *Tarjuma-yi Kitāb al-futūḥ*, ed. Mīrzā Muḥammad Shīrāzī Malik al-Kuttāb as *Tarjuma-yi Kitāb al-futūḥ az Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-maʿrūf bi-Aʿtham al-Kūfī, wa mutarjim-i ān Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Harawī* (Bombay: Mīrzā Muḥammad Shīrāzī Malik al-Kuttāb, 1305/1887).

3. Zeki Velidi Togan, "Ibn Aʿtham-al-Kufi," *Islamic Culture* 44, no. 1 (1970): 249–252.

(henceforth abbreviated as H).[4] Yet strictly speaking, that volume cannot be regarded as a truly critical edition, either, even if the editors made a major effort to base their undertaking on all the manuscripts preserving the Arabic text that were available to them. In fact, they used four out of the seven currently known Arabic exemplars: MS Gotha (FB MS. orient. A 1592), MS Istanbul (Ahmet III 2956/1–2), MS Dublin (Chester Beatty 3272), and MS Birmingham (Mingana 572). Two further copies might have escaped the editors' attention because of the misidentification of their codices: MS Patna (Khudā Bakhsh 1042) was ascribed to al-Wāqidī in the library's 1929 printed catalog,[5] while Fuat Sezgin referred to MS Ankara in his first, 1967 volume of *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* as a work by Abū Mikhnaf.[6] The same cannot be said of the last known fragment, MS Milan (Ambrosiana H 129), since it was properly identified as Ibn Aʿtham's work in the very first paper to mention it. Yet this piece, published in an Italian *Festschrift* in 1910 and also quoted by C. Brockelmann in his entry on Ibn Aʿtham in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, did not gain particularly wide currency in later research, which could explain why it was overlooked by the editors of H.[7]

Despite the unquestionable merits of the editors, who, for the first time, made available a fairly complete Arabic text of Ibn Aʿtham's history, like most pioneering enterprises, H was unable to settle all the problematic issues raised by the manuscript tradition. Unfortunately, since no introduction is provided to the eight volumes, the editors share neither working principles and methods nor their observations concerning the work's textual tradition. In the absence of such information, readers are left almost entirely in the dark about major questions, including the physical condition and dating problems of the manuscripts, their copyists, the circumstances of their copying, the lacunae, and the handling of poems, to mention but a few issues. Thus, from time to time, a shroud of vagueness envelops the source of textual insertions and their extent, especially since not even the most careful reading of the footnotes sheds light on these issues. It is not always clear, for example, why some of the poems missing from MS Istanbul (the one apparently chosen as the edition's basis against which the other three were collated) but preserved in MSS Dublin and Birmingham were sometimes included in the main text, whereas in other cases they were relegated to the footnotes. Nor are hypercorrections infrequent, particularly when *isnād*s are concerned, as Lawrence I. Conrad has already pointed out.[8]

Although much caution thus needs to be exercised when drawing conclusions

4. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAẓīm al-Dīn and Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Muʿīn Khān, 8 vols. (Hyderābād: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1388–1395/1968–1975).

5. Maulavi Muinuddin Nadwi, *Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Oriental Public Library at Bankipore*, vol. 15, *Arabic MSS., History* (Patna: Baptist Mission Press, 1929), 108–110.

6. Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, 9 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967–1974), 1:308–309 (4–5).

7. Eugenio Griffini, "I due episodi siciliani dello Pseudo al Waqîdî in uno nuova redazione anonima," *Centenario della nascita di Michele Amari*, ed. Enrico Besta, Gaetano M. Columba, Carlo A. Nallino, Antonio Salinas, Giambattista Siragusa, and Carlo O. Zuretti, 402–415 (Palermo: Virzì, 1910).

8. Lawrence I. Conrad, "Ibn Aʿtham and His History," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 23 (2015): 87–125, esp. 114.

based on H's text because of these uncertainties, none of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*'s three subsequent editions provided a more solid basis for research. The edition published by Nuʿaym Zarzūr in 1986 only rarely offers more than a simple retyping of H.[9] The editor also chose a peculiar "method" to fill the lacunae of the Arabic text. In most cases, he simply inserted the medieval Persian translation's modern Arabic retranslation without indicating this fact accurately. As though to worsen this indefensible practice, such insertions were from time to time also complemented with additional texts from, for example, the work of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923).[10] Moreover, even a careful reading of his text is sometimes of little help in securely distinguishing the entire extent of editorial interventions. For instance, although at 1:75, n. 1, Zarzūr draws his readers' attention to a gap and refers to the Persian manuscripts he used (MSS Hyderābād, Salar Jung 144 and 145),[11] ten pages later the endpoint of the Arabic retranslation is marked only by a square bracket, without any explanation.[12] The process of harmonizing H and the retranslation of the Persian may have led to further difficulties,

including losses from the Arabic text transmitted through the extant codices, as is the case with a section of about half a page that was in all probability left out when the end of the retranslated Persian passage was inadequately joined to the Arabic of H.[13]

The same method of filling the lacunae of the original Arabic with sections translated back from the Persian was employed by both later editors of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*. However, one of them, ʿAlī Shīrī, was more careful in systematically marking these insertions by introducing them with an editorial note and indicating their terminations by square brackets supplemented with clarifying footnotes.[14] The insertions are less easily discerned in Suhayl Zakkār's 1992 edition.[15] Unlike Shīrī, Zakkār did not merely reuse Zarzūr's modern Arabic retranslation[16] but chose to create his own based on Shīrāzī's abovementioned lithograph.[17] To be sure, this is very much in line with Zakkār's intention to finally prepare the much-needed critical edition, for which he likewise chose to rely on MS Istanbul, using MS Dublin as the control text. Yet his footnotes reveal that he did not

---

9. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, ed. Nuʿaym Zarzūr as: *al-Futūḥ*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1406/1986).

10. See, e.g., Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (ed. Zarzūr), 1:78, lines 20–21; 1:81, lines 4–5.

11. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (ed. Zarzūr), 1:75, n. 1.

12. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (ed. Zarzūr), 1:84, line 20.

13. For the missing part, see H 1:100, lines 1–11.

14. See, for example, Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, ed. by ʿAlī Shīrī as *Futūḥ*, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ, 1411/1991), from 1:72, line 16 to 1:83, line 8, esp. 1:83, n. 1.

15. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār as *al-Futūḥ*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1412/1992).

16. Since Shīrī's text is identical with Zarzūr's, there is good reason to assume that he simply recycled his predecessor's text.

17. Ibn Ḥubaysh, *Ghazawāt*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār as *Ghazawāt Ibn Ḥubaysh*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1412/1992), 13 (introduction).

systematically refer to the readings of the latter, and like Zarzūr before him, he also incorporated different passages from independent works into the main text of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (e.g. "Ṣiffīn," most likely the *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*).[18]

This brief overview perhaps explains the excitement felt by any student of ninth- and tenth-century Arabic historiography when laying hands on a freshly edited Ibn Aʿtham, especially if, as is the case with the volume reviewed here, it draws on a previously neglected manuscript, thereby making its testimony available to the academic community. Of course, the choice to edit merely a select part of a multivolume opus has its potential pitfalls. However, in view of the enormous extent of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, the hardships of accessing its manuscripts, and the difficulties abounding in its extant printed versions, of which my review gives no more than a slight glimpse, all efforts to improve the entire text or portions of it are easily justifiable and more than welcome.[19] This having been said, it may also be noted that an approach along these lines yields the best results if the editor selects a particular portion that provides an intrinsic rationale for its quasi-independent treatment, either in terms of its textual transmission or because of the work's structure. This does not entirely hold true for the present volume, since,

as the editor, Qays al-ʿAṭṭār, explains in his introduction, his intention was simply to complement the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*'s existing editions by making a previously unpublished manuscript available to a broader audience.

It must also be noted that MS Ankara does not seem to represent a separate, easily definable thematic unit within the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*. Although neither the original beginning nor the end of the codex is extant, in my estimation, which is based on an examination of the quire signatures of the manuscript, no more than a few, most likely about two to three, folios could have been lost from its beginning. Unfortunately, no similar calculation can produce a reliable estimate of the number of missing folios at the manuscript's end. Comparing the estimated loss in the beginning closely with Ibn Aʿtham's text suggests that MS Ankara very possibly did not start with the beginning of a larger thematic unit but rather was part of a multivolume set of manuscripts in which textual units were not necessarily distributed among the single codices according to thematic principles. Yet mention should be made of the interesting circumstance that the very first preserved lines of MS Ankara are three hemistichs of a poem. The poem cannot be completed on the strength of the other manuscripts because those either do not preserve

---

18. Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (ed. Zakkār), 1:164, lines 13–17.

19. This would also be true for other partial editions based on different codices, if their editors had not ascribed Ibn Aʿtham's text to others, thereby deluding themselves while modifying and commenting on the text; cf. Mónika Schönléber, "Notes on the Textual Tradition of Ibn Aʿtham's *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*," in *Contacts and Interaction: Proceedings of the 27th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants, Helsinki 2014*, ed. Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, Petteri Koskikallio, and Ilkka Lindstedt, 427–38 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), esp. 429–31, with further literature.

these lines or contain another poetical composition.[20]

The edition under review begins with a very detailed introduction that occupies almost one hundred pages. To the reader's delight, besides some general issues usually discussed in this section, al-ʿAṭṭār addresses certain problems rarely touched upon in Middle Eastern editions. He opens his discussion with a chapter on Ibn Aʿtham, covering his name, *madhhab*, works, poetry, and death (pp. 9–23). Al-ʿAṭṭār's conclusions are generally reliable. Only in some cases should they be treated with caution because, though he bases his arguments on a majority of the available sources, a few important ones are not mentioned.[21] The next chapter (pp. 23–33) outlines the rise of early Arabic historiography and offers an overview of how historical information was transmitted from Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/774) down to Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200); a particular emphasis is placed on the role of *isnād*s and the emergence of their use in historiography.

The main aim of the next chapter is to explore the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*'s reception history between the fifth and thirteenth *hijrī* centuries (pp. 34–56). The sources reviewed are listed in twenty-three sections in chronological order. The chapter collects the most important data

on authors and works that made use of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, but its principal value is no doubt the attention al-ʿAṭṭār pays to Ibn Aʿtham's confessional affiliation (pp. 13–19). After citing some medieval and modern authorities who explicitly declared Ibn Aʿtham to be a Shiʿi writer, al-ʿAṭṭār reviews a significant amount of medieval and early modern Muslim literature, including authors who belonged to *al-shīʿa* and what he calls *al-ʿāmma*.[22] On the basis of their writings, he rejects the previous claim, arguing that Ibn Aʿtham was not in fact committed to any particular *madrasa* (school) or *madhhab*.

The next chapter explains the editor's goal in taking on this project and presents in detail—over almost twenty pages—the main differences between his text and the previous editions (pp. 57–74). Curiously, instead of basing his editorial undertaking on comparing the text transmitted in MS Ankara to those preserved in other manuscripts, of whose existence he was aware, and making emendations accordingly, al-ʿAṭṭār chose to use Zarzūr's and Zakkār's editions as control material to MS Ankara. In light of the problems mentioned above, this choice is less than fortunate in several respects.

To highlight MS Ankara's value, the editor meticulously lists the differences between the two editions and his

---

20. MS Birmingham (fol. 63v, lines 6–7) has two lines, while MS Dublin (fol. 150r, line 8) has only one, which is identical with the first line of MS Birmingham. By contrast, MS Istanbul (fol. 91v, line 14) only alludes to a poem (*shiʿran*, "a poem") but omits its text.

21. Significant sources not consulted include, for example, al-Sahmī's (d. 427/1038) *Taʾrīkh Jurjān*, Ibn Mākūlā's (d. ca. 475/1082) *al-Ikmāl fī rafʿ al-irtiyāb ʿan al-muʾtalif wa-l-mukhtalif fī l-asmāʾ wa-l-kunā wa-l-ansāb*, Ibn Funduq al-Bayhaqī's (d. 565/1169–70) *Tārīkh-i Bayhaq*, and Ibn Nuqṭa's (d. 629/1231) *Takmilat al-Ikmāl*.

22. Al-ʿAṭṭār uses this term in a consistent manner throughout his introduction to designate non-Shiʿi persons and institutions.

manuscript.[23] His examples are divided into the following four larger groups:

1. Missing parts: MS Ankara preserves texts, mostly poems, missing from the two editions (pp. 58–63).

2. Completeness: It contains a more complete version of the text than do the two editions (pp. 64–67).

3. Correctness: It has the correct wording in sections that were corrupted in the previously published versions (pp. 68–72).

4. Vocalization: Its vocalization is more reliable than that in the two editions (pp. 73–74).

To prove his points, al-ʿAṭṭār provides a detailed list of examples—in the form of direct quotations—for each group. This meticulous work has unquestionable merits, but its effectiveness is necessarily constrained by the inherent deficiencies of Zarzūr's and Zakkār's volumes, not to mention the fact that H, on which Zarzūr's edition was based, failed to include a detailed description of the principles applied in establishing its readings. Given that al-ʿAṭṭār was aware that Zarzūr's work was merely a copy of H, his rationale for choosing that edition remains obscure, and he provides no clear explanation for it in his introduction.

The discussion continues with a description of MS Ankara (pp. 74–77). Al-ʿAṭṭār reaffirms that in spite of Fuat Sezgin's earlier attribution of MS Ankara

to Abū Mikhnaf, the manuscript, in fact, contains a long section of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ* covering the stories of Ṣiffīn, al-Nahrawān, the caliphate of al-Ḥasan and his treaties, and Muʿāwīya's reign (pp. 74–75). As for the manuscript's date, he seconds Sezgin's opinion in assigning it to the sixth/twelfth century. There is no indication, either in the introduction or elsewhere in the text, as to whether this dating is based on the editor's personal examination of the manuscript.

After introducing his readers to the main manuscript, al-ʿAṭṭār also briefly discusses the two previously published editions on which his comparisons are based. He notes explicitly that Zarzūr's work is "taken literally from the printing of Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya in India," that is, H (pp. 75–76). However, for reasons that remain unclear (see below), he seems to think that the editors of H consulted only MS Istanbul. Thus he does not mention H's use of MSS Birmingham and Dublin, or of the Persian translation.[24] By contrast, he correctly acknowledges MSS Istanbul and Dublin as the sources of Zakkār's edition.

Al-ʿAṭṭār explains the main principles of his editorial method in fourteen paragraphs (pp. 76–77). As a general rule, he has compared the three texts against each other, with preference given to readings in MS Ankara, which, if necessary, have been corrected against the two selected editions. In several cases, he has also consulted other historical sources. Normally, changes made to the text of

---

23. Al-ʿAṭṭār's volume covers the following pages in the two editions: Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (ed. Zarzūr), from 2:55, line 8 to 317, line 5; Ibn Aʿtham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* (ed. Zakkār), from 1:281, line 1 to 2:31, line 4.

24. The text covered by MS Ankara is equivalent to H 3:87, line 13 to 4:197, line 10, and MS Istanbul 1:91v, line 14 to 169r, line 18.

MS Ankara are clearly indicated in the footnotes.

