Creating Arab Origins: Muslim Constructions of *al-Jāhiliyya* and Arab History

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Abstract

The pre-Islamic Arab is a ubiquitous character in classical Arabic literature, but to date, there has been only scant scholarly analysis of his portrayal. In contrast to the dynamic discussions of contemporary Arab identity, the pre-Islamic and early Islamic-era Arabs are commonly treated as a straightforward and culturally homogeneous ethnos. But this simplified 'original Arab' archetype that conjures images of Arabian Bedouin has substantial shortcomings. There is almost no trace of 'Arabs' in the pre-Islamic historical record, and the Arab ethnos seemingly emerges out of nowhere to take centre-stage in Muslim-era Arabic literature. This thesis examines Arabness and Muslim narratives of pre-Islamic history with the dual aims of (a) better understanding Arab origins; and (b) probing the reasons why classical-era Muslims conceptualised Arab ethnic identity in the ways portrayed in their writings. It demonstrates the likelihood that the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula was in fact 'Arab-less', and that Islam catalysed the formation of Arab identity as it is familiar today. These Muslim notions of Arabness were then projected backwards in reconstructions of pre-Islamic history (*al-Jāhiliyya*) to retrospectively unify the pre-Islamic Arabians as all 'Arabs'. This thesis traces the complex history of Arabness from its stirrings in post-Muslim Conquest Iraq to the fourth/tenth century when urban Muslim scholars crafted the Arab-Bedouin archetype to accompany their reconstructions of *al-Jāhiliyya*. Over the first four Muslim centuries, Arabness and *al-Jāhiliyya* were developed in tandem, and this study offers an explanation for how we can interpret early classical-era narratives that invoke the pre-Islamic Arab.

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Introduction

Readers of classical Arabic literature are in the constant company of the pre-Islamic Arab. Since the second/eighth century beginnings of the Arabic literary tradition, Muslim writers from the urban centres of the Islamic world have woven memories of pre-Islamic Arabia into almost every conceivable genre of writing: poetry anthologists, classical litterateurs, historians, genealogists, grammarians, lexicographers, Qurʾānic exegetes, jurists, theologians and even collectors of Prophetic hadith each engaged with the veritable pan-cultural reconstruction of ancient Arab life. The appeal of the Arabian pre-Islamic era (*al-Jāhiliyya*) spread far beyond scholarly writing too: the voluminous hero cycles in popular Arabic literature recounting the fabulous adventures of pre-Islamic Arabs such as ʿAntara, Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan, Zīr Sālim and Ḥamzat al-Bahlawān evidence the Arabian *Jāhiliyya*'s allure across the entire gamut of pre-modern Muslim civilisation. In contrast to the pre-Islamic Arab's iconic status in Muslim culture, however, modern scholarship accords him curiously cursory attention.

Perhaps because modern scholars assume classical-era Muslims simply and systematically portrayed *al-Jāhiliyya* as the pagan antithesis of Islam;[1] perhaps because pre-Islamic Arabs are assumed to have been unsophisticated Bedouin whose nomadic wanderings in far-away desert Arabia produced no written history;[2] or perhaps because classical Arabic writing purports to present such a complete, comprehensive and consistent picture of pre-Islamic Bedouin life,[3] there seems to be little cause for and only scant benefit in close study of Arabic writings about pre-Islamic Arabs. But on the contrary, there is much to be gained from reappraising

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[1] Goldziher (1889-1890) 1:201-208; Khalidi (1994) 1-3; Hawting (1999) 2-5.

[2] Robinson (2003) 8-10 and Duri (1962) 46 accept that the past was important to pre-Islamic Arabians as a plastic oral tradition, but both consider this unlike written, empirical 'history'.

[3] The apparent explanatory power of the Bedouin archetype has been used to explain concepts such as the putative Arab character (Polk (1991)) and the original message of the Qurʾān (Izutsu (1966)).

what we think we know about pre-Islamic *Arabica*. From a historical perspective, critical scrutiny of the narratives of pre-Islamic Arab history will shed clearer light on the genesis of Islam. Since the Arabs are represented as Islam's original believers, the conquerors of the Middle East, and the creators of the Caliphate, the study of Arab origins takes us to the heart of Islam's historical origins. And from a literary perspective, a more sensitive appraisal of the imaging of the pre-Islamic Arab will unlock meanings embedded in those myriad references to Arabs and *al-Jāhiliyya* across classical Arabic writing that enable us to better appraise why Muslim cultural producers so consistently summoned memories of the pre-Islamic Arabs.

This thesis engages with the historical and literary questions of Arabness and early Muslim civilisation together to ask both 'who were the original Arabs' and 'why did Muslim writers describe those Arabs in the particular ways they did'? The two investigations are inseparable because (a) Muslim-era literature constitutes the vast majority of the now available sources for early Arab history; and (b) the 'Arab', as both a historical identity and as a literary figure is depicted as an archetype. We conceptualise the pre-Islamic Arab today as an Arabian Bedouin tribesman primarily because Muslim-era writings depict him in that guise, and we almost invariably speak of the historical pre-Islamic Arabs as a cohesive ethnicity with uniform cultural traits because many Muslim-era writings present the literary persona of pre-Islamic Arabness in homogenised, stereotyped images. Arabic literature seems to bequeath a tidy representation of the original Arab *Jāhiliyya*, and scholars today seek to fit that literary creation into modern reconstructions of the Late Antique Near East.

The classical, foundational model of Arab *Jāhiliyya*, is, however, riddled with difficulties. Modern anthropologists demonstrate that ethnicities are not monoliths: racial purities are myths and peoples across the world engage in a constant process

of redefining themselves. The very use of 'the Arab' to describe the populations of pre-Islamic Arabia and the early Islamic Near East is accordingly specious. By treating Arabness as a static phenomenon, we prevent ourselves from probing the actual process of Arab ethnogenesis and we uncritically adopt the common narrative that Arabs emerged from a pagan and 'barbarous' *Jāhiliyya*. Racial 'purities' and the ethnic origin 'history' of other world peoples have been comprehensively deconstructed, but 'the Arabs' of pre- and early Islam have hitherto escaped such analysis. My thesis begins a fundamental reappraisal of 'Arab history' by investigating the complexities of the supposed *Jāhiliyya* and Arabness archetypes in Muslim writings up to the fourth/tenth century.

I start with Robert Hoyland's call to investigate the extent to which Muslims "invented" the idea of the Arab.[4] But I must refine Hoyland's statement: did Muslims just create one, monolithic "idea" of Arabness? Hoyland proceeded from an assumption that Muslim writers embrace a unitary impression of *Jāhiliyya*,[5] but, as I argue in Chapter 1, this is itself a simplification. I reveal the panoply of classical Muslim impressions of *Jāhiliyya* which accordingly permitted various different impressions of the 'original', pre-Islamic Arab to be expressed in classical Arabic literature. Those varied early Muslim conceptions of Arabs and Arab genealogy are considered in Chapter 2, where, just as Macdonald observed in the case of the Classical and Late Antique world, "the term 'Arab' has proved to be the most difficult to define of any in the ancient Near East",[6] I reveal that classical Muslim writers experienced equal difficulties in trying to define Arabness themselves. Both *Jāhiliyya* and the Arab can be appreciated as complex, evolving ideas in classical Muslim consciousness, the development of which calls for sensitive analysis.

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[4] Hoyland (2001) 243-247.

[5] Hoyland (2001) 9.

[6] Macdonald (2009b) 304.

Chapters 3 and 4 trace Arab ethnogenesis afresh, arguing via the extant evidence and aided by anthropological theories of ethnic development that we must look to Muslim-era Iraq, not the pre-Islamic Arabian Desert to find the first stirrings of an ethnically 'Arab' consciousness, and Chapters 5 and 6 explore how Muslim Iraqi philologists and litterateurs forged the canonical literary persona of the primordial Arab.

Since the common paradigms about pre-Islamic Arabness point to a messy crash-landing, this thesis jettisons stereotypes: Arab must be differentiated from Arabian, *Jāhiliyya* dissociated from 'barbarism'/'pagandom'; Bedouin *aʿrābī* must be distinguished from Arab *ʿarabī*, and notions of authentic Arabness' desert roots discarded. Relieved from these encumbrances, I was inspired by the critical ethos in contemporary Islamic studies that revealed the extent to which 'traditional' narratives of early Islamic history gradually developed during the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, and I argue via diachronic analysis of extant early literature, that 'Arab history' had a similar experience, and only eventually did the archetypal depiction of the primordial Arabian/Bedouin Arab settle into place.