However, this principle is overruled in a curious set of editorial interventions (p. 78). Al-ʿAṭṭār emphasizes that he has changed certain recurrent features of the manuscript's text without marking these changes in the critical apparatus. These are as follows:

1. Changes to word order (e.g., *an yakhruja ilā al-kurdūsīna bi-aṣḥābihi*, instead of *an yakhruja bi-aṣḥābihi ilā al-kurdūsīna*)

2. Spelling of *innī*, *innā* and similar words with one *nūn* as preserved in the manuscript instead of *innanī* and *innanā*, as in the two editions

3. The addition of *nasab* to all names appearing without it in the manuscript (e.g., *fa-qāla al-Ashʿath b. Qays*, instead of *fa-qāla al-Ashʿath*)

4. Modifications to conjunctions such as *wa-*, *fa-*, and *thumma*

5. Slight changes to sentences introducing poems (e.g., *fa-kataba ilayhi Qaʿb b. Jaʿil shiʿran* instead of *fa-kataba ilayhi Qaʿb b. Jaʿil*)

6. In cases where Arabic grammar allows both feminine and masculine forms of a verb, selection of the form that agrees with the gender of the subject (e.g. *zaḥafat al-nās* rather than *zaḥafa al-nās*)

Although al-ʿAṭṭār explains his decision not to mark these modifications in the footnotes by invoking their high number, one might argue that their regular appearance in fact makes them

a valuable object of study for gaining a better understanding of the manuscript, its archetype, and its copyist, on the one hand, and perhaps of the text itself, on the other.

The edited text covers almost 550 pages (pp. 89–641). The layout is pleasing and carefully designed, and the font size chosen for the text is convenient, which makes the book easy to read. Readers will surely appreciate that the editor put in the time and effort to vocalize the poems. The only annoyance to readers hoping to exploit the volume for textual studies is the editor's choice to mark all divergences between MS Ankara and the two printed editions while omitting all references in the footnotes to the volume and page numbers of those editions. This decision, made perhaps for the sake of simplicity, makes the time-consuming work of double-checking the sources of these modifications even more tiresome.

The volume concludes with a set of indexes covering Qurʾānic verses, proper names, place-names, tribes, battles, and poems, as well as a bibliographic section that lists the primary and secondary sources cited in the introduction (pp. 643–701). A separate bibliography is provided for the sources used in the preparation of the edited text (pp. 703–30). A very detailed table of contents can be found at the very end of the volume. This includes not only the subchapters of the introduction but also all chapter titles in the edited text (pp. 731–36).

The volume under review is a solid, careful work and an outstanding example of the high-quality editions produced in the Middle East. By making available the text of a previously unedited—and thus largely

inaccessible—manuscript, it enables future scholars to base their studies on a larger number of testimonies to the transmission of Ibn Aʿtham's work, thereby significantly contributing to our understanding of this process. Besides suggesting new readings of already published textual units, an even more significant contribution of MS Ankara is its abundance of poems. In this regard, MS Ankara is hardly unique among the manuscripts that were disregarded in the production of H. The present edition thus again drives home how incomplete and imperfect our knowledge of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ* must by necessity remain if we base our assessment solely on the text of H, until now the most complete and reliable printed version. On the other hand, in light of the present edition as well as further similar enterprises, we can confidently entertain hopes of coming much closer to restoring a more complete version of Ibn Aʿtham's text by reinstituting large portions of text that post-tenth-century readers and/or copyists had found unappealing and thus unnecessary but without which the author's original aims and methods cannot be properly understood.

A central feature constraining the edited text's suitability for philological and text-critical analyses is al-ʿAṭṭār's self-imposed reliance on "control material"—namely, Zarzūr's and Zakkār's editions—that is, by its nature, inadequate as a reliable basis for such an undertaking. To be sure, using previously published editions in searching for the "best" readings for one's own critical text is an established and accepted

practice, especially if the editor lacks firsthand access to all extant manuscripts. The legitimacy of this approach may seem reasonable at first sight in the present case, too, since Zakkār's and Zarzūr's volumes were directly or indirectly based on manuscripts that were apparently available to al-ʿAṭṭār only in this secondhand form. (As noted earlier, Zakkār worked with MSS Istanbul and Dublin, whereas H, whose text Zarzūr in part retyped, used MSS Istanbul, Dublin, and Birmingham for the portions of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ* covered by MS Ankara.[25])

However, while retyping H, Zarzūr pruned his model's footnotes with a heavy hand. In his own notes, references almost always point to *al-aṣl*, which seems to stand for MS Istanbul, while omitting the readings of MSS Dublin and Birmingham (referred to as "D" and "B" in H). This "simplification" can easily mislead the unwary reader unfamiliar with H, not least by conveying the impression of an edition carefully based on a single genuine manuscript. This state of affairs might explain why al-ʿAṭṭār apparently believed that Zarzūr's volume was based solely on MS Istanbul, which could equally have led him to omit any mention of MSS Dublin and Birmingham, ignored by Zarzūr. In addition, the process of retyping can easily introduce errors into the body of the text, which makes such a retyped volume even more unsuited to further comparisons.

In conclusion, despite the shortcomings of major and minor importance that I have indicated, this volume is without doubt a useful and important edition that, by

---

25. The text covered by MS Ankara is the equivalent of MS Birmingham (fols. 63v, line 8 to 150v, line 14) and MS Dublin (fols. 150r, line 9 to 254r, line 9).

making available a previously unedited codex, fills a significant gap in the study of the manuscript tradition of the *Kitāb al-futūḥ*. Accordingly, al-ʿAṭṭār's work is of considerable interest to and a valuable tool for both scholars focusing their research on this specific topic and those investigating the period of the first *fitna.*

Therefore, the editor and the publisher are to be commended for undertaking this laborious task. In view of the volume's significance, it is to be regretted that very few copies of this work are available in the specialized libraries of the Western world, limiting access to this long-awaited edition of a key witness to Ibn Aʿtham's history.

Book Review

Al-Muḥassin b. ʿAlī al-Tanūkhī, *Stories of Piety and Prayer: Deliverance Follows Adversity.* Edited and translated by Julia Bray. Library of Arabic Literature (New York: New York University Press, 2019), xxxi + 352 pp. ISBN 978-1-4798-5596-4. Price: $35 (cloth).

András Hámori

Princeton University (Emeritus)

(hamori@princeton.edu)

This volume is the first installment of a complete edition and translation of al-Tanūkhī's *al-Faraj baʿd al-shidda* by Julia Bray, the Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, and contains the first three of the fourteen chapters of the work. The edition, Bray notes (p. xxiii), adopts "the substance of al-Shāljī's text."[1] She has examined several manuscripts that were not consulted by al-Shāljī, but as she points out, for this volume they yielded only a small number of variants or additions. "In subsequent volumes, the proportion will be higher" (p. xxiv). This, I think, will come from the increasing complexity of the stories in the later chapters.

Published by the Library of Arabic Literature, with the Arabic and the English printed in clear type on facing pages, the book is a pleasure to hold in one's hands. The translation is dazzling.

Brimming with life, the *Faraj* is by far the most enjoyable Abbasid collection of anecdotes. It is also a rich source for the history of Abbasid society and administration, and for the study of Arabic narratology. Because of al-Tanūkhī's ground plan for the book, the first two chapters are devoted largely, although not exclusively, to brief or elaborate recommendations of trust in God's mercy, Qurʾanic verses and prayers guaranteed to rescue believers from a tight spot, and exemplary stories of the religious worthies of the past. The third chapter contains anecdotes of menace and deliverance experienced by characters entangled in the social and political realities of Abbasid society, offering the reader a narrative thrill and a taste of the volumes to come.

---

1. Al-Muḥassin b. ʿAlī al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj baʿd al-shidda*, ed. ʿAbbūd al-Shāljī, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1978).

In composing his *Faraj*, al-Tanūkhī (d. 384/994) took up a narrow genre already in existence and turned it into one of delightful variety. In the preface he tells us of three books on the subject. The first, by al-Madāʾinī (who died in the second quarter of the third/first half of the ninth century), was very short. It was no doubt similar in conception to the longer work by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281/894). This second *Faraj baʿd al-shidda*, which has been published, is described by al-Tanūkhī as being "about twenty folios long" and consisting "mostly of reports about the Prophet . . . and accounts of the Companions and Successors . . ." (p. 5).[2] Judging by al-Tanūkhī's quotes, the third book, by the *qāḍī* Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Azdī, must have been no less limited in scope. Al-Tanūkhī still writes about deliverance after adversity—he was familiar with adversity himself—but, as Bray makes clear in her introduction, his catchment area is far broader (p. xvi):

> His predecessors had thought of deliverance in conventionally devotional terms. Al-Tanūkhī's notion of deliverance embraced most kinds of human situation and many ways of writing about them. There are few limits to what qualifies as a rescue story in the *Deliverance.* Under the story-telling rules that emerge as one reads, deliverance must be earned, sometimes heroically, or deserved, sometimes by the truly deserving; but often it takes only a very little faith or hope for someone to be plucked from misery, and luck in all its

forms, including that of unexpected human kindness, plays a major part.

This approach allows al-Tanūkhī to range from stories of government functionaries known to history who escaped imprisonment, torture, or worse, through accounts of anonymous characters such as the man delivered from a murderous cook, to stories of the wonderful, as in the "I-only-am-escaped" story of the man who, to his good fortune, had sworn not to eat elephant. In all this, al-Tanūkhī presents himself as an anthologist. He cites his sources. At times he records several versions of the same story, and literary elaboration becomes apparent. This still does not tell us much about his own role in the writing, although when a story begins with "a trustworthy friend related to me," the vagueness of attribution may arouse the reader's suspicions.

In the first three chapters there are (at least) three principal stylistic registers. If the feel of the Arabic is to be conveyed, each register presents the translator with demands peculiar to it, and Bray's admirable versions are spot-on. First, there are intricate periods whose English equivalent, if it is to be readable, must adapt syntax and occasionally idiom, and still convey a sense of the architectonic qualities of the original: retardations, forward drive, syntactic connections at a distance. Two examples will suffice. The first is found on pp. 2–5:

> *Wa-wajadtu aqwā mā yafzaʿu ilayhi man anākha al-dahru bi-makrūhin ʿalayhi qirāʾata al-akhbāri allatī*

2. Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad, *al-Faraj baʿd l-shidda*, edited by Ḥasan b. ʿAbd al-ʿĀl and ʿImād Fārih (Ṭanṭā: Maktabat al-Ṣaḥāba, 1405/1985).

tunabbī ʿan tafaḍḍuli allāhi ʿazza wa-jalla ʿalā man ḥaṣala qablahu fī maḥṣalihi wa-nazala bihi mithlu balāʾihi wa-muʿḍilihi bimā atāḥahu lahu min ṣunʿin amsaka bihi al-armāqa wa-maʿūnatin ḥulla bihā min al-khināqi wa-luṭfin gharībin najjāhu wa-farajin ʿajībin anqadhahu wa-talāfāhu, wa-in khafiyat tilka al-asbābu wa-lam tablugh mā ḥadatha min dhālika al-fikru wa-l-ḥisābu . . .

To those enduring fate's injuries, nothing, I find, affords more powerful solace than reading accounts of God's graciousness, Mighty and Glorious is He, toward those who have previously suffered the same plight and undergone the same tribulations and perplexities, for they show how those at their last gasp have been preserved through the working of His ordinance, those sore beset succored, or saved by an extraordinary grace, or freed by a marvelous deliverance that made all come right again. How these things came to pass may not be evident; what happened may not be susceptible to reasoning or calculation . . .

One might have opted for "favor" rather than "His ordinance," but there is no quarreling with the important choices. Literal translation of the metaphors (especially of the temptingly concrete-seeming *ḥulla bihi min al-khināqi*) is renounced in favor of an English sentence rhythm that gives us a flavor of the Arabic—indeed, a syntax that reproduces the slowly emergent pleasure given by its Arabic counterpart. A literal translation could have achieved nothing like this.

Another passage, pp. 96–97:

Wa-sayyidunā al-qāḍī adāma allāhu taʾyīdahu anwaru baṣīratan wa-aṭharu sarīratan wa-akmalu ḥazman wa-anfadhu maḍāʾan wa-ʿazman min an yatasallaṭa al-shakku ʿalā yaqīnihi aw yaqdaḥa iʿtirāḍu al-shubahi fī murūʾatihi wa-dīnihi fa-yalqā mā iʿtamadahu allāhu min ṭāriqi al-qaḍāʾi al-maḥtūmi bi-ghayri wājibatin min farḍi al-riḍā wa-l-taslīmi.

Your Excellency the Judge, may God ever sustain you, has a discernment too enlightened, is too pure-hearted, too perfectly resolute, and has too lively a strength of purpose for doubt to get the better of your assurance or niggling uncertainties to impair your manly honor and faith and prevent you from meeting with the requisite consent and resignation the ineluctable decree that God has determined shall come to pass.

This is a fine interpretation of the ceremonial, cumulative composition of the Arabic.

The second stylistic register I have in mind is that of elevated religious admonition. For example, pp. 40–41:

Qamaʿa al-jāḥidīna wa-l-mushrikīna wa-qatala ulāʾika al-kafarata al-māriqīna wa-l-muʿānidīna wa-ghayrahum min al-mukadhdhibīna al-kādhibīna alladhīna kānū ʿan al-ḥaqqi nākithīna wa-bi-l-dīni mustahziʾīn . . .

He subdued the infidels and the idolaters and slew the renegade and obdurate miscreants, those liars who

had called Muḥammad a liar, who broke their word and mocked the faith . . .

Consider the options for *al-kafara.* To pair "infidels" with "unbelievers" would be feeble. The case for "miscreants" is not only that the word originally meant "unbeliever" and only that, but also that the whole Latinate phrase "renegade and obdurate miscreants" is of a piece, reproducing the pulpit gravity of the Arabic. A somewhat similar example is found on p. 88–89: ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib is teaching a Bedouin how to ask for God's forgiveness. He begins: *Akhliṣ niyyataka wa-aṭiʿ rabbaka wa-qul . . .* Bray translates: "Make sincere your intent, bend yourself to the will of your Lord, and say . . ." Why not go by the dictionary and just say "obey your Lord?" The penitential prayer that follows, much too long to cite (and also beautifully translated), is cast in the high style of art prose, with characteristic complexities of syntax, including the decorative variation of prepositional phrases. "Bend yourself to the will of your Lord" takes the reader to the stylistic register proper to the setting, a solemn homiletic style patinated by centuries of sermons. (A simple Google search turns up, in the *Works* of Robert Harris, president of Trinity College in Oxford, published 1654: "Truth of life, is whereby a man bends himself to please God, and to be conformable to his will in all things.")[3]

The "ordinary speech" of dialogue in *oratio recta* and of unadorned to-the-point narration is the third register for which an English match needs to be found. I put quotation marks around "ordinary speech" because the language is book-Arabic deployed to produce the illusion of living speech. I do not know whether a formal analysis of al-Tanūkhī's "ordinary style" would find in it anything peculiar to him. He does, after all, claim, as does everyone up to the moment when al-Ḥarīrī admits to being a writer of stories, that he is only a transmitter of what he has read or heard. In any event, in his narratives speech and scene work together. Sharply focused exchanges in stories of bureaucratic intrigue or discussions of financial chicaneries strike the reader as only too plausible. But plausibility is not a requirement: a character's deadpan narration of the extraordinary can also suggest linguistic immediacy. Such is the case with a man's recollection, free of any marks of literariness, of how he was startled awake by an oppressive weight on his chest, only to see his wife kneeling on him, a straight razor in her uplifted hand. Frequently, the unmediated is suggested by a single brush stroke. In one passage (pp. 164–165) the malefactor defies the victim to go on complaining to God, and the narrator, remembering the mockery, also remembers his enemy's country accent: *Fa-qāla lī kun ʿalā al-ẓulāmi* [written *ʿalā al-ẓulāmati*] *. . . yukarriruhā dafaʿātin wa-yukassiru al-mīma bi-lisāni ahli al-Kūfa.* It is the illusion of ordinary speech in specific settings that the translator must match. Bray does this with a light and pitch-perfect touch.

---

3. Robert Harris, *The Works of Robert Harris . . . : Revised, Corrected, and Now Collected into One Volume, with an Addition of Sundry Sermons, Some Not Printed in the Former Edition, Others Never Before Extant* (London: James Flesher for John Bartlet the elder and John Bartlet the younger, 1654), 204.