The fact that pre-Islamic *Arabica* entered almost every conceivable genre of Muslim-era literature[7] suggests that the reconstruction of Arab origins and creation of an Arab past was one of the major scholarly preoccupations of early Islam, and so obliges analysis of an expansive range of sources written between the late second/eighth and fourth/tenth centuries. Reconstructing the Muslim versions of Arabness involves pulling together unwieldy threads, and in so doing, I have had to stick out my neck into highly specialised fields: Qurʾānic exegesis, hadith

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[7] Makdisi (1990) 88-115 argued that "*Arabica*" – the study of Arabic poetry, language and philology – constituted a defined field of "*adab* humanism". Today, however, *adab* is more widely defined to embrace so many fields that it is almost redundant to call *adab* a field to itself (see Lapidus (1984), Allen (1998)). The vast body of pre-Islamic Arabian lore accords with the diffused notion of *adab*: knowledge of which every Muslim-era scholar ought to have been familiar.

scholarship, Arabic philology, historiography, poetry collection and genealogy. Though reading any one of these genres prompts myriad questions worthy of research in their own right, I felt that this thesis' subject matter demanded a broader approach. The Muslim creation of Arabs was a pan-cultural phenomenon with such profound influence on the manner in which Islamic history and the culture of the Near East to the present day are understood, that the genesis of the common Arab archetype needs to be addressed. The wide swathe of classical cultural producers who developed the canonical notions of Arabness were in dialogue with each other, and I accordingly had to harness various disciplines to bring this dialogue back to life and to reveal the complex path by which Arabs became an ethnicity and pre-Islamic history was reconstructed. I explore texts that are familiar to scholars, but I read them from the perspective of Arabness, which I do not believe has been rigorously pursued before.

To reconstruct such complex and vital aspects of Muslim culture, the need for integration and cross-reference is essential, but if it is the aim of the historian to edit, organise, present and describe materials that come from the past and to create explanations for past events, then every history bears probability of success or error. The answers that I propose cannot therefore promise absolute certainty, and further work shall hopefully expand the study of Arabness in Muslim imaginations; but it is certain that Arabs emerged into history and took their place as the Near East's dominant people. Akin to any ethnic formation, this must have occurred as a process, and over time different conceptions of Arabness must have arisen. I shall venture an answer that confirms a bizarre spectre of an Arab-less pre-Islamic Arabia, and in tracing the Muslim retrospective Arabisation of Arabian history, I reveal how the 'Arab' was turned into the central player in a complex mythology

which classical Muslim writers narrated to explain their history and their place in the world.

Chapter 1: The *Jāhiliyya* Paradigm

The phrase 'the first Arabs' naturally evokes images of Arabia, its deserts and pre-Islamic *al-Jāhiliyya*. In accordance with this conceptual universe of 'traditional Arabness', the top result of an Internet search for the word 'Arab' yields a photograph of a bescarved Emirati next to his camel: a twenty-first century image that seems to perfectly epitomise the anonymous Arabian's ancestors in the pre-Islamic desert 1,500 years ago.[8] Google's top image for 'Arabs' depicts three enrobed horsemen racing across the desert, another archaism and epitome of the lusty tribal raiding which histories of the Arabs published over the last century tell us was the hallmark of pre-Islamic Arab life.[9] Popular imagination and historiographical reconstruction concur that the Arabian *Jāhiliyya* was the Arabs' national prehistory, their primordial state before they embraced Islam and embarked on the seismic conquests of the early first/seventh century.

The neat, binary periodization of pre-Islamic/Islamic Arab history, however, is extremely stark, and modern scholars now query the empirical reliability of the elaborate depictions of Arab *Jāhiliyya* in Arabic literature since the third/ninth century. The Arabic accounts were written 150-300 years after the Muslim conquests, the ability of any written tradition to faithfully preserve orally

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[8] Google search of the word 'Arab' performed 2 August 2013.

[9] Google search, 2 August 2013. Carmichael identifies camelback nomadism as the origin of Arab ethnic identity (1967) 6-7. Hitti (1946) 23-29 and Hourani (1991) 10 divide original Arabs between Bedouin and settled, but Hourani focuses on the "dominant" Bedouin archetypes of "courage, hospitality, loyalty to family and pride of ancestry" and Hitti details primordial Arab tribal rivalry, raiding and honour. Some writers reconstruct Arab origins from a mix of primordial Bedouin *Jāhiliyya* stereotypes, while simultaneously identifying every historical inhabitant of Arabia as 'Arabs', thereby co-opting urban civilisations from Yemen to Palmyra into Arabness and arguing that Arabs were the first Semites (ʿĀqil (1969) 52-60, Sālim (1970) 411-445). It is noteworthy that this reconstruction appears in Arabic texts written during the height of politicised Arab nationalism. See also Nāfiʿ (1952).

transmitted memories of the past is suspect,[10] and it seems inevitable that Muslim-era writers would reconstruct *al-Jāhiliyya* under the influence of an overriding agenda to denounce it as an age of desert 'barbarism' and antithesis of Islam.[11] The suspicions about classical Arabic literary narratives appear confirmed when the literature is cross referenced with both archaeological finds from Arabia and writings about pre-Islamic Arabia in Babylonian, Greek, Roman and other pre-Islamic literatures. There is scant corroboration: classical Arabic literature does not seem to reflect what the early Arabs 'actually did', and specialists of ancient Arabian history now infrequently, if ever, cite from it.[12] Jan Retsö accepted that "classical Islamic historians ... knew of a history that stretched approximately one century before the emergence of the Prophet",[13] and Robert Hoyland demonstrated that Muslim-era writings about pre-Islamic Arabia contain some "nuggets" of historical fact about the 150 years before Islam,[14] but in the main, the vast and detailed accounts of primordial Bedouin Arab life in Arabic literature seem are considered inaccurate reconstructions.[15]

Whilst specialists of ancient *Arabian* history eschew the Arabic literary accounts of pre-Islamic Arabia, contemporary scholars of *Arab* history, however,

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[10] Shryock (1997) 16-17 identifies the incongruences between "speaking history one way and writing it ... in others".

[11] Consider Hawting's statement that Muslim writers "in the main ... portrayed [*al-Jāhiliyya*] as a state of corruption and immorality" (1999) 2.

[12] Hoyland (2001) 9-10, Retsö (1993) and Fisher (2013). Claude Cahen (1990) 212-213 notes that the most famous classical writer of Yemeni history, al-Ḥasan al-Hamdānī (d.c.334/945) "could at best read [pre-Islamic Yemeni inscriptions] imperfectly and mainly relied on the traditions of the Islamic era". Hence modern epigraphic analysis of pre-Islamic Yemeni inscriptions is deemed more historiographically 'accurate' than the study of Muslim-era narratives.

[13] Retsö (1993) 32.

[14] Hoyland (2009) 389-391.

[15] Crone's stringent critique of Muslim-era accounts of pre-Islamic Arabia in her 1987 *Meccan Trade* may be the most extreme example of this revisionist approach. While Sergeant critiqued it as "founded upon misinterpretations, misunderstanding of sources" (1990) 472, and Saḥḥāb (1992) sought a detailed refutation, the belief that Muslim accounts are "of dubious historical value" remains common (Berkey (2003) 40, 57-60).

ironically still embrace classical literary narratives of Arab origins. Notions of the Arab race, scholarly and otherwise, continue to conceptualise the original Arabs as an Arabian domiciled ethnos whose pre-Islamic history was a time of tribal warring, Bedouinism and material underdevelopment. The classical master narrative that the *Jāhiliyya* was a time of 'barbarism' is widely, and often unreservedly accepted,[16] and Western scholars envisage the emergence of Arabs from barbaric desert roots analogous to the supposedly barbarous woodland imagined to be the homeland of Europe's Germanic peoples.[17]

The notion that the 'true', 'authentic' first Arabs were Bedouin is so strong that even the archaeological finds which attest to developed pre-Islamic Arabian urban cultures in Yemen, Oman and Bahrain have not altered the conception of *Arab* origins: Western scholars declare those developed cultures as ethnically non-Arab, and they locate the 'original Arab heartland' specifically in the deserts of Arabia's northwest where relatively few urban centres have been found. On the other hand, Arabic writers in the twentieth century championed the archaeological finds in Arabia and the wider Fertile Crescent as evidence for the existence of the antiquity of the pre-Islamic 'Arab race'.[18] These Arab nationalists, however, cast a somewhat indiscriminate net of Arabness, and their inclusion of Yemenis,

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[16] The 'barbarism' epithet for *al-Jāhiliyya* proposed by Goldziher (1889-1890) 1:201-208) was repeated by Izutsu (1966) 28-30, Khalidi (1994) 1-3, Robinson (2003) 14, McCants (2011) 2. For an integrated 'barbarised' construction of Arab origins, see Cook (1986) 478-481. Hawting (1999) 2-5 doubts that *al-Jāhiliyya* was as 'barbarous' as we think, but he blames Muslim writers for uniformly barbarising it.