In one story, al-Mutawakkil lays this to a man's charge: *Kullu mā dabbarahu Ītākh fa-min raʾyihi* (pp. 148–49). The meaning of *min raʾyihi* is as plain as can be, but which translation preserves the snappy rhythm—the stylistic soul—of the original? Anything with "opinion," "advice," or even "consultation" would end up clunky. I do not see how Bray's "He is the brains behind all Ītākh's plotting" could be bettered. The test is this: Would the conversation come alive on the stage? It would. A similar issue comes up later in the same story (pp. 152–153). The narrator is subject to a confiscatory fine. Torture is applied. A friend advises him to pledge a huge sum he does not have. The narrator is puzzled, but the friend explains: *Anā aʿlamu annaka ṣādiqun wa-lākin uḥrus nafsaka ʿājilan . . .* "I know. Of course. The thing is to buy safety for now . . . " "To buy safety for now" fits the context perfectly and also moves the story along at the pace the urgency of the moment requires. Try a more dictionary-bound translation of *uḥrus nafsaka ʿājilan*, and you will see how much is lost. The colloquially authentic rendering of the introductory part of the sentence is also just right. I much prefer it to a classroom version like "As for me, I know that you're telling the truth . . ." There is nothing wrong with the latter except that it sinks like lead.

In another passage (pp. 204–205) a father and a son are in prison and bribe the guards to let them send a letter. The son relates:

Fa-qultu li-l-muwakkalīna fī ʿashiyyi dhālika al-yawmi: qad wajabat

lakum ʿalaynā ḥuqūqun fa-khudhū hādhihi al-darāhima fa-ntafiʿū bihā fa-mtanaʿū.

That evening, I said to the guards, "We are much obliged to you. Please accept this money for yourselves," but they refused.

Fa-ntafiʿū bihā does not mean "so use it." It could be supplemented ("spend it on yourselves," "use it as you like"), but Bray's solution is far better, replacing the imperative with a phrase that might accompany a nice tip to a taxi driver.

Let me finally add an example where Bray offers the tonally perfect English for an expression whose precise sense is not perhaps immediately obvious: "There are three places where a man reveals himself: in his bed, in his wife's arms, and in the saddle" (p. 227). "In his wife's arms" renders *idhā khalā bi-ʿursihi.* There can be no better translation. This is how al-Suyūṭī in his commentary on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim explains *aʿrasa*, which in the *ḥadīth* clearly means "to have sexual intercourse": *aʿrasa al-rajulu idhā khalā bi-ʿursihi ayy zawjatihi.*[4] Bray's translation is true to both the sense and sensibility of the decorously reticent original.

There are hardly any passages in which I disagree with Bray's interpretation. I will mention one, and that only because if I am right the memorable moment that gives the pious anecdote its hook into reality is so delicious. In one version of a story (pp. 210–13), cited from al-Madāʾinī, Yazīd b. Abī Muslim threatens to kill the hero before he, Yazīd, finishes a bunch of grapes

---

4. Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *al-Dībāj fī sharḥ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj*, edited by Fatḥī Ḥijāzī, 5 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2006), 3:64, at *ḥadīth* no. 3020.

but is himself killed before the grapes are gone. In a second, cannier version, the hero prays that God should destroy Yazīd in the twinkling of an eye. Narrating his adventure, he recalls: *Jaʿaltu aḥbasu ṭarfī rajāʾata l-ijāba.* Having recently paid a visit to the ophthalmologist, I think the meaning is perhaps not so much "I covered my own eyes in the hope that my prayer would be answered," but rather "I made an effort to keep my eyes from blinking."

I have offered a sampling of Bray's method. But translating a thousand-year-old book is not just a matter of philology and style, and Bray also makes it accessible in a variety of ways. There are helpful explanatory translations, as in *Kāna badʾa khurūjī ilā al-Shāmi anna al-Mutawakkil . . .* , "This is how my posting to Syria came about. The caliph al-Mutawakkil . . ." (pp. 176–177). Or *Kuntu fī waqtin min al-awqāti (yaʿnī fī awwali amrihi) . . .* , "Once upon a time (that is, at the start of his career) . . ." (pp. 124–125). Technical expressions whose meaning is no longer readily apparent are put in context and clarified. On pp. 50–51, for example, X demands that Y pay him five thousand dirhams, "which he owed him according to a tax-farming contract he held from him"; *ṭālabahu bi-khamsati ālāfi dirhamin kānat ʿalayhi min ḍamānin ḍaminahu ʿanhu.* Extremely useful to all readers is a generous glossary (pp. 247–304) identifying persons, places, and also administrative and cultural matters such as "*shurṭa,*" "reading back for verification (*qirāʾah ʿalā*)," "tax (or revenue) farming," "seven heavens," etc.

There are delights here for the specialist no less than for the reader with no Arabic. Al-Tanūkhī has found his translator. One cannot read this book without a sense of exhilaration and gratitude.

Book Review

Luke B. Yarbrough, *Friends of the Emir: Non-Muslim State Officials in Premodern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), xiv + 361 pp. ISBN 978-1-1087-2174-5. Price: £90/$120 (cloth) and £24.99/$32.99 (paperback).

Mohamad Ballan
Stony Brook University

(mohamad.ballan@stonybrook.edu)

Although there has been a considerable amount of scholarship devoted to the many dynasties, caliphs, emirs, and sultans who exercised dominion throughout the Islamic world in the medieval and early modern eras, until recently, comparatively little attention has been paid to the officials tasked with governing and administering these states. Recent approaches to the topic have attempted to think carefully about the importance of the production of documents and administration,[1] archives and historical writing,[2] connections and competition at royal courts,[3] the nexus between rulers and religious authority,[4] and the emergence of particular discourses of kingship and sovereignty,[5]

---

1. Marina Rustow, *The Lost Archive: Traces of a Caliphate in a Cairo Synagogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), and Petra M. Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State: The World of a Mid-Eighth-Century Egyptian Official* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

2. Fozia Bora, *Writing History in the Medieval Islamic World: The Value of Chronicles as Archives* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019).

3. Emma J. Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates: Living Well in the Persian Cosmopolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Samuel England, *Medieval Empires and the Culture of Competition: Literary Duels at Islamic and Christian Courts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), and İlker Evrim Binbaş, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran: Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAlī Yazdī and the Islamicate Republic of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

4. Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), and John P. Turner, *Inquisition in Early Islam: The Competition for Religious and Political Authority in the Abbasid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

5. Christopher Markiewicz, *The Crisis of Kingship in Late Medieval Islam: Persian Emigres and the Making of Ottoman Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

while shedding light on the status, function, and self-perceptions of military and administrative elites.[6] With *Friends of the Emir: Non-Muslim State Officials in Premodern Islamic Thought*, Luke B. Yarbrough contributes to this growing body of scholarship by closely examining the Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, and other non-Muslim officials whose employment occasioned energetic discussions among Muslim scholars and rulers. This masterfully written and well-argued book reveals those discussions for the first time in all their diversity, drawing on unexplored medieval sources in the realms of law, history, poetry, *adab*, administration, and polemic. It traces the discourse on non-Muslim officials from its emergence in the Umayyad era (661–750) through medieval Iraq, Syria, Spain, and Egypt to its apex in the Mamluk period (1250–1517). Yarbrough compellingly demonstrates that for all the diversity among premodern Muslim thinkers on the topic of non-Muslim officials, their writings constituted not a disjointed miscellany but a "continuously evolving prescriptive discourse, characterized by numerous recurrent structures, themes, topoi, and schemata, as well as by pervasive and overt intertextuality" (p. 4). Far from being an intrinsic part of Islam, Yarbrough convincingly argues, views about non-Muslim state officials were devised, transmitted, and elaborated at moments of intense competition between Muslim and non-Muslim learned elites. This focus upon competition, professional rivalry, and the "ubiquitous pursuit of resources" makes *Friends*

of the Emir a particularly important intervention by prompting scholars to rethink notions of sovereignty, cultural polemics, and the practice of politics in the medieval Islamic world. Yarbrough's considered and nuanced approach to the subject provides a productive framework for scholars seeking to look beyond sharp dichotomies between "normative discourses" and "historical realities" in their approach to the premodern world.

The book is divided into three broad sections: "Beginnings" (chapters 1–4), "Elaboration" (chapters 5–6), and "Efflorescence and Comparisons" (chapters 7–9). Chapter 1 ("An Introduction to the Prescriptive Discourse Surrounding Non-Muslim State Officials") establishes the historical, methodological, and theoretical background for the study. The chapter provides a useful historiographical overview of works written in English, French, and Arabic about the question of non-Muslim officials, demonstrating that much of the scholarship has been rooted in ahistorical assumptions that posit a dichotomy between textual prescription and historical practice. The remainder of the chapter outlines Yarbrough's own methodological and theoretical approach. It is here that he provides a critical explanation of his interpretive choices, particularly the development and utilization of the concept of "valued resources," which is heavily indebted to social theory (particularly the writings of Pierre Bourdieu), in order to demonstrate the utility of thinking carefully about "resources" and "capital" as ways of

---

6. Jo van Steenbergen (ed.), *Trajectories of State Formation across Fifteenth-Century Islamic West-Asia: Eurasian Parallels, Connections and Divergences* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), and Maaike van Berkel and Jeroen Duindam (eds.), *Prince, Pen, and Sword: Eurasian Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

evaluating the practices of historical actors and their motivations. One of the most valuable contributions of the book is its exploration of the ways in which exclusionary behavior, including the articulation and dissemination of particular discourses about non-Muslim officials, constituted a discursive tool in the ubiquitous pursuit of resources. While rejecting the notion that these discourses constituted a smokescreen for sociopolitical motives, Yarbrough demonstrates that many medieval Muslims who shaped the discourse about non-Muslim officials wrote to achieve specific personal ends, which included both worldly renown and ultimate salvation.

Chapter 2 ("Preludes to the Discourse: Non-Muslim Officials and Late Ancient Antecedents") presents a synchronic study of non-Muslim officials and the reasons for their employment while surveying late antique discourses around dissenting officials, particularly surviving writings on non-Christian officials in the Eastern Roman Empire and non-Zoroastrian officials in the Sasanian Empire. The chapter carefully defines the various categories, terms, and interpretive frameworks employed throughout the book, delineating how and why the study of the prescriptive discourse about non-Muslim officials can shed important light on premodern Islamic politics and society. In the first part of the chapter, Yarbrough argues that non-Muslim officials were ubiquitous in the administration of premodern Islamic states, primarily in a bureaucratic capacity. He stresses that their continued employment, despite considerable opposition, was due to a number of factors, including various

combinations of dependence, loyalty, special competencies, and lower cost in both material and symbolic terms. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to a survey of several late-ancient antecedents to the discourse, not necessarily as part of an argument about the degree to which these antecedents influenced the emergence of Muslim prescriptive discourses but in order to explore the similar dynamics at play within the Eastern Roman and Sasanian Empires. Yarbrough demonstrates that in the late Roman Empire, a number of imperial laws restricted or prohibited the employment of officials who dissented from Christian orthodoxy, while in the Sasanian Empire, non-Zoroastrian officials were sometimes viewed as problematic because their elevation destabilized the hierarchies that structured Sasanian society. The chapter illustrates the importance of considering the emergence of Islamic polities against the backdrop of the world of late antiquity while serving as a useful comparative study of the three empires (Sasanian, Roman, and early Islamic).

Chapter 3 ("The Beginnings of the Discourse to 236/851") introduces the oldest stratum of the discourse proper, which encompasses a wide range of sources and consists largely of parabolic stories about early caliphs and their putative statements about non-Muslim officials. The chapter argues that these stories should be interpreted as instruments of competition and were composed in various settings long after the events that they purportedly describe. According to Yarbrough, the narrators of these stories used them to challenge rivals for social, material, and political resources. This chapter, which brings together several

case studies, demonstrates the historical value of parables as a window into the normative imaginations of Muslims during the first two centuries of Islamic history. It convincingly argues that the earliest elements of the Islamic prescriptive discourse concerning non-Muslim officials did not rest on pre-Islamic foundations but originated in second/eighth- and third/ninth-century Iraq, as literate Muslim elites produced and propagated disapproving parables that were ascribed to revered early authorities, specifically the caliphs ʿUmar I and ʿUmar II. The chapter demonstrates Yarbrough's command of the early Islamic source material and context and illustrates the utility of his larger theory of "valued resources" for thinking about the emergence of Islamic prescriptive discourses about non-Muslim officials. In addition to showing that the most important proof texts emerged in a particular time and place, Yarbrough traces how the discourse was shaped by specific individuals, circumstances, and concerns.

Chapter 4 ("The Discourse Comes of Age: The Edicts of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil") provides a translation, contextualization, and detailed analysis of the principal prescript (*tawqīʿ*) of the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–47/847–61), which Yarbrough dates to 236/851. The chapter locates the edict within al-Mutawakkil's broader strategy to secure his rule and stave off challenges to his legitimacy by rewarding the detractors of non-Muslim officials. Al-Mutawakkil was the first caliph for whose sweeping directive against non-Muslim officials we have plentiful and solid evidence, and Yarbrough's contextualization and analysis of this document illustrates the manner in which the discourse was effectively mobilized by the state itself to articulate a change in policy. Beyond providing an instructive case study of the intersection of prescriptive discourse and notions of sovereignty in the premodern Islamic world, this chapter underscores that the articulation and deployment of the prescriptive discourse concerning non-Muslim officials needs to be situated within the broader context of intra-Muslim competition and rivalry.

The next section of the book traces the continued development of the prescriptive discourse about non-Muslim officials by studying its two major aspects: juristic and literary. Chapter 5 ("Juristic Aspects of the Discourse") illustrates the discourse's blossoming into a minor theme in juristic works of many kinds and demonstrates that these discussions were more historically embedded and more diverse than has been previously recognized. The chapter examines this diversity while observing the development of Muslim juristic writings on the issue, an investigation that encompasses Sunni jurisprudence as well as Ibāḍī and Shiʿi juristic thought. Yarbrough shows that the juristic writings were motivated not only by contemporaneous historical factors but also by the desire to uphold the established positions of the authors' own juristic traditions and to regulate non-Muslim officials within the coherent prescriptive systems that those systems aspired to create. In addition to cataloging and evaluating the various aspects of the juristic strands of the prescriptive discourse, this chapter is particularly valuable for its contextualization and analysis of the writings of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) on the issue of non-Muslim

officials, particularly his argument (in the *Aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya*) that permitted a non-Muslim to be appointed an executive vizier (*wazīr al-tanfīdh*). Throughout the chapter, Yarbrough highlights how Muslim jurists developed diverse rationales for limiting, discouraging, or prohibiting the employment of non-Muslim officials; how these rationales were frequently repeated and developed during moments of tension with states or non-Muslim elites; and how jurists sought, above all, to mediate between their *madhhab* traditions and contemporary exigencies.

Chapter 6 ("Literary Aspects of the Discourse") examines the role of rivalry and defamation across various genres of literature (*adab*), and in premodern Islamic political life more generally, before turning to diverse literary representations of non-Muslim officials. The chapter points out that some of these literary texts shared materials and themes with juristic strands of the discourse. It also sheds important light on the ways in which particular rhetorical practices—especially in the genre of counsel literature (*naṣīḥa*)—formed part of a larger set of competitive practices deployed by elites in pursuit of scarce resources. A work of *adab*—whether a chronicle, a biography, a compendium of entertaining stories, or a mirror for princes—could deliver a prescription as forcefully as a handbook of substantive law could. The chapter confirms the importance of the various genres of *adab* for illuminating both the prescriptive discourse, in particular, and premodern Islamic society and politics, in general.