[17] Crone and Cook (1977) 139 expressly compare what they call Islam's emergence from "barbarian elements" to Late Antique European history. European historians since the seventeenth century constructed narratives of national origins from barbaric, heroic roots: Elizabethans described the wild first Britons and Picts (Bate and Thornton (2012) 217-225), Wagner famously told the German story as a heroic origin myth in *Der Ring*, and the glorification of Gauls is noted in French historiography (Pomian (1992)). Hoyland (2009) and Fisher (2013) directly equate Arab ethnic formation in the Near East with the process by which barbarians became frontier guards and thence European nations on the Rhine and Danube.

[18] Hitti (1947), ʿAlī (1968-1973) 1:33, Sālim (1970).

Palmyrenes and Nabataeans into the primeval Arab race is doubtful,[19] hence most current scholarly writing uses the word 'Arab' only to denote northwest Arabian nomads after the third-fourth centuries CE. While the historical sweep of Arab nationalism is too wide, the Western recourse to traditional Bedouin archetypes has the disadvantage of fixing conceptions of the 'original Arab' in a paradigmatically underdeveloped state, unable to escape from his desert/tribal stereotype encapsulated in the Google search results. Cementing this discourse, some even argue that the word 'Arab' etymologically connotes Bedouin lifestyle,[20] and the words Arab, Arabian and Bedouin appear interchangeably in many accounts of the earliest chapters of Arab history from pre-Islamic beginnings to the Umayyad Caliphate.[21]

A small number of pre-Islamic Arabian history specialists staunchly reject the association of 'Arab' and 'Bedouin',[22] but they are a minority in the wider fields of Islamic historiography and Arabic literature and culture.[23] It is ironic that

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[19] Macdonald (2009b) denies the Arabness of the Palmyrenes, and Hoyland (2001) 5,8,48 does the same for pre-Islamic Yemenis. In Western writing, Nabataeans are between quasi-Arabness (Retsö (1999)) and non-Arabness (Macdonald (2009b), (2009c)); Retsö 2012 adopts an open-ended Arabness and Nabataean-ness.

[20] Dousse (2012) 42-43 and Robin (2012) 48 cite the desert environment and nomadic lifestyle as "fundamental aspects of Arab identity".

[21] For the pervasive association of Arabness with Bedouin-ness see Nöldeke (1899), Caskel (1954) 38, von Grunebaum (1963) 12 "the Arab, by etymology and cultural convention was the Bedouin". See also Rodinson (1981) 15; Robin (2010) 85 "[Arab] was indicative of a way of life – that of nomad peoples living from stock breeding on the steppes and in the desert". The catalogue of the recently re-designed Arab World Institute in Paris opens with an assertion that "the genuine Arab 'ethnic' group" is from the Arabian Peninsula (Corm and Foissy (2012) 26).

[22] Macdonald (2001a) 2,20, (2009b) 312-313; Retsö (2002) 1-8; Lecker (2010) 153-154; Berkey (2003) 40-49, though he does not appear to distinguish between 'Arab' and 'Arabian'. Scholarly contention is evident in the catalogue of the Arab World Institute: Corm and Foissy (2012) 26 dislike the "standard perception that Arab = Bedouin", while Dousse's contribution to the same volume ((2012) 44) states "the notion of Arabness, of Arab identity does not have its origin in a specific territory, nor in a population, but in an environment, the desert and the nomadic lifestyle".

[23] The title of Farrin's 2011 monograph *Abundance from the Desert* on Arabic poetry reveals the underlying Bedouin-origins motif, and McCants' 2011 research on classical Muslim civilisation

classical Arabic writings can be so roundly critiqued as sources for details of pre-Islamic history on the one hand, but their master-narrative of the Arabs' desert origins remains so firmly accepted as the 'true' roots of Arabness on the other, yet this appears to be the situation in modern scholarship.[24] The survival of the stereotyped conception of Arab origins despite the stringent critique of the literary tradition which created it suggests that any study of the origins of Arabness confronts a powerful and well-established paradigm, and my re-appraisal of Muslim representations of *al-Jāhiliyya* and Arab origins must first tackle entrenched stereotypes.

1.1 The *Jāhiliyya* archetype: origins in Western scholarship

The persistence of the Arab-*Jāhiliyya* stereotype can be attributed to its long history in Western writing. The 'barbarous' desert *Jāhiliyya* idea emerged in European thought with the very first serious studies of Arabic and Islamic history written during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Enlightenment scholars, Bedwell, Pococke and later Ockley, Sale and Gibbon paid special attention to Arab origins and *al-Jāhiliyya* in order to narrate the emergence of the Caliphate from the rubble of the Roman Empire and explain Islam's rise. As a result, they unveiled to English speaking readers an image of *al-Jāhiliyya* as tribal, pagan, and barbaric in a fashion that so closely resonates with recent writings about pre-Islamic Arabia that one cannot help but sense the weight of the foundational Enlightenment-era tradition still guiding *Jāhiliyya* studies.[25] Consider Chapter 50 of

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addresses its supposed creation as an urban phenomenon that broke away from the Arabs' original Arabian "barbarism" (2).

[24] Though the scholars listed in Note 22 above urge departure from the Bedouin/Arab stereotype, I am unaware of scholarly consensus on an alternative articulation of pre-Islamic Arab identity.

[25] For an overview of early English scholarship of Arabic and Islamic studies, see Holt (1957). Holt (1957) 453-454 recounts the stereotyped *Jāhiliyya* of Arab tribes and paganism described in Pococke's *Specimen historiae Arabum*. Gibbon's lengthy discussion of *al-Jāhiliyya* in Chapter 50 of *The Decline and Fall* revealed the narrative to wider audiences.

Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* which encapsulates an array of pre-Islamic Arab and Arabian archetypes still current in modern thought:

> ... in the dreary waste of Arabia a boundless level of sand is intersected by sharp and naked mountains; and the face of the desert, without shade or shelter, is scorched by the direct and intense rays of a tropical sun (231) ... The same life is uniformly pursued by the roving tribes of the desert; and in the portrait of the modern *Bedoweens* we may trace the features of their ancestors, who, in the age of Moses or Mohammed, dwelt under similar tents, and conducted their horses, and camels, and sheep to the same springs and the same pastures (234) ... Of the time of ignorance which preceded Mohammed, seventeen hundred battles are recorded by tradition: hostility was embittered with the rancour of civil faction (243) ... in Arabia, as well as in Greece, the perfection of language outstripped the refinement of manners; and [Arabic] speech could diversify the fourscore names of honey, the two hundred of a serpent, the five hundred of a lion, the thousand of a sword, at a time when this copious dictionary was intrusted to the memory of an illiterate people (245).[26]

The tradition has shortcomings, however, particularly in terms of its sources. P.M. Holt demonstrated that the pioneering English Arabists reconstructed pre-Islamic history almost exclusively from Mamluk and Ottoman era writings,[27] and that

> [r]eaders and students of Islamic history in the seventeenth century were not greatly concerned with the critical studies of texts or the verification of sources. They wanted information in a compendious form on the historical background of Muslim civilization. Hence early [Arabic] historians were not particularly esteemed;

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[26] Gibbon (1776-1789) 5:231-245.

[27] Holt (1957) 450-451. The earliest histories then available date from the fourth/tenth century: al-Ṭabarī, al-Masʿūdī and *Naẓm al-Jawhar*, a world chronicle by Eutychius (Saʿīd ibn Biṭrīq (d.940), Patriarch of Alexandria.

in fact late and near-contemporary historians might be preferred since they brought the story down to recent times.[28]

The foundations of English encounters with *al-Jāhiliyya* thus emanate from relatively late Arabic historical texts, and since then, there has been surprisingly little interrogation of the *Jāhiliyya* idea in earlier texts from the first generations of the classical Arabic literary tradition (late second/eighth to fourth/tenth centuries). To challenge the stereotypes, I scrutinise early classical Arabic depictions of *al-Jāhiliyya* and the 'original Arab'. More fundamentally than the now doubted *details* of pre-Islamic Arabian history depicted in Arabic texts, the *whole edifice* of pre-Islamic Bedouin Arabness may have been an elaborate figment of a Muslim, urban, literary imagination. Before jumping to conclusions about Arabs in pre-Islamic Arabia, therefore, we need to radically reconsider what we think we know about the beginnings of Islamic history and Arab ethnic identity.