Following this exploration of literary sources, chapter 7 ("The Discourse at Its Apogee: The Independent Counsel Works") focuses on a small cluster of works that were written in the central Islamic lands, from Iraq to Egypt, between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, and that were dedicated entirely to the issue of non-Muslim officials. The chapter introduces these works, their authors, and the circumstances of their composition, situates them within a long literary tradition, and offers a historical account of the flowering of the prescriptive discourses that they contain. As Yarbrough masterfully demonstrates, these works combined numerous earlier elements of the discourse—including exegetical, literary, juristic, and historical strands—with components hitherto outside it to produce distinctive polemical amalgams. One of the most interesting and insightful of these works, ʿUthmān b. Ibrāhīm al-Nābulusī's *Tajrīd sayf al-himma*, has been recently translated and annotated by Yarbrough.[7] The chapter shows how such books were fashioned by Muslim learned elites as tools of competition in their own pursuit of resources that were increasingly mediated by the Ayyubid and Mamluk states. Yarbrough also positions these works within a larger social and political context that was characterized by extended conflict among Muslims, non-Muslims, and the state in Egypt; as such, Yarbrough argues, they were both products of, and contributors to, that larger climate of conflict.

---

7. ʿUthmān b. Ibrāhīm al-Nābulusī, *The Sword of Ambition: Bureaucratic Rivalry in Medieval Egypt*, trans. Luke B. Yarbrough (New York: New York University Press, Library of Arabic Literature, 2016).

Chapter 8 ("The Discourse in Wider Perspective: Comparisons and Conclusions"), which is among the most ambitious parts of the book, looks beyond Islamic history to medieval Latin Christendom, particularly Arpad Hungary, and Yuan China in order to think comparatively about the prescriptive discourse. Before pursuing this comparative study, however, Yarbrough summarizes his own arguments about the Islamic prescriptive discourse concerning non-Muslim officials. According to Yarbrough, the four key factors that explain the discourse's flourishing in some historical settings and its faltering in others are "(1) ideological communal diversity in which intercommunal rivalry for prestige has a zero-sum dimension; (2) direct competition for scarce resources among literate elites who belong to distinct ideological communities; (3) existing exclusionary discourses within those communities; and (4) access to ruling elites who would be expected to sympathize with expressions of discontent" (p. 263). Yarbrough finds all four of his criteria—ideological diversity, direct competition for scarce resources, traditions of exclusionary rhetoric, and the receptivity of ruling elites—present in Arpad Hungary, but he nonetheless determines the Latin Christian discourse to be substantially different in both form and substance. Examining the case of Yuan China, Yarbrough concludes that no exclusionary discourse surrounding outsider-officials as such was generated, despite the existence of ostensibly similar circumstances. Although each of the three cases had distinctive features, the chapter argues that the Islamic discourse is unrivaled in its thematic and

intertextual continuity and coherence, its sophistication, and its sheer magnitude. As a possible explanation, Yarbrough offers the peculiar evolving relationship between "postclassical" Islamic state power and authority, which he contrasts with the persistent salience of exclusive communal affiliation that was shared by rulers and learned elites in the case of China, and the separation of moral authority and political power in the case of late medieval Europe. While the reader may take issue with some of Yarbrough's particular choices and broader conclusions in this chapter, his comparative approach is to be commended for its integration of the Islamic world into a larger conversation about the interplay between prescriptive discourses, notions of sovereignty, and practices of politics across late medieval Eurasia. The book concludes with chapter 9 ("Afterword: The Discourse to the Nineteenth Century"), which provides some observations on the afterlives of the prescriptive discourse in the nineteenth-century Middle East, indicating the ways in which it survived in attenuated form under the Ottomans.

Friends of the Emir is a groundbreaking work. Its original and innovative approach to the topic of non-Muslim officials in premodern Islamic states is underpinned by a robust theoretical and methodological framework; command of a vast array of sources across regions, time periods, languages, and genres; and a commitment to both interdisciplinarity and comparative approaches. The book paves the way for a nuanced understanding of governance in the medieval Islamic world that seeks to encompass normative juristic discourses, theories of sovereignty, and the practice of politics. Yarbrough has produced a remarkable account of the emergence and

dissemination of prescriptive discourses about non-Muslim officials at the fraught nexus of Islamic authority, textual production, state power, and communal difference. By demonstrating that the prescriptive discourse was the contingent, cumulative creation of particular historical actors rather than an ahistorical, indelible feature of Islam, *Friends of the Emir* reorients our view of how non-Muslims participated in premodern Islamic politics. Yarbrough's most significant contribution is to historicize the surviving textual evidence of that prescriptive discourse by situating it not within understandings of "*dhimmī* law" or "Islamic legal norms" but within the dynamic social, political, and ideological context of professional rivalry and competition over resources. The development and notion of valued resources, which historicizes and contextualizes the emergence of prescriptive discourses, serves to reintegrate Islamic history into broader conversations about the transformation of society and politics across premodern Eurasia.

Even though there is much that is laudable about the book in terms of its comprehensiveness, originality, and interdisciplinary approach, this reviewer was hoping to learn more about the different ways in which women and gender figured in the larger discourses about non-Muslim officials. Since exclusionary discourses directed against female counsel and intimates—whose number would have included a significant proportion of non-Muslims, especially in the royal courts—were also widespread during this period, it would have been useful for the author to have engaged more directly with this question. The book would also have

been strengthened by an elaboration on the notion of "friendship" as articulated and discussed within the prescriptive discourse concerning non-Muslim officials in the premodern Islamic world. Yarbrough indicates that "direct service to rulers . . . frequently assumed a personal rather than official quality" (p. 29), but a more elaborate discussion of this distinction would have been helpful, especially as it would have underscored the importance of personal access to and intimate bonds of affinity with the ruler as yet another "valued resource" to be pursued. Indeed, the very title of the book, *Friends of the Emir*, alludes to the importance of the personal bonds between the king and his subordinates, which led this reviewer to expect a sustained discussion of the implications of friendship, bonds of obligation, and intimacy within a royal context. Although there is already an extensive body of literature on this question in the case of Latin Christendom, it awaits further exploration in the context of the medieval Islamic world.

These are minor quibbles with an otherwise comprehensive and pathbreaking book, which will provoke numerous conversations among scholars of history, literature, and Islamic studies. *Friends of the Emir* is an original piece of scholarship that is thoroughly researched and beautifully written. It will be useful for anyone seeking to think critically about the relationship between Muslim learned elites and state power, the historical development of prescriptive thought, and the manner in which discourses of sovereignty and political practice were deeply intertwined in the medieval Islamic world.

Book Review

Al-Malik al-Afḍal al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī b. Dāwūd al-Rasūlī,
Bughyat al-fallāḥīn fī al-ashjār al-muthmira wa-l-rayāḥīn.
Edited by Khālid Khalfān b. Nāṣir al-Wahībī (Damascus:
Dār al-Farqad, 2016), 2 vols., 1199 pp., 6 b/w images, map,
indices. Price: $30 (cloth).

Daniel Martin Varisco
Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton

(dmvarisco@gmail.com)

One of the most important extant agricultural treatises from the middle Islamic era is *Bughyat al-fallāḥīn fī al-ashjār al-muthmira wa-l-rayāḥin* by the sixth Yemeni Rasulid sultan, al-Malik al-Afḍal al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī (d. 788/1376). There are five known extant copies of this text, although none from the Rasulid era itself, apart from an abridged version by the author.[1] Attention was first drawn to the treatise by Max Meyerhof in the *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* in 1943.[2] He translated the title as *L'objet des désirs des agriculteurs au sujet des arbres fruitiers et des plantes odoriférantes.* His description of the manuscript was based on a 1931 copy of an undated manuscript

(Zirāʿa 155) in Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya; at the time, the copy had been sent outside the library for its safety during the war. In 1953–54, R. B. Serjeant copied a manuscript of the text that was made available to him by a certain Shaykh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Shāṭirī in Tarim. The Tarim text, now not accounted for, had itself been copied in 1197/1782. Serjeant's transcription is housed with his papers at the University of Edinburgh.[3] The oldest surviving manuscript is in the Ahmet III library (A. 2432, fols. 177v–225r) in Istanbul. There is also a copy in the Western library of the Great Mosque in Sanaa (Zirāʿa 1), which was copied in 1362/1943, although it wrongly

---

1. This is published in D. M. Varisco and G. R. Smith, eds., *The Manuscript of al-Malik al-Afḍal al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī b. Dāʾūd b. Yūsuf b. ʿUmar b. ʿAlī ibn Rasūl: A Medieval Arabic Anthology from the Yemen* (Warminster, UK: Aris and Phillips for the E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1989), 206–211.

2. Max Meyerhof, "Sur un traité d'agriculture composé par un sultan yéménite du XIVᵉ siècle." *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 25 (1943): 55–63; 26 (1944): 51–65.

3. https://archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/537.

attributes the text to al-Malik Yaḥyā b. Ismāʿīl al-Ghassānī. None of these copies appears to be complete.

The editor of the present edition, Dr. Khālid al-Wahībī, is Omani and the son of a former minister in the Omani government. During 2005–6 he visited Dār al-Kutub in Cairo and examined two manuscript copies of the text as well as microfilms of the copy in the Western Library of the Great Mosque and of the earliest manuscript in the Ahmet III library. The edition of al-Wahībī is an important contribution to the study of Islamic-era agriculture for several reasons. This is the first publication of the *Bughyat al-fallāḥīn*, based on four manuscripts. Variations between the manuscripts are noted in the extensive footnotes. The editor provides a discussion of previous research by Meyerhof, Serjeant,[4] myself,[5] Yaḥyā al-ʿAnsī,[6] and ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Khāmirī[7] (pp. 17–21). Drawing on al-Khāmirī and the Yemeni chronicles, he provides a biography of

al-Afḍal, including the books ascribed to the sultan (pp. 24–36). He describes the four manuscripts he consulted in Cairo, with a summary of their contents (pp. 37–61), and he identifies the sources used or quoted by al-Afḍal in his treatise (pp. 62–95). The edition is followed by a bibliography of references (pp. 1119–34) and very useful indexes (pp. 1135–99) on a range of topics: names of tribes and peoples; place-names; plants and the diseases and pests that afflict them; animals and the diseases and pests that afflict them; stars and lunar stations (*anwāʾ*); seasons and almanac lore; soils and agricultural land; water sources; seeds, seedlings, and plantings; harvest, storage and ripening; pruning and grafting of trees; human diseases and cures; books mentioned in the text; cultural terms; agricultural tools; and terms of measure.

The primary value of *Bughyat al-fallāḥīn* lies in the information it yields on agriculture in Yemen. Al-Afḍal provides some details of his own but mainly

---

4. R. B. Serjeant, "The Cultivation of Cereals in Medieval Yemen," *Arabian Studies* 1 (1974): 25–74; idem, "Agriculture and Horticulture: Some Cultural Interchanges of the Medieval Arabs and Europe," in *Oriente e Occidente nel medioevo, Filosofia e Scienze*, 535–548 (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1971).

5. D. M. Varisco, *Medieval Folk Astronomy and Agriculture in Arabia and the Yemen* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997); idem, "Water Sources and Traditional Irrigation in Yemen," *New Arabian Studies* 3 (1996): 238–83; idem, "An Anonymous 14th Century Almanac from Rasulid Yemen," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 9 (1994): 195–228; idem, *Medieval Agriculture and Islamic Science: The Almanac of a Yemeni Sultan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994); idem, "A Royal Crop Register from Rasulid Yemen," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 34 (1991): 1–22; idem, "Medieval Agricultural Texts from Rasulid Yemen," *Manuscripts of the Middle East* 4 (1989): 150–154; idem, "The Production of Sorghum (Dhurah) in Highland Yemen," *Arabian Studies* 7 (1985): 53–88; idem, "Sayl and Ghayl: The Ecology of Water Allocation in Yemen," *Human Ecology* 11 (1983): 365–383.

6. Yaḥyā al-ʿAnsī, *al-Turāth al-zirāʿī wa-maʿārifuhu fī al-Yaman* (Sanaa: American Institute for Yemeni Studies, 2008); *al-Mawāqīt al-zirāʿiyya fī al-Yaman* (Sanaa: American Institute for Yemeni Studies, 2006); *al-Maʿālim al-zirāʿiyya fī al-Yaman* (Sanaa: American Institute for Yemeni Studies and Centre français d'archéologie et de sciences sociales, 2004). Al-ʿAnsī discusses contemporary knowledge of agriculture in Yemen, but not that of the Rasulid era.

7. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Khāmirī edited a biographical text of al-Afḍal al-ʿAbbās: *al-ʿAṭāyā al-saniyya wa-l-mawāhib al-haniyya fī al-manāqib al-Yamaniyya* (Sanaa: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Siyāḥa, 2004).

relies on two earlier Yemeni sources: *Milḥ al-malāḥa fī maʿrifat al-filāḥa*[8] of al-Malik al-Ashraf ʿUmar (d. 696/1296) and *al-Ishāra fī al-ʿimāra* of his father, al-Malik al-Mujāhid ʿAlī (d. 764/1362). Two known copies of *Milḥ al-malāḥa* exist: one published by Muḥammad Jāzim and the other acquired by Eduard Glaser in the late nineteenth century.[9] Mixed in with details on Yemen is information taken from three well-known texts that have received previous attention. These are the tenth-century *al-Filāḥa al-Nabaṭiyya* attributed to Ibn Waḥshiyya and translated from the Syriac, the Arabic translation of the Byzantine *al-Filāḥa al-Rūmiyya* of Qusṭūs (Cassiano Basso Scolastico) of the sixth–seventh century, and the eleventh-century *al-Filāḥa* of the Andalusian Ibn Baṣṣāl. A few other non-Yemeni sources are also used. Given that these non-Yemeni sources exist and have been published, the principal contribution of *Bughyat al-fallāḥīn* is the Yemeni material. There exist a number of other Yemeni sources with relevant information on Yemeni agriculture, but these have largely been ignored by the editor.[10]

The editor has chosen to compare the two texts in Dār al-Kutub, the earliest one in the Ahmet III library and the very late copy in Sanaa. It is clear from his footnotes that the most trustworthy witness is Cairo's Zirāʿa 155. There is no colophon

and the writing does not look Rasulid, but there is a marginal note in this manuscript with the date 1131 AH (1718–19 CE). This note appears to have been added by a later hand, given that it refers to a group of scholars from Mocha who came to Shaykh Aḥmad b. ʿĪsā al-Walīdī, referred to as a father in the note, regarding seeds for the clove (*qaranful*) plant. Al-Wahībī (p. 39) assumes this is the approximate date of the manuscript, but the note appears to have been made by someone who owned the manuscript rather than at the time of its copying. There are relatively few comments in the margins. Some appear to be corrections to the text, but others add information, often about the Tihāma region. Regardless of the date of the manuscript's copying, it is the second-oldest manuscript surviving thus far. The copy made of this text in 1931 is useless, since we have the original from which it was copied. Similarly, the very late Sanaa manuscript is of little value because it is poorly written and contains numerous errors, extending even to the name of the author.

Although al-Wahībī suggests that the manuscript preserved in the Ahmet III library in Istanbul was copied by ʿAlī b. ʿAmr al-Qādirī in 868 AH (1463–64 CE), I am not sure where he found this very early date. When I examined the manuscript in Istanbul in 1983, I noted

---

8. Meyerhof transliterated the first word as *milḥ*, which I follow. Jāzim prefers *mulaḥ*, but both have similar meanings. Lacking an original text, it is difficult to determine which term al-Ashraf used.

9. Muḥammad Jāzim, "Kitāb Mulāḥ al-malāḥa fī maʿrifat al-filāḥa," *al-Iklīl* 3, no. 1 (1985): 170–207. Jāzim copied an incomplete text copied in Yemen after 1172/1758. The edition by ʿAbd Allāh al-Mujāhid, *Milḥ al-milāḥa fī maʿrifat al-filāḥa* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1987), was copied from Jāzim's handwritten transcription and should be avoided. The Glaser manuscript (no. 247) is in Vienna. I am preparing a translation of this text based on the two extant copies and quoted excerpts in *Bughyat al-fallāḥīn*.