I am inspired by the results of recent scholarly enquiries into Arab origins. Modern studies have encountered a surprising absence of clear references to 'Arabs' in pre-Islamic historical and epigraphic records. Their searches are invariably guided by the archetypal assumptions that Arabs did exist in the pre-Islamic Arabian Desert, and they look for a cohesive community of poetic and linguistically unified Bedouin.[29] But because the Late Antique historical record does not reveal such a group, modern scholars are left with only educated guesses about when and

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[28] Holt (1957) 451.

[29] Von Grunebaum's classic 1963 essay on the Arab *Kulturnation* posits that Arabness constituted a "community more securely felt than named" (5) possessing "hazy geographical and human borders" (22) which produced an Arab identity via a shared way of life. Rodinson's observation that Arabness changes between "periods and locales" ((1981) 9) prompts a radical rethink of Arabness as an intellectual construct, though Rodinson does not pursue the lead and many contemporary scholars persist in pinpointing the 'moment' when 'Arabs' emerged as the *ethnos* epitomised in the classical literary 'Muslim tradition': a poetically-gifted community in northwest Arabia in the centuries before Islam (Hourani (1991) 12, Conrad (2000), Hoyland (2001) 241-244, Robin (2010) and Dousse (2012) 45). Montgomery's 2006 "The Empty Hijaz" is critical of nomad-Arab stereotyping but also focuses on the role of "Bedouinised" poetry in identifying the rise of the Arabs.

where the Arabs formed into an ethnos.[30] To resolve the conundrum, I suggest that the earliest Muslim-era writings obliterated memories of the actual inhabitants of pre-Islamic Arabia and reconstructed pre-Islamic history by populating it with Islamic-era notions of 'Arabs' and so established the familiar paradigm. Looking for pre-Islamic Arabs in the guise which the *Jāhiliyya* stereotypes condition us to expect them is anachronistic, and studying the classical creation of the Arab archetype can enlighten modern readings of pre-Islamic history and explain the difficulties encountered in trying to find any Arabs outside of Muslim-era texts.

Fresh study of *al-Jāhiliyya* also permits better understanding of the expansive range of classical Arabic writing that summoned the memory of the pre-Islamic past. If we look no further than the presumption that citations of *al-Jāhiliyya* were intended as references to 'barbarism' and/or the antithesis of Islam *qua* 'civilisation', we risk misinterpreting a wide array of discourses in classical Arabic writing. This is immediately apparent in the fact that the word *ḥaḍāra* (the modern Arabic term for 'civilisation') is not attested in classical literature.[31] Since classical Arabic writers did not have a word encapsulating our notions of 'civilisation', how legitimate is it to assume that they believed *al-Jāhiliyya* epitomised what we imagine as 'barbarism'? Is this dichotomy yet another relic of the foundational Enlightenment-era discourse of Carsten Niebuhr and Edward Gibbon still guiding

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[30] There is no consensus on the date of the 'first Arabs'. Some count all Arabians in the centuries before Islam as 'Arabs' (Shahid (1984) and (1995-2009), Bosworth (1983) 593-598 and Potts (2010) 74-76). Fisher (2011b) 249 rejects Shahid's methods, and others propose a northwest Arabian Bedouin origin: Conrad (2000), Robin (2010). Macdonald (2009a) revealed a plethora of diverse Arabs recorded in Greco-Roman writings, whereas Retsö (2003) gathers them together into a cohesive religious warrior sect a millennium older than Islam. This has not been adopted by other scholars (see Robin and Fisher, above), and Hoyland's 2009 study examined below places Arab ethnic formation on the Syrian/Byzantine frontier during the fourth to sixth centuries CE which Fisher (2013) endorses.

[31] The related *al-ḥāḍira* is defined in early dictionaries as 'settled life', but without the positive connotations of civilisation as 'developed life' (al-Khalīl *al-ʿAyn* 3:101). *Ḥaḍāra* itself appears in al-Zamakhsharī's fifth/eleventh century *Asās al-Balāgha* as a word for 'settled-ness' (130) and in Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān* as 'settling down' (4:197); both again lacking indication of 'civilisation'.

the hand of modern researchers? I argue that early texts about *al-Jāhiliyya* are more ambivalent and complex than the modern paradigm assumes, and we need to re-evaluate our readings of classical Arabic portrayals of Arab origins and the pre-Islamic past.