10. See the list in my "Medieval Agricultural Texts," updated online at http://filaha.org/medieval_agricultural.html.

that it was copied by a Kurd in 1001/1592. Regardless of the date, it remains the oldest copy known, although the author's name and the book's title are missing. It is not clear how a Yemeni manuscript could have been copied in Istanbul in the fifteenth century, since the Rasulid dynasty ended in 1454 and the earliest invasion of Yemen by the Ottomans took place in 1538. Thus far no original Yemeni copy of the text has been found in Turkey. Ahmet III lived at the start of the eighteenth century, when the Cairo copy was made. It is bound with a copy of the Byzantine *al-Filāḥa al-Rūmiyya*. Unfortunately, the text is full of errors and was clearly copied by someone who had little knowledge of Yemen. It is interesting to note that both the Ahmet III copy and the main Cairo copy are incomplete and end at almost the same point. The Ahmet III copy ends with a discussion of the seven climes, about three lines longer than the Cairo copy. The two later copies also do not go beyond this point. This suggests that the original text may in fact not have been finished. It is also possible that the agricultural text of sixteen chapters was completed, since the last section on the seven climes is not listed in the contents and is referred to in the text as a *fāʾida*.

We have no information on the original manuscript, but there must have been a very early copy, most probably a Rasulid one, that was taken to Istanbul for the copy made there. The Cairo copy was clearly written in Yemen, although it is not clear when it arrived in Cairo. The fact that there are more recent copies in Tarim and Sanaa indicates that there must be an earlier copy, or more than one in Yemen, unless it has been destroyed. Given that many manuscripts are still found in private Yemeni libraries, with some now sold to wealthy individuals in neighboring states, other copies of *Bughyat al-fallāḥīn* may yet surface.

Given the effort put into this edition, it is unfortunate that the editor has a limited knowledge of Rasulid Yemen and the history of Yemeni agriculture in general. One of the glaring errors is misidentifying the author of *Milḥ al-malāḥa*, whom he elsewhere recognizes as al-Ashraf (p. 77), as al-Malik al-Muẓaffar in a footnote on p. 193, note 3. The problem is that al-Afḍal is using the term *jadd* here as an honorific for his father's uncle, not to denote his literal grandfather. In describing al-Ashraf's book, al-Afḍal calls the author his *jadd* (p. 100), but al-Afḍal's grandfather was al-Malik al-Muʾayyad Dāwūd, the brother of al-Ashraf. In the passage on p. 193 the reference is to the *jadd* of his father, called the *khalīfa*, but the author of *Milḥ al-malāḥa* is not his father's grandfather. The same problem occurs on p. 194, note 7, where al-Wahībī assumes the quotation is from al-Malik al-Muʾayyad when it is from al-Ashraf. I suspect that al-Afḍal is quoting his father about al-Ashraf here, since this is the usual formula used. On p. 199, note 16, al-Wahībī misidentifies the star called *kalb* in Egypt as the lunar station *ʿawwāʾ*, but the reference is to the summer rising of Sirius, a famous marker in ancient Egypt. The substitution of *qittāʾ* (p. 203) for the snake cucumber (*qiththāʾ*) is probably a printing error. The list of non-Arabic references has a number of errors and indicates that the editor did not have access to Western commentaries on the non-Yemeni texts quoted by al-Afḍal.

A comparison of this published edition to the Cairo manuscript reveals a few instances in which the latter has been

misread. On p. 185, line 1, al-Wahībī chooses Nayrūz rather than what is clearly *buzūr* in the Cairo manuscript. The word cannot be Nayrūz because it refers to summer rather than spring and other parts of the text note that this is the season when seeds appear. The Himyaritic month name for February is *Dhū Dithāʾ* and not *Dhū al-Dhayā* (p. 190), although none of the copies gives the proper spelling. On p. 192 the word *ayḍan* is left out. On p. 193 al-Wahībī misreads the Cairo manuscript, which I read as *taṭammu* rather than *yaḍummu*; the verb *taṭammu* is used in the text of Ibn al-Waḥshiyya.[11] I suspect that the reference on p. 198, line 4, is to grapevines in the village of al-Janāt, as in the Cairo manuscript, rather than *al-jibāl*. On p. 327, al-Wahībī misreads *sawāqī* (water channels) as *sawālif*. On p. 413, line 6, after the coastal plant name *al-ʿrhf*

for *mulūkhiyya*, he drops from the Cairo manuscript the phrase *wa-fī al-Ṭarafāt/ al-Ṭaraqāt* (?), which appears to be the term for a region.

In sum, this is a valuable resource on a very important fourteenth-century Yemeni text, although it has a number of annoying errors and misreadings. The only manuscript copies worth examining are the Cairo and Ahmet III ones, given the numerous errors in the two later copies, so it is not clear why the editor bothered with the latter. He also did not have access to Serjeant's copy of the Tarim manuscript, although this is archived in Edinburgh. Since the two volumes were published in Damascus, they will be difficult to access for most scholars. However, anyone interested in agriculture during the Mamluk and Rasulid eras should secure a copy of them.

---

11. Ibn Waḥshiyya, *L'agriculture Nabatéenne = al-Filāḥa al-Nabaṭiyya*, ed. Toufic Fahd, 3 vols. (Damascus: Institut français d'études arabes de Damas, 1995), 2:944.

Book Review

Jean Aubin, *Études sur l'Iran médiéval: Géographie historique et société*. Edited by Denise Aigle. Les Cahiers de Studia Iranica 60 (Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 2018), 371 pp., index, maps. ISBN 978-2-91064-046-0. Price: €60 (paper).

David Durand-Guédy
Independent Scholar

(david_durandguedy@yahoo.com)

Twenty-two years after his death, the visionary work of Jean Aubin is an enduring source of inspiration for scholars working on medieval Iran. For this reason alone, the publication of this volume is to be welcomed. Prepared by his student Denise Aigle, it contains seventeen of Aubin's articles on the subject, published between 1959 and 1991.

Who was Jean Aubin? In the article on Ḥasan Jūrī, the improbable leader of the Sarbedar movement in fourteenth-century Khurasan, Aubin notes that "he did not like to parade himself in front of the public. He conducted his preaching in secret" (p. 308). No doubt Aubin felt an affinity with his subject. He discouraged the preparation of any *Festschrift* to honor his work, going so far as to prohibit his colleagues from writing his obituary after his death.[1]

Born to a family of printers in rural France, with no particular predisposition to dedicate a large part of his life to Iran, Aubin was twenty-two years old when he left for Tehran immediately after graduating from the École des langues orientales in Paris with a degree in Persian. Over a period of roughly six years (1949–55), he was in contact with luminaries such as Said Nafisi and M.T. Danishpazhuh, traveled extensively inside the country, and worked directly with unexploited manuscripts. It was during this stint in Iran that he prepared his editions of important sources for Timurid history, which at the time was something of a poor relation in the field of medieval Iranian studies.[2]

---

1. See Jean Calmard and Jacqueline Calmard, "Jean Aubin 1927–1998," *Studia Iranica* 27 (1998): 9–14, at 9. It seems that no one has dared to violate the prohibition in or outside of France.

2. Aubin's source editions include biographies (in 1954: sayyids of fifteenth-century Bam; in 1956: Shāh Niʿmat Allāh Walī) as well as chronicles (in 1957: the Timurid chronicle *Muntakhab al-tawārīkh-i Muʿīnī*).

His first publication, the 1953 "Les princes d'Ormuz du XIIIe au XVe siècle," carried within it the seeds of his future research: the Turko-Mongol period, local frameworks of study, and Portugal. Indeed, Aubin dedicated most of his attention to the four centuries from the Mongol invasion in the early thirteenth century to the transformation of the Safavid state in the late sixteenth, and its key issue: the acculturation process induced by the rule of Turko-Mongol nomads over a country, or rather, a world ("le monde iranien"), with a different social fabric. For Aubin, the historical analysis could be done only at the local level, through the analysis of interpersonal relations.[3] In 1953, this local framework was a small island in the Persian Gulf. Later he would choose a city (Bam, Shiraz, Yazd), a rural area (eastern Azarbayjan and northern Gilan), or even a road network (in Khurasan, or by the Persian Gulf). Conversely, Aubin always remained defiant of preconceived theories and even more so of dogmatism. For example, he was able to show that the various *ideas* put forward to explain the rise of the Sarbedar state in fourteenth-century Khurasan (a Shiʿi movement for some, the result of class struggle for others) did not hold up when the evidence

was subjected to scrutiny (articles 16 and 17 in the reviewed volume).

Finally, there is Hormuz, which was a Portuguese base from 1507 to 1622 and the European gateway to Persia. Aubin, ever alert for new sources, was quick to grasp the potential of the Portuguese archives to complement the Persian sources on the Safavid period. This interest led him to become a major scholar of the history of the Indian Ocean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Iranians, Indians, and Europeans took part in the shaping of a new world. That a believer in local approaches to history became a pioneer of "global history" is an apparent paradox on which to meditate.

The present volume contains most of Aubin's articles on the pre-Safavid period, with the exception of the source editions.[4] They are organized in four sections: (1) cities and roads, (2) religious and cultural elites, (3) Mongol Azarbayjan, and (4) acculturation and social issues. It goes without saying that these categories are not hermetic; they are mere tools that serve to highlight Aubin's various areas of interest. The articles have been not simply reprinted but entirely retyped (even the maps have been redrawn) and printed in a uniform, well-spaced, and highly readable layout.[5] Thus this volume looks more

---

The complete references can be found in the bibliography of Aubin's works at pp. 367–71 in the reviewed volume.

3. In the foreword to the first issue of *Le monde iranien et l'Islam*, a journal he founded in 1971, Aubin writes that "local history is the natural framework of analytical research. Only the analysis at the level of the cells of the Iranian body, that is the counties and the cities, will allow us to realize . . . the remarkable permanence of Iranian-ness [thanks] to the cohesion and the social forces at play" (quoted in the reviewed volume at p. 12, my translation).

4. The absence of the aforementioned 1953 article on Hormuz and the famous 1963 article on Tamerlane's warfare tactics is regrettable. The articles on the Safavid period will be included in another volume.

5. These editorial choices have caused some misprints (e.g., p. 180, n. 36: "distriblition" for distribution; p. 159, n. 15: "india" for indica) and formatting issues (e.g., p. 201: the subtitle "II. Les cadis Kakuli" should have

like Claude Cahen's famous collection of articles, *Les peuples musulmans dans l'histoire médiévale* (Damascus: IFEAD, 1977), than like the typical Variorum reprints. The index is thirty-five pages long. The insertion, between brackets or in the margins, of the original pagination of the articles would, however, have been helpful. In addition, the new layout would have been an opportunity to update the text, at least as far as source editions are concerned. Although Aubin's analysis stands the test of time remarkably well, many critical editions have since been published (for example: Bayhaqī in article 7; Shabānkāraʾī in article 9; Ibn Bazzāz in articles 11–13; Faryūmadī in article 17).[6] But these omissions do not detract from the fact that this is a fine book that will be of benefit to every specialist in medieval Iran.

Why spend so much effort on the publication of relatively old articles (and, incidentally, why review the result in such length in a journal that aims to be at the cutting edge of scholarship)? Of course, anyone studying medieval Iran and the Mongols knows Aubin's name. He is all over the bibliographies of volume 3 of *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, which treats the eastern Islamic world between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries.[7] But for a number of reasons, his work has not been as widely read as it should have been. Several factors are to blame for this. For one thing, it did not help that many of the key texts were published in two journals that did not survive Aubin and that never made it to the digital world.[8]

The main problem, however, lies elsewhere. Very demanding of himself, Aubin was also demanding of his students and readers. His meticulosity resulted in immense notes, in which he displayed an

---

come with the table on p. 218, not in the text) that even a painstaking proofreading process could not avoid. On a more critical note, the choice to standardize all the transliterations in the reference system (to follow the later system propounded by Aubin in *Studia Iranica* and *Le monde iranien et l'Islam*) has led to multiple mistakes (e.g., p. 159, n. 11: "*tārīḫ*" instead of *tārīḫ*; nn. 16 and 18: "*tavarīḫ*" instead of *tavārīḫ*; n. 19: "*miraǧ*" instead of *miʿrāǧ*). Also, the map in the 1959 article on Siraf has been left out. The reader can refer to the relevant map in the article on Shilau (= Siraf) on p. 89, but this fact could have been mentioned.

6. Abū l-Faḍl Bayhaqī, *Tārīkh-i Bayhaqī*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar Fayyāḍ, 2nd ed. (Mashhad: Dānishgāh-i Mashhad, 2536 *shamsī shāhānshāhī*/1977); Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Shabānkāraʾī, *Majmaʿ al-ansāb*, ed. Mīr Hāshim Muḥaddith (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1363sh./1984); Ibn Bazzāz, Tawakkul b. Ismāʿīl al-Ardabīlī, *Ṣafwat al-ṣafā*, ed. Ghulām Riḍā Ṭabāṭabāʾī Majd (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Zaryāb, 1373sh./1994); Ibn Yamīn Faryūmadī, *Dīwān*, ed. Ḥusayn-ʿAlī Bāstānī-Rād (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Sanāʾī, 1363sh./1984).

7. *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 3, *The Eastern Islamic world, Eleventh to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. David O. Morgan and Anthony Reid (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Aubin has the most cited titles (after Thomas Allsen) in Beatrice Forbes Manz's chapter on the Mongols as well as in Sholeh Quinn's on the Safavids. See also A. C. S. Peacock's synthesis, *The Great Seljuk Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015). Specialists of medieval Iran, such as Jürgen Paul in Germany (on Sufi orders, local rule, and Mongol domination) and Kazuo Morimoto in Japan (on sayyids), are among those who have also made the most of Aubin's publications. In Iran, Aubin (Ūbin) is known mostly through translations of articles quoting him, starting with Denise Aigle's collection of articles (*The Mongol Empire between Myth and Reality: Studies in Anthropological History* [Leiden: Brill, 2015]). An exception who has made more use of Aubin's work is M. B. Wuthūqī, a native of Lār, which happens to be a region in southern Iran that Aubin knew very well.

8. These are *Le monde iranien et l'Islam* (four issues published from 1971 to 1977) and *Moyen-Orient & Océan indien* (seven issues published from 1984 to 1990).

amazing command of the sources and the scholarship in all European languages, beginning with Russian, a key language for the Mongol period. Aubin never taught undergraduates and never felt the need to reach a wider public, as Cahen (to take another example from France) did with his excellent book *L'Islam des origines au début de l'empire ottoman* (Paris: Bordas, 1970).[9] Or rather, he felt that as far as medieval Iran was concerned, the time was not yet ripe for synthesis, and he remained unconvinced by the synthetic attempts made by A. K. S. Lambton in English and I. P. Petrushevsky in Russian.[10] It was only when he realized that he was ill that he finally agreed to write a very short book (ninety-six pages) on Ilkhanid Iran. The resulting volume—*Émirs mongols et vizirs persans dans les remous de l'acculturation* (1995)—develops some of the broader conclusions that he reached after four decades in the sources, namely that, for the elite, acculturation between Mongols and Iranians worked in both directions and personal interest trumped racial/national antagonism.

Aubin also suffered from the decline of French, along with several other European languages, in the field of Iranian studies. The effects of this decline were aggravated by Aubin's complex prose, which demands a very good command of the language. Like that of Fritz Meier in German, Aubin's historical analysis was neglected as the values of European orientalism faded and as English monolingualism grew rampant.

Even in France, Aubin's work left little trace, but for different reasons: the students he trained were too few, and his field was not able to compete with the hegemony of the Arabists on the one hand and that of the students of Henry Corbin on the other.[11]

A few reading suggestions may perhaps help the neophyte use this volume. The first step should be Aigle's very useful introduction, entitled "L'œuvre de Jean Aubin (1927–1998) et l'histoire globale" (pp. 11–24), followed by Aubin's own "Elements of the Study of Urban Agglomerations in Medieval Iran" (article 1). In it, he provides guidelines "to move from the descriptive inventory [of events and spaces] to a dynamic approach and the formulation of complex problems" (p. 31). This article is very synthetic, very clear, and truly thought-provoking, and it

---

9. A shorter German version appeared as *Islam: 1. Vom Ursprung bis zu den Anfängen des Osmanenreiches* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1968).

10. A. K. S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); I. P. Pertruševskij, *Zemledelie i agrarnye otnošenija v Irane XIII–XIV vekov* (Moscow: Akademija nauk SSSR, 1960). Similarly, Aubin thought that John Masson Smith Jr.'s pioneering history of the Sarbedar was useful for its numismatic analysis but still premature given the "lack of familiarity [of the author] with fourteenth century Iran" (Smith, *The History of the Sarbadār Dynasty, 1336–1381 A.D., and Its Sources* [The Hague: Mouton, 1970], reviewed in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 14, no. 3 (1971): 332–33).

11. Among Aubin's few students, we should mention, in addition to the editor of the volume under review, the late Chahyar Adle in Paris (who developed primary interests in art history and archaeology) and Masashi Haneda in Tokyo (who emulated his teacher by combining research on medieval Iran and the first phase of globalization).

should form part of any curriculum on the history of Iran.[12] The same is true for his aforementioned short book, *Émirs mongols et vizirs persans*.[13]

After completing these relatively approachable pieces, the non-expert reader is advised to proceed to the article on Shaykh Zāhid (no. 13). This is an extremely readable biography of a Sufi master in thirteenth-century Azarbayjan in which Aubin shows a real talent for integrating extracts from a source into his own prose. The student will then be ready to tackle Aubin's most emblematic writings. The slope in these articles is steep, but if the reader makes it to the summit, he will be able to see a great deal farther. Three articles, in particular, should be mentioned. "Réseau pastoral et réseau caravanier: Les grand'routes du Khorassan à l'époque mongole" (article 16) shows that the Mongol period saw the creation of a dual network of roads: those for caravans (in the plains) and pastoral ones (at higher altitudes). Aubin describes them through a broad sociohistorical analysis that involves the initiatives of local dynasties (e.g., the Juwaynīs in Bayhaq) and the transformation in the economy and the structure of power during the Turko-Mongol period. In "La propriété foncière en Azerbaïjan sous les Mongols" (article 11), Aubin uses the unique documentation linked to the Safavid order to show that, contrary to preconceived ideas, the peasantry was able to resist; Iranian landowners did not hesitate to call on the Mongols when needed; and, above all, for new religious elites such as the early Safavid masters, spiritual authority and good land management went hand in hand. In "L'ethnogenèse des Qaraunas," (article 14) he solves an issue concerning which the contradictions within the sources (the most famous being Marco Polo) had puzzled everyone from Yule to Pelliot.

In 1997, Aigle oversaw the publication of the proceedings of an important conference convened under Aubin's aegis.[14] It is to be hoped that this latest tribute will draw still more attention to a truly pioneering historian whose work remains useful and reliable. Sources he was the first to use in manuscript are now on every scholar's desk, and many of his findings have been confirmed by later research (although the terminology may have changed).[15] Like Minorsky's, Aubin's

---

12. I give the title of this article in English, as it is translated in David Durand-Guédy, Roy P. Mottahedeh, and Jürgen Paul, eds., "Cities of Medieval Iran," special issue, *Eurasian Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (2018): 21–38 (repr. Leiden: Brill, 2020), with an introduction by Jürgen Paul.

13. The text is devoid of footnotes. Aubin assumed that specialists would be familiar enough with the sources to fill in the gaps and that nonspecialists would benefit from a fluid and compact narrative. This methodological choice had been "harshly criticized," as Philippe Gignoux recalls in the foreword (without naming it, Gignoux is referring to Monika Gronke's review in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40, no. 3 [1997]: 310–12).

14. Denise Aigle, ed., *L'Iran face à la domination mongole* (Tehran: Institut français de recherche en Iran, 1997).

15. In the second preface of her book on Timurid Iran, Beatrice Manz mentions Aubin as someone whose work was foundational to her. At some point in the analysis, she argues against Aubin's interpretation of the events of 850/1446 in Isfahan as a "Shi'ite uprising" (Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 256). Indeed, Aubin had spoken of "the aristocratic attempt

methodological approach, his lack of regard for theoretical frameworks, and his refusal to follow *l'air du temps* gave his articles a high resistance to aging.[16] His path is not an easy one to follow, but is there another one?

---

of the Shii notables of Isfahan under the 'honorific patronage' of Sulṭān Muḥammad-i Baysonġor," but he was also the first to note, on the same page, that "the demarcation between Sunnism and Shiism is made of nuances, and as long as these are not clarified by a specific research, we will not know exactly what does the label 'Shi'i' cover in the fifteenth century" (Aubin, *Deux sayyids de Bam au XVᵉ siècle* [Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1954], 484).

16. Although Aubin was loath to write obituaries, he made a telling exception for Minorsky, whose erudition and method he regarded as a model to emulate. The obituary appeared in *Studia Iranica* 5 (1976): 131–33.

Book Review

Sunil Sharma
Boston University

(sharma@bu.edu)

The term "Persianate" is widely used by scholars in various disciplines at present. Of course, it has been around for several decades, but although it has been used to serve different purposes by scholars depending on their disciplines or regional specialties, there have been frequent attempts to return to Marshall Hodgson's original definition to justify or challenge its use. Not surprisingly, the term's usage is largely confined to academic writing and it has not caught on in the larger world, unlike other area studies designations such as Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian. In literary and art-historical scholarship, Persianate is often conflated with Persian, suggesting the aspiration for a more transnational and cosmopolitan civilizational reach. But Persian (like Iranian) denotes a national designation as well as a language, and hence there is some slippage in the use of these terms. Literary scholars and art and architecture historians have long grappled with these questions and faced the dilemma of choosing between Persian, Persianate, Indo-Persian, and Islamicate in the case of South Asia. Naturally, people, texts, and cultural practices can be discussed under multiple categories, and often there are no precise distinctions between them. Are some Persian texts Persianate, while others are not? Are the instances in which the medieval Persian poet Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī's poetry was commented on by an Ottoman Turkish scholar or translated into a vernacular language of the Deccan in the sixteenth century manifestations of Persianate culture? Or is it perhaps more accurate to state that they occurred in a Persianate world? The transregional extent of Persian in different premodern vernacular contexts justifies the use of the term in the original Hodg-

sonian sense, but outside of literary and artistic discourses, style and genre are not the defining criteria for what is Persianate. In recent times, historians have taken up the challenge to further articulate and even broaden the conceptual parameters of the Persianate. This effort has resulted in two edited volumes, issuing from conferences held a few years ago, with the same title, albeit different subtitles: *The Persianate World*. There is obviously some overlap in the introductory historical surveys of the spread of Persian beyond Iran in the two books, but there is also some degree of conversation between the essays of a few scholars, including two of the three editors, whose work appears in both books.

Green states early in his introduction that the collection of essays in the volume he edited is "an exercise in world history, [whose] aim is to decouple the study of Persian from both explicit and implicit methodological nationalisms" (p. 2). Building largely on post-Hodgsonian scholarship on the multiple dimensions of the Persianate by Bert Fragner,[1] Brian Spooner, and William Hanaway[2] and the seminal essays of Saïd Amir Arjomand,[3] all of which explored the role of Persian as a spoken or written contact language entrenched in the activities of specific social groups, Green proposes a new and more precise term for the premodern

Persianate world: "Persographia," as distinct from the "Persophonie" or Persophonia, a term introduced by Fragner. This term has a parallel in the field of East Asian studies, where the designation "Sinographic sphere" has found consensus among current scholars and provides a better approach, historically and intellectually, than the area studies model.[4] Placing the emphasis on "scribal practices and manuscript-based exchanges" that spread through courtly and Sufi networks, which were distinct from those connected to the spread of Islam, rather than merely on the movement of Persian-speaking communities outside the Iranian plateau, the concept of a Persographic sphere is highly appealing in many ways. It is even applicable to cultural areas with languages not written in the Perso-Arabic script, such as Armenian, Georgian, and Bengali, to name a few, where literary genres and poetic images were nevertheless derived from Persian. According to Green, it is not sufficient to delineate a broad Perso-Islamic "cultural axis" to map the geographic region of the Persianate; instead, more precise locations that served as sites for the circulation of texts and people must be identified. The attempt to shift the focus of the study of the Persianate from disciplines that privilege aesthetics to a world-historical inquiry nevertheless calls

1. Bert Fragner, *Die "Persophonie": Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1999).

2. William Hanaway, *Literacy in the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2012).

3. Saïd Amir Arjomand, "Defining Persianate Studies," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1 (2008): 1–4; idem, "Evolution of the Persianate Polity and Its Transmission to India," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 2 (2009): 115–136.

4. Wiebke Denecke and Nam Nguyen, "Shared Literary Heritage in the East Asian Sinographic Sphere," *The Oxford Handbook of Classical Chinese Literature*, ed. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-Yee Lee, and Xiaofei Tian, 551–567 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

for a survey of the origins and spread of the New Persian language as a lingua franca in the *longue durée* in order to identify the "breaking points and fault lines" in this global phenomenon. Persian as a lingua franca and Persianate practices flourished in multilingual societies, at times in tandem with other vernacular languages, but eventually lost out to them as this world shrank. Even as printing technology allowed more communities to have access to texts from a shared literary heritage, it also helped the cause of the languages that were in competition with Persian and were linked to nascent nationalist movements. As a result, the map of the Persianate world, especially the locations of Persographic hubs and centers, underwent a dramatic and permanent change.

The twelve essays in Green's volume were carefully curated to highlight the fullest geographic spread of the Persian world from China in the east to Britain in the west. There is a chronological division, with three parts of four essays each by scholars who are specialists in a particular area of the Persianate world. The overall narrative charts the rise and apex of Persianate cultural achievement in the medieval and early modern periods, including the incorporation of many non-Persophone communities into the fold, leading to the so-called breaking point. Part I, "Pan-Eurasian Expansions, ca. 1400–1600," is on the earliest period, covering the history of Persian learning in the early Ottoman empire and the careers of some Ottoman Persianists (Murat Umut Inan); the spread of Persian in rural Bengal and the formation of a Bengali Muslim identity (Thibaut d'Hubert); translation between Persian and Chinese at the Ming court (Graeme Ford); and the history of

the use of Persian vis-à-vis Turkic in the Volga-Ural region in Inner Asia (Devin DeWeese). Part II, under the rubric "The Constraints of Cosmopolitanism, ca. 1600–1800," includes essays on the importance of personal and provincial networks in the production of Mughal Persian texts (Purnima Dhavan); the fate of Persian in Qing China, especially its Sufi communities (David Brophy); multilingual Persianate communities in Imperial Russia (Alfrid Bustanov); and the new use of Persian through a study of talismanic scrolls in Xinjiang, Eastern Turkistan (Alexandre Papas). Part III, with the heading "New Empires, New Nations, ca. 1800–1920," has essays on hybrid identities as exemplified in the life and career of the white Mughal D. O. Dyce Sombre (Michael Fisher); on the de-Persification translation program at the court of the Khanate of Khiva (Marc Toutant); on colonial Daghestan as seen through the lives of migrants such as ʿAbd al-Rahim Talibuf (Rebecca Ruth Gould); and on the poet Adīb Peshāwarī (d. 1930), another migrant, this time one who had left British India to settle in Iran (Abbas Amanat). The book concludes with a short excursus, in the form of an epilogue titled "The Persianate Millennium" by Brian Spooner, that provides a brief history of the Persian language. The topic of multilingualism in Persianate societies is one of the overarching themes in these essays, attesting to the development of Persian in interaction with other literary cultures in various societies through a range of textual practices. Together, the essays provide different pieces of the history of Persian learning at the court, chancery, school, and shrine, enmeshed in webs of power and politics over a millennium. There could have been

more dialogue among the essays in this volume, including direct cross-references, but that is a difficult task and Green ties them together in the introduction. The essays open up exciting prospects for more comparative work, especially with respect to the degree of Persianization and competition with vernacular cultures in different corners of the Persianate world at the local or transregional levels.

The underlying questions in the volume edited by Amanat and Ashraf, as articulated in the introduction by Ashraf and the first essay by Amanat ("Remembering the Persianate"), are whether the "category of Iran" can effectively be marginalized in Persianate studies, and how Iranian studies—the concern is mainly with the discipline of history—can avoid the pitfalls of "parochialism and essentialism" (p. 13). The process of retrieving the cultural high points of a unified cultural sphere demonstrates that the Persianate model is central to the academic study of the Middle East, in particular Iran. Stressing the existence of a vast sociocultural sphere connected by Persophonie (*fārsī-zabān*), a harmonious "comfort zone," the editors emphasize the viability of Persianate studies as an academic field whose purview extends beyond language and literature. It was the shared experience of Persianate forms of governance, learning, and pleasure in the courts of premodern transregional empires that allowed the sustenance of this ecumene. The expansion from a Persian to a Persianate sphere is mapped through the mobility of medieval literary figures such as Nāṣir Khusraw, Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī, and others who upheld the cause of Persian in areas beyond the Iranian heartland. Rooted in ideals of kingship

and statecraft in the pre-Islamic past, the cultural achievements of Iran in poetry and music—described in a celebratory vein— along with the mobility of Sufis, trade networks, and material culture blossomed in a Muslim context, overlapping to some extent with the use of Arabic. Literary genres and texts played a central role in the flowering of the Persianate, attesting to the Persographic feature of the cultural expansion. In contrast to Green's book, in which particular geographic spots in the history of the Persianate world are scrutinized as sites for the limits of Persian, here it is the waning and demise of the robust Persianate cultural sphere, with its shared legacy that failed to "survive the trauma of encounters with modernity" (p. 40), that signals the swan song of the vast cultural ecumene.

The eight essays in the volume edited by Amanat and Ashraf explore a range of topics. After Amanat's historical survey, which is really a second introduction to the volume, Richard Eaton's essay offers a comparative discussion of the Persian and Sanskrit cosmopolises, the latter related to the pioneering work of Sheldon Pollock. The implicit suggestion that the Persian cosmopolis is perhaps a more useful term for the same geographic and cultural sphere as that denoted by the Persianate world is supported by a preference for it in some current scholarship. Eaton points out the pitfalls of confusing the application of two Hodgsonian terms, Islamicate and Persianate, in the case of premodern South Asia, especially the Deccan. The essay by A. Azfar Moin on the politics of saint shrines in the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires is also comparative in nature. A study of the Bengali version of the *Sayf al-mulūk* romance by Ālāol

(fl. 1651–71) in Arakan by Thibaut d'Hubert is the sole piece on a literary text. The other four essays are studies on the rise of Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi Sufi networks (Waleed Ziad); multilingualism in the context of the Enikolopian family in the Caucasus (Hirotake Maeda); inclusion and exclusion of the Baluch people in the Persianate world (Joanna de Groot); and the twilight of Persian in India through a close analysis of an Indo-Persian travel account to Britain by Mīr Lāʾiq ʿAlī from the late nineteenth century (Nile Green). Only de Groot's essay includes a further elucidation of the conceptual value of the term "Persianate world," suggesting that "explorations of its fluidity, complexity, and heterogeneity will give it more force and impact as an analytical tool" (p. 197). Altogether the essays attempt to provide case studies representing the four Persianate modalities identified in the first essay: governance and statecraft; a shared literary heritage; Sufi networks; and commonalities in material cultures.

These two books with their wide array of scholarly output will certainly remain landmark volumes marking the maturation of Persianate studies as an interdisciplinary field of historical inquiry. The introductions are valuable in themselves, especially for pedagogical purposes. As with most edited volumes, the individual essays will mostly be consulted by those with a specialized interest in a particular region or linguistic tradition. In the end, it is not possible to marginalize Iran, or for that matter India, because of the astounding levels of Persographic textual and artistic production in those areas as compared to frontier areas. At the same time, the books afford the opportunity to take stock of the state of the field, and it may be time to stop redefining the term at every instance, or to stop avoiding its existence altogether, as the case may be. Going beyond offering sweeping surveys of Perso-Islamic political and Persian literary histories or collating a set of case studies in an edited volume, more nuanced and comparative studies of how the term can be effectively integrated into various methodological approaches that do rely heavily on texts—such as the self and body, sexuality and gender, history of emotions and sports, food, and travel studies—will further establish the conceptual uses of the term. The various roles played by women in Persianate societies, whether as poets or patrons, a point brought up by Green in his introduction, should also be given more attention. Mana Kia's recent book, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford University Press, 2020), offers a compelling and attractive model to understand what Persianate signified at an individual level in the broader context of the interconnected histories of Iran and India. This is currently a thriving area of study despite the disparate understandings of the term in different disciplines, but as Green argues in his introduction, the Persianate will always be a "contingent" and "contested" category and has the scope to be redefined in multiple ways in future scholarship.

Book Review

Emma J. Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates: Living Well in the Persian Cosmopolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), xix + 318 pp. ISBN 978-1-108-48193-9. Price: £75.00 (cloth).

Meia Walravens
University of Antwerp

(meia.walravens@uantwerpen.be)

Emma J. Flatt's *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates* is a convincing and expertly written study of courtly culture in the Bahmani sultanate (1347–1528) and its five successor sultanates, Bijapur (ca. 1490–1686), Ahmadnagar (ca. 1490–1636), Berar (ca. 1490–1574), Bidar (ca. 1492–1619), and Golkonda (ca. 1501–1687). The members of the courtly societies of these Indo-Islamic states had roots in (most prominently) north India, Iran, and Central Asia, and they had adopted Persian as the language of the court and administration. Scholarship in the field shows a long-standing interest in studying these elite migrants to the Deccan.[1] Prompted by the observation that courtiers moved as easily between the Deccan's courts as they did to them, Flatt now aims to elucidate what practices and ideas allowed their easy integration and their high degree of mobility. As such, the book also fits within a growing body of scholarly literature that pays attention to the topic of mobility—not only of people,

---

1. E.g., Jean Aubin, "De Kûhbanân à Bidar: La famille Niʿmatullahī," *Studia Iranica* 20, no. 2 (1991): 233–261; Simonetta Casci, "Cultural Mobility in the Deccan: The Afaqis' Long Journey," *Deccan Studies* 7, no. 2 (2014): 5–23; Richard M. Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan, 1300–1761: Eight Indian Lives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 59–77; Muḥsin Maʿṣūmī, "ʿAnāṣir-i qawmī-yi tashkīl dihanda-yi jāmiʿa-yi Dakan dar dawra-yi Bahmanīyān va chigūnagī-yi taʿāmul-i ānhā bā yakdīgar," *Majalla-yi ʿilmī-pizhūhishī-yi dānishkada-yi adabiyāt va ʿulūm-i insānī-yi dānishgāh-i Iṣfahān* 2, no. 53 (1387 Sh./2008): 81–91; Muhammad Suleman Siddiqi, "Ethnic Change in the Bahmanid Society at Bidar: A.D. 1422–1538," *Islamic Culture* 60, no. 3 (1986): 61–80; idem, "The Pro-Afaqi Policy of Ahmad Shah Wali Bahmani: Its Impact and Consequences," *Deccan Studies* 11, no. 2 (2013): 25–48; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Iranians Abroad: Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation," *Journal of Asian Studies* 51, no. 2 (1992): 340–363.

but also of objects and ideas—in the wider Islamic world.[2]

Flatt argues that vital to understanding this historical phenomenon is to grasp what constituted courtliness. She contends that the Deccan's elite shared with their counterparts in Persian-speaking lands a particular courtly disposition: a certain awareness of and engagement with authoritative literature and related knowledge, behaviors, and skills. It was acquired through a "cosmopolitan" education based on a "canon" of Persian (and Arabic) texts that betray a concern with instruction and moralization. The aim of this education was to impart to the student a specific mindset that would make him value the ongoing effort to gain proficiency in a variety of fields and to perfect a range of courtly qualities. This mindset consequently helped courtiers from diverse backgrounds to carve out a space for themselves in the Persian-oriented sultanates of the Deccan.

Flatt builds this argument on the idea of the Persian Cosmopolis, a concept that is gaining currency among historians of Islamic South Asia. The term is a shorthand for a tradition stretching over a vast time and space marked by a reliance on deep-rooted and transregionally appealing ideas, images, and practices associated with the Persian language and its literary heritage. These were often reinterpreted and adapted to local contexts, mainly in the political realm. The author provides a clear explanation of this concept, engaging with Sheldon Pollock's work on the Sanskrit Cosmopolis, as well as with Richard Eaton's and Philip Wagoner's use of the term Persian Cosmopolis (pp. 17–24). Absent from this discussion is the Arabic Cosmopolis, which was introduced almost a decade ago by Ronit Ricci.[3] The role of Arabic itself, however, is not forgotten in the book; Flatt mentions that Arabic works were also part of the courtier's canon and in chapter 5 points to the use of an "Arabicized" Persian in Bahmani *inshāʾ* (epistolography, meaning both the art and its products) as a political tool. It might have been interesting to consider the implications of these glimmers of an Arabic presence at South Asian courts for the idea of the Persian Cosmopolis—and of an Arabic one. In Flatt's defense, though, the concept of the Arabic Cosmopolis is only now making headway in a couple of recent studies, which appeared after the publication of Flatt's work.[4] This young field shows the utility of thinking about cosmopolises as a way to grasp issues of mobility, transmission, and connectedness over larger areas, as Flatt does, but it

---

2. On the Deccan, specifically, the most recent example (which appeared after Flatt's book) is Keelan Overton's edited volume *Iran and the Deccan: Persianate Art, Culture, and Talent in Circulation, 1400–1700* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020). For the Islamic world more generally, see, for example, Stefan Rohdewald, Stephan Conermann, and Albrecht Fuess, eds., *Transottomanica – Osteuropäisch-osmanisch-persische Mobilitätsdynamiken: Perspektiven und Forschungsstand* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2019), which also includes a part on India (Christoph U. Werner, "Persisch-Indisch-Osmanische Interaktionen").

3. Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

4. E.g., Christopher D. Bahl, "Transoceanic Arabic Historiography: Sharing the Past of the Sixteenth-Century Western Indian Ocean," *Journal of Global History* 15, no. 2 (2020): 203–223; Mahmood Kooria, "Languages of Law: Islamic Legal Cosmopolis and its Arabic and Malay Microcosmoi," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 29, no. 4 (2019): 705–722.

also highlights the fact that the concept is still in full development and that the complexities of the South Asian context call for both refinement and extension.

In a laudably innovative approach, Flatt herself extends the concept of the Persian Cosmopolis to comprise not only language practices but bodily ones as well (see p. 20). This allows her to highlight the importance of the physical manifestations in which the influence of the Persian Cosmopolis in the Deccan courts is visible, such as rituals, the training of the body for particular skills, and material objects. In the first chapter of the book ("Courtly Disposition," pp. 31–73), the author elaborates on this line of thinking. She explains that the way a courtier in the Persian Cosmopolis thought about what constitutes courtliness and how to achieve it was influenced by the idea, prevalent in Islamic advice literature as well as in Sufi thought and medico-philosophical theories, that both the body and the character were malleable and could be perfected (or corrupted) via internal and external forces. The self, the body, the world, and the cosmos constituted a continuum: changes in one sphere were believed to influence the others. By extension, this idea implied that the cultivation of courtliness was crucial not only to attain worldly success, but also to live ethically and to refine one's soul. This interplay between the political and the personal, practices and knowledge, the worldly and the ethical, and the mundane and the spiritual in the courtly culture of the Deccan sultanates is a common thread throughout the book.

Chapter 2 ("Networks, Patrons and Friends," pp. 74–119) and chapter 3 ("Courts, Merchants and Commodities," pp. 120–164) consider the social and economic networks that tied the Deccan sultanates to the Persian Cosmopolis. Most of the subtopics discussed in these chapters are well known in the field through previous scholarship; they include the connotation of knowledge acquisition that "travel" had in Islamic accounts, the Bahmani sultans' pro-immigration policies, the interdependence of trade and state in the premodern Indian subcontinent, and the Bahmani chief minister Maḥmūd Gāvān's (d. 1481) mercantile networks. The part on the Bahmani secretary ʿAbd al-Karīm Nīmdihī's (d. ca. 1501) social network (pp. 83–88), in particular, might have benefited from a fresh examination of the material in the main source, Nīmdihī's *inshāʾ* collection *Kanz al-maʿānī*, instead of relying on Jean Aubin's publications.[5] Still, these chapters are valuable for bringing together the complex and varied aspects of the Deccan's transregional relations in a comprehensible overview. Further, the addition of highly engaging sections related to Flatt's interest in bodily practices brings back the focus from the wider context of economic and social connections to the court. For example, as part of demonstrating the role of friendship relations and sociability in courtiers' careers, Flatt discusses the practice of sitting together in the assembly (*majlis*) and how concerns about the body and its susceptibility to external influences shaped this social encounter (pp. 109–119).

---

5. An edition of the collection has been available in print for five years but has received very little scholarly attention: ʿAbd al-Karīm Nīmdihī, *Kanz al-maʿānī (Munshaʾāt-ī Nīmdihī)*, ed. Muḥammad-Riżā Naṣīrī and Muḥammad-Bāqir Wus̱ūqī (Tehran: Academy of Persian Language and Literature [Farhangistān-i zabān va adab-i fārsī], 1394 Sh./2015).

The remaining chapters of the book each deal with a set of skills that were important in the courtly life of the Deccan sultanates: letter writing (chapter 4, "Scribal Skills," pp. 167–209); knowledge of esoteric sciences (chapter 5, "Esoteric Skills," pp. 210–267); and mastery of martial arts (chapter 6, "Martial Skills," pp. 268–302). These chapters illustrate some of the concrete aspects of courtly life, but their aim is also to show how these three seemingly very different occupations were all underpinned by the same idea: that they (and the literary or scientific works that treated them) had transformative powers on both a communal and an individual level. To the individual courtier, each of these skills held obvious practical value; one should be able to write letters for the sultan and to colleagues and friends, be aware of the power of esoteric sciences to better serve the sultan and to safeguard one's own well-being, and be ready to fight in battles. At the same time, given the continuum between physical activities and the soul explained by Flatt in the beginning of the book, these skills were linked to courtly ideals of perfected selves: the true *munshī* (composer of *inshāʾ*), the spiritual master, and the *javānmard* (a person embodying characteristics of "young-manliness").

At the communal level, Flatt argues, we can observe attempts to mobilize each of these three courtly skills to deal with the ethnic, linguistic, and religious heterogeneity of Deccani society. The Bahmani chief minister Maḥmūd Gāvān thus advocated in his chancery manual an "Arabicized" Persian, purged of vernacular influences, as the basis of *inshāʾ* to balance out rivalries between ethnic-political factions at the court, which are well known for the disrupting role they played in Bahmani history. As for the esoteric sciences, one of the sultans of Bijapur, ʿAlī ʿĀdil Shāh I (r. 1558–1580), found them an ideal arena in which "to create conceptual commensurabilities between Indic and Islamicate cosmologies with the aim of promoting a shared culture in a multi-ethnic and religiously plural society" (p. 305). He did so by writing an astrological encyclopaedia that drew on both Islamic and Indic beliefs, images, and practices. Finally, the Deccan sultans are shown to have encouraged or prohibited certain martial arts depending on whether they perceived them as a unifying or disrupting force.

In addition to a range of more conventional primary sources on the early modern Deccan, such as Firishtah's *Tārīkh*, ʿIṣāmī's *Futūḥ al-salāṭīn*, Shīrāzī's *Tadhkirat al-mulūk*, and Ṭabāṭabāʾs *Burhān-i maʾāsir*, the book's main arguments build on two particularly noteworthy sources: Maḥmūd Gāvān's chancery manual *Manāẓir al-inshāʾ* (chapter 4) and ʿAlī ʿĀdil Shāh's astrological encyclopaedia *Nujūm al-ʿulūm* (chapter 5). Flatt's use of them makes a key contribution to the field, because both works to date have been looked at only from specific angles. *Nujūm al-ʿulūm* has mainly received art-historical attention owing to its splendid miniatures.[6] In *Manāẓir al-inshāʾ*, the sections on the rules of letter composition have been singled

---

6. An exception is Flatt's own previous study "The Authorship and Significance of the *Nujūm al-ʿUlūm*: A Sixteenth-Century Astrological Encyclopedia from Bijapur," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 131, no. 2 (2011): 223–244.

out for use in analyzing official letters from other premodern Islamic dynasties.[7] Flatt's argument that these works served political, societal, and personal ends for the first time sheds light on the purposes for which they were potentially written. Much work remains to be done to better understand these Deccani texts (for example, no attempt has so far been made to examine *Manāẓir al-inshāʾ*'s place within the larger Islamic tradition of *inshāʾ*), but Flatt's intervention is an important step forward.

Only two minor reflections about the effectiveness of the book's arguments as a whole impose themselves. First, the arguments presented slightly lose sight of the book's opening question: "How had the ideas of 'the court' and 'courtliness' become so immediately recognisable across a wide geographic area, and so readily applicable—by Persians—to Indic culture?" (p. 2). This question is raised after observing that certain images of the court modeled on ancient Persian examples are used by the Bijapuri historian Rafīʿ al-Dīn Shīrāzī to describe the cave temples at Ellora. It also relates to an aim articulated in the abstract: that the book "challenges the idea of perpetual hostility between Islam and Hinduism in Indian history." Although the introduction recognizes that one should not disregard the local context when focusing on the Persian Cosmopolis (pp. 22–24), the issue of the interaction between "Persian" and "Indic" elements in the Deccan's courtly culture only really receives attention in chapter 5. The author herself suggests, in her concluding remarks, that this question deserves to be taken up more elaborately in future research (p. 306–307).

Second, a risk of the thematic instead of chronological approach of the book is that the reasoning of one of the central arguments becomes somewhat circular: strong connections, often through human travel, with the Persian-speaking world allowed the Deccan sultanates to develop a courtly culture compatible with those of other regions within the Persian Cosmopolis, which in turn facilitated the transregional movement of courtiers. Admittedly, it would be pointless to try to establish cause and effect in this complex, two-way process. Nevertheless, an attempt might have been made to discern certain evolutions in migrants' movements over the almost three centuries under discussion and to explain how they related to Deccani courts' participation in the Persian Cosmopolis. That this remains a very difficult thing to do further illustrates the relevance of Flatt's research and the pressing need for contributions like *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates*.

The book features some useful and clear maps of the early modern Deccan (pp. 5 and 8), the Persian Cosmopolis (p. 76), and the Bahmani capital of Bidar (p. 278), as well as wonderful illustrations taken from Persian manuscripts, mostly from the *Nujūm al-ʿulūm* (MS CBL In. 02). As to the transliteration of titles and phrases from Persian and Arabic, unfortunately a rather large number of mistakes remain in the publication, mostly due to an inconsistent rendering of the letters ʿayn (ʿ) and

---

7. E.g., Malika Dekkiche, "The Letter and Its Response: The Exchanges between the Qara Qoyunlu and the Mamluk Sultan: MS Arabe 4440 (BnF, Paris)," *Arabica* 63 (2016): 579–626; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, "The Delicate Art of Aggression: Uzun Hasan's *Fathnama* to Qaytbay of 1469," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2011): 193–214.

hamza (ʾ) throughout. For example, we find *ʿAjāʿib* (p. 39) instead of the correct *ʿAjāʾib*, *mujtamiʾ* (p. 157) instead of *mujtamiʿ*, *al-māʿida* (p. 199) instead of *al-māʾida*, and *Rasāʿil* (p. 233) instead of *Rasāʾil*. There is also *Iqʿra* (p. 179, n. 42) instead of correctly *Iqraʾ*, al-Mutanabbīʿ (p. 198, n. 112) instead of al-Mutanabbī, *faṣāhat* (p. 201) instead of *faṣāḥat*, *Makhzān* (p. 202, n. 129) instead of *Makhzan*, and *Manāẕīr* (throughout chapter 4) instead of *Manāẕir*. This does not change the fact, however, that *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates* is a highly erudite work, carefully structured and original in its approach and arguments, which should certainly become part of the "canon"—to use some vocabulary that matches the themes of the book—of historians, area specialists, political scientists, and scholars of language and literature alike.

Book Review

Thomas Bauer, *Warum es kein islamisches Mittelalter gab: Das Erbe der Antike und der Orient* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2018), 175 pp. ISBN 978-3406-72730-6. Price: €22.95 (cloth).

Christian Mauder
University of Bergen

(christian.mauder@uib.no)

Scholars write books out of various motivations, such as curiosity about and fascination with the unknown, the desire to impart knowledge, the urge to contribute to a debate, or the wish to advance their careers. According to its preface, *Warum es kein islamisches Mittelalter gab: Das Erbe der Antike und der Orient* (Why there was no Islamic Middle Ages: The heritage of antiquity and the Orient) was written for a different reason, namely, "anger about the widespread negligence with which a term is used that causes more damage than those who use it are usually aware of" (p. 7; my translations throughout). The term in question is, of course, "Middle Ages," especially as part of the phrase "Islamic Middle Ages." Thomas Bauer's book is essentially a strongly worded and well-argued plea against the use of this term, which is still very common in both German and

—especially in its adjective form "medieval"—English scholarly literature about Islam and Islamic history. Moreover, Bauer develops a reasoned alternative to this term and the periodization it expresses by arguing that, up to the eleventh century CE, Islamic history should be understood as the final, albeit not fundamentally distinct, phase of late antiquity.

The main part of the book consists of five chapters. The first chapter (pp. 11–31) provides what its title promises: "The 'Islamic Middle Ages': Six Reasons against It." The first reason Bauer adduces is a lack of precision: Even among Europeanists, it is disputed when the Middle Ages begin and end; once the term "Islamic" is added, the picture becomes even more muddied, given that this religious label is used to refer to the history of societies that consist largely of non-Muslims. Second, "Middle

Ages" is often accompanied by misleading notions, such as the erroneous idea that the people who lived in this period were particularly pious. Again, one aggravates this problem by combining "Middle Ages" with "Islamic," since the two terms in combination imply what Bauer calls "an epitome of religious fanaticism" (p. 16). According to Bauer, this leaves no room for nonreligious aspects of literature, political thought, science, and art. Third, the term "Middle Ages" can be pejorative, especially when combined with the term "Islamic." Bauer's case in point here is the media coverage of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which was depicted as a "return to the Middle Ages" (p. 19). Fourth, the term "Middle Ages" inherently serves purposes of exoticizing and othering; it is used to project an antithesis to one's own, enlightened present. Fifth, derived as it is from the periodization of European history, it is Eurocentric and often imperialistic. The latter aspect becomes clear when non-Western—and especially often Islamic—societies are presented as mired in or even regressing to the Middle Ages, thus lacking the essentially Western characteristic of modernity. Sixth, the term lacks an empirical basis when applied to the Islamic world, since it presupposes a similarity of living conditions in European and Islamic parts of the globe during the period of roughly 500–1500 CE. Such a similarity, however, did not exist, as Bauer details in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 (pp. 33–77) uses the letters of the Latin alphabet to demonstrate through twenty-six short case studies that, in terms of intellectual, cultural, and social history, as well as the history of everyday life and mentalities, the conditions of living in the premodern

Islamic world were profoundly different from those in contemporaneous Europe during the time from the rise of Islam to the eleventh century CE. The case studies, some of which are illustrated, examine pertinent objects of material culture such as public bathhouses, glass objects, copper coins, and roofing tiles alongside fields of learning such as medicine and the natural sciences, social characteristics such as literacy and urbanity, and concepts such as the dogma of hereditary sin and homoeroticism. Bauer argues that each of these examples demonstrates that the Islamic world did not experience a break with earlier, antique periods of history comparable to what European societies underwent during the later centuries of the first millennium. Instead, the Islamic world exhibited characteristics Bauer summarizes under the keywords "continuation of late antiquity," "resurgence of ideas from pre-Christian antiquity," "independent developments that anticipate achievements of the early modern period," "no 'barbarization,'" and "preservation and further development of the culture of antiquity" (pp. 74–75). Given this lack of a clear break with antiquity, it is not justified to apply the term "Middle Ages" to the Islamic world.

Having thus thoroughly deconstructed the concept of an "Islamic Middle Ages" in the first half of his book, Bauer uses the remainder to develop a viable alternative. He begins this undertaking in the third chapter, "Looking for the Complete Picture: From the Mediterranean to the Hindukush" (pp. 79–117), by discussing what effective concepts of periodization ought to do, namely, (1) be objective and unbiased, (2) be applicable to large areas, (3) reflect fundamental changes affecting all or at

least many spheres of life in broad strata of society, and (4) be based on permanent and irreversible historical changes. Building on insights from linguistic theory, Bauer then argues that, optimally, periodization should be based on what he calls "clusters of characteristics" (*Merkmalsbündel*). This means that when developing systems of periodization, scholars should not merely take their cues from changes in one or two areas, such as politics or religion, but instead identify times that are characterized by multiple transformations in numerous aspects of human life. On the basis of these theoretical considerations, Bauer goes on to deconstruct the notion of the rise of Islam in the seventh century as marking the beginning of a new period of history. The beginning of Islam neither brought with it an immediate, large-scale transformation of the religious and economic landscape nor resulted in a profoundly different political map of Europe and the Middle East. Rather, as Bauer points out, the late antique pre-Islamic political order was dominated by two emperors—a Western Roman one in southern and central Europe and an Eastern Roman one based in Constantinople—and the Sassanian Great King who ruled his Middle Eastern empire from his residence on the banks of the Tigris in what is today Iraq. Around the year 800, more than a century after the rise of Islam, the political map looked strikingly similar. There were again two Roman emperors and a ruler—now called caliph instead of Great King—who governed his Middle Eastern empire from his capital on the Tigris. Moreover, all three rulers personified the same type of political leadership, something Bauer, quoting Almut Höfert, calls "imperial monotheism." Only the disintegration of

the caliphal imperial monotheism during the tenth and eleventh centuries marked the beginning of a profoundly new period in the political history of the region. Bauer thus argues that the rise of Islam, rather than marking the end of late antiquity, resulted only in the beginning of a new phase of late antique history. Bauer calls this phase "Islamic late antiquity" and understands it as a transformative period for both the Islamic world and what is commonly called "early medieval" Europe. During this phase, both regions underwent gradual but very different processes of transformation of their late antique heritage, culminating in the start of a new period of history in the eleventh century. During this new period, the two regions again became much more similar in terms of their intellectual, economic, and cultural development than had been the case during the centuries of transformation. Building on these findings and the work of Garth Fowden, Bauer argues that instead of taking dates such as 476 or 635 CE as markers of the beginning of a new period, historians should understand the first millennium as one cohesive period of history.

Regarding Islamic cultural, literary, and intellectual history, Bauer contends that the time from the rise of Islam to the eleventh century should not be misrepresented as a Hegelian "golden age" in which Islamic societies "preserved" the antique cultural heritage that later enabled Europe to experience its Renaissance while the Islamic lands were caught in an inevitable process of cultural decline. Rather, the phase up to the eleventh century represents the formative period of Islamic intellectual culture, which then gave way to a long "classical" period until

the end of the fifteenth century. Because of the long-dominant paradigm of a general cultural decline that in part served colonial goals, a teleological worldview that saw modern Europe as the pinnacle of human history and evaluated other cultures on the basis of their contributions to European modernity, and a general scholarly fascination with the beginnings of historical processes, the intellectual and cultural output of this classical period remains very little studied. This holds true even though, when examining a certain field of intellectual history, modern-day scholars typically begin their explorations with some of the well-ordered and comprehensive works from the classical period rather than with the often highly innovative, but not yet fully developed scholarly products of the formative period. Nevertheless, the latter were long considered by modern-day scholars to be the more interesting and more relevant objects of study.

The first part of Bauer's fourth chapter, "Islamic Late Antiquity: The Formative Period of the Islamic Sciences" (pp. 119–148), takes up the topic of the importance of scholarly works from the classical period. It underlines the central place works authored in or around the eleventh century occupied in later Islamic scholarship by examining two works from the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively, that provide broad overviews of Islamic intellectual history: Kātib Čelebi's (d. 1657) *Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-l-funūn* and Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Shawkānī's (d. 1839) *Adab al-ṭalab wa-muntahā al-arab*. For each discipline of Islamic learning, Bauer identifies the works that receive a great deal of attention

from Kātib Čelebi and al-Shawkānī or that they recommend for study. He presents a list of more than twenty works that were of central importance for what he calls "the Islamic curriculum" (p. 121). The vast majority of these works were produced in or around the eleventh century, when most disciplines of Islamic learning had reached a level of maturity denoting the beginning of their postformative period. The status of these works as syntheses of earlier accomplishments and as the cornerstones of later developments within their respective disciplines demonstrates the pivotal significance of their time of production to the history of Islamic scholarship, as seen through the lens of two late representatives of this intellectual tradition who were steeped in its classical heritage.

The second part of the fourth chapter looks in detail at the changes the Islamic world experienced during the eleventh century. It pays special attention to the cultural, economic, political, and demographic situation in different regions of the Islamic world. Bauer points, among other things, to the period of crisis in greater Syria and Egypt during the eleventh century, which manifested itself in developments such as increased incursions by Bedouin groups and migrating nomads, famines, and deurbanization, which in turn likely had their underlying causes in adverse climate conditions. These developments went hand in hand with the end of Islamic imperial monotheism as represented by the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad as well as with the downfall of the Umayyads of al-Andalus and, slightly later, that of the Fatimids of Egypt. Because this time of crisis was of

only regional importance and lasted less than two hundred years, it did not result in a fundamental cultural discontinuity, although it nevertheless indicated the beginning of a new period.

The fifth and final chapter, "The Eleventh-Century Epochal Threshold: Conclusion and Outlook" (pp. 149–158), summarizes the main arguments and findings of the book, offers a brief discussion of their applicability to African history, and closes with reflections on the periodization of later Islamic history. Regarding the latter point, Bauer argues against the view that the early sixteenth century marks the beginning of a fundamentally new period. Instead, he proposes a periodization that treats the time from the eleventh to the second half of the eighteenth century as one single period of Islamic history, with the events at the beginning of the sixteenth century marking only the turn from the earlier to the later part of this period.

Altogether, Thomas Bauer's *Warum es kein islamisches Mittelalter gab* constitutes a remarkably broad, well-argued, clearly structured, and richly illustrated contribution to one of the most

fundamental debates of Islamic history. Building on the author's important earlier work on questions of periodization,[1] it offers a persuasive deconstruction of what Bauer shows to be the highly problematic notion of an "Islamic Middle Ages." Historians who continue to use this term will be hard-pressed to find convincing reasons for their terminological choice. Moreover, any future attempt to arrive at a meaningful periodization of Islamic history must take Bauer's conclusive arguments for the notion of an "Islamic late antiquity" into account.

In his book, Bauer does not simply return this notion of an "Islamic late antiquity," which had already figured prominently in the work of the late Thomas Sizgorich,[2] to the center of the debate about the proper understanding of early Islam. He also contributes to several important recent trends in the revision of traditional systems of periodization of Islamic history.[3] These trends include the deconstruction of the concept of "decline" as a useful category of historical inquiry,[4] the reevaluation of the early sixteenth century as a supposed watershed in Islamic history,[5] and the tendency no

---

1. See especially Th. Bauer, "In Search of 'Post-Classical Literature': A Review Article," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (2007): 137–167.

2. See, e.g., his "Narrative and Community in Islamic Late Antiquity," *Past & Present* 185, no. 1 (2004): 9–42.

3. For a useful overview of current systems of periodization of Islamic history and the debates about them, see F. Donner, "Periodization as a Tool of the Historian with Special Reference to Islamic History," *Der Islam* 91, no. 1 (2014): 20–36, especially 28–36; and with regard to early Islam in particular, A. Borrut, "Vanishing Syria: Periodization and Power in Early Islam," *Der Islam* 91, no. 1 (2014): 37–68.

4. See, e.g., S. von Hees, ed., *Inḥiṭāṭ—The Decline Paradigm: Its Influence and Persistence in the Writing of Arab Cultural History* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2017); S. Brentjes, "The Prison of Categories: 'Decline' and Its Company," in *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas*, ed. F. M. M. Opwis and D. Reisman, 131–156 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

5. See, e.g., S. Conermann and G. Şen, "Introduction: A Transitional Point of View," in *The Mamluk-Ottoman Transition: Continuity and Change in Egypt and Bilād al-Shām in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. S. Conermann and G. Şen, 13–32 (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2017), especially 13–20.

longer to regard dynastic changes alone as sufficient indicators of the beginnings of new periods.[6]

As is almost inevitable in a book of its breadth, *Warum es kein islamisches Mittelalter gab* includes a few elements specialists might find problematic. Statements such as "Egypt is ruled from the sixth [*sic*] century onward by Arabic-speaking Muslims" (p. 85) or the claim that al-Shawkānī's *Adab al-ṭalab wa-muntahā al-arab*, which was completed around 1807, belongs to the eighteenth century (p. 120) might best be explained as slips of the pen. The claim that it was "foreign" to the premodern Islamic world to treat converts to Islam with suspicion should be revised in light of Luke Yarbrough's recent work on Islamic anti-*dhimmī* discourses that also targeted converts.[7] Yet, of course, these minor points in no way diminish the value of the book as a whole. Possibly more serious is an unfortunate terminological choice that is particularly puzzling in a work that calls consistently for careful reflection on the potential pitfalls of our scholarly vocabulary: the term "Orient." This term, which appears prominently in the subtitle of Bauer's book, is no less problematic in German than it is in English and, ever since the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, brings to mind a bygone time of exoticizing literature about the "Oriental" other. Within the German-speaking context, in particular, recent calls by far-right political actors to defend the "Occident" against "Oriental" invaders make the term appear even more unfit for academic use. It should be pointed out, however, that in the main text of Bauer's book, which in more than one place engages critically and thoughtfully with Orientalist discourse, the term "Orient" is largely absent, appearing most often in quotations from other studies. Its prominent—and unexplained—appearance on the cover of the book is thus difficult to fathom. One is left to wonder whether its use reflects primarily the marketing strategy of the publisher rather than any terminological preferences of the author.

In the preface to *Warum es kein islamisches Mittelalter gab*, the author aptly describes his book as "moving between a hopefully not too polemical essayistic style and a hopefully not too dry specialized scholarship" (p. 8). To the present reviewer, Bauer's work clearly fulfills both hopes and constitutes one of the most important German-language books on Islamic history published in recent years. It is a work no historian of the Islamic world interested in questions of periodization can afford to ignore, and it will have a profound impact on one of the most fundamental debates of our field.

---

6. See, e.g., K. Hirschler and S. B. Savant, "Introduction: What Is in a Period? Arabic Historiography and Periodization," *Der Islam* 91, no. 1 (2014), 6–19, at 13–16.

7. L. Yarbrough, *Friends of the Emir: Non-Muslim State Officials in Premodern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

العصور الوسطى