1.2 Alternative approaches to the pre-Islamic Arabs and *al-Jāhiliyya*: beyond 'barbarism'

Over the past twenty years, several scholars have noted the greater complexities of the classical Arabic reconstructions of *al-Jāhiliyya* and pre-Islamic Arab identity, but their approaches are very different and I am unaware that they have previously been brought into dialogue with each other. It is upon the foundation of a critical consideration of four theories that I ground what is hopefully a more comprehensive picture of *Jāhiliyya.*

1.2(a) Narratology and Jāhiliyya *studies*

Robert Hoyland's 2009 comparison of classical Arabic literary genealogy and *akhbār* about pre-Islamic Arabia with pre-Islamic epigraphic finds and Byzantine textual evidence demonstrates that a number of 'real' pre-Islamic names were recorded in Muslim-era literature. From the concordances, he concludes that Muslim narrators retained some memories of pre-Islamic times, and since their memories of events more than 150 years before the Prophet Muḥammad rapidly cease to be corroborated by external evidence, Hoyland identifies the late fifth century as the period when an Arab historical consciousness emerged and so too Arab ethnic identity. Hoyland is one of the first non-Arabic modern scholars to seriously engage with the Arabic textual record,[32] but his empirically-minded

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[32] Jawād ʿAlī (1968-1973) and Iḥsān ʿAbbās (1990) are well-researched surveys of the pre-Islamic material which construct empirical and encyclopaedic accounts of pre-Islamic history via a synthesis of Arabic literary and non-Arabic material. As argued herein, however, I advocate a more narratological approach to the Arabic texts.

approach seeks to isolate identifiable facts without investigating the contexts in which Muslim-era Arabic literature preserved the material. Given the dearth of inscriptional evidence from the fifth and sixth century CE Middle East, it is possible that the Muslim-era Arabic writings recalled even more 'real' historical information about pre-Islamic history than even Hoyland suggests, but the presence of pre-Islamic names, and the record of alliances and certain events in Muslim-era texts does not explain why those details were remembered or what Arabic authors meant to impart by preserving those memories. To interpret the origins of the Arabs without questioning the discourses that informed the particular material Muslim-era authors used to produce their narratives risks misusing the Arabic texts as sources for facts which they never intended to relate.

Hoyland proved that Muslim-era Arabic writers remembered details about pre-Islamic historical groups and individuals, but in this thesis, I adopt a more narratological approach to reading the Arabic sources which I believe is a necessary methodological departure given the nature of classical narratives about *al-Jāhiliyya*. History has traditionally been read as an empirical storehouse of information, but Hayden White's seminal contribution to historiography in his 1980 "The value of narrativity in the representation of reality" and his 1987 monograph *The Content of the Form* revealed the fundamental fictional nature of historical narratives. White argued that "real events do not offer themselves as stories",[33] and that historians, when *retelling* the past, construct narratives that do not record the empirical truth of past events, but rather reflect the need to portray events with "the coherence, integrity, fullness and closure of an imagined life that can only be imaginary".[34] The historian's craft is an act of the creative imagination that reconstructs the past through the lens of contemporary vision, converting a web of past names and

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[33] White (1980) 8.
[34] White (1980) 27.

events into a coherent and comprehensible story for present audiences. White teaches us not to reconstruct the past by extracting details from historical works, but to engage with the plot of a historical narrative as a whole and read the texts as carefully constructed stories.

White argued that his theory applies to all forms of history writing, but whatever the case may be on a global scale, Muslim-era writings about *al-Jāhiliyya* seem particularly apt for a White-inspired reading. Arabic texts do not report *al-Jāhiliyya* as a clinical, chronological historical epoch, we have no 'chronicles of *al-Jāhiliyya*',[35] and there are even very few purely 'historical' texts about *al-Jāhiliyya*; in fact, the first Arabic books labelled *Tārīkh* (history/dating) start their narratives from the Prophet Muḥammad's emigration and the Year 1 of the Muslim Hegira calendar.[36] Classical writers instead preserved the history of *al-Jāhiliyya* via *akhbār* (stories) and verses of poetry shared across classical writing, and the Muslim memory of *al-Jāhiliyya* thus comes to us in complex narratives recorded by storytellers (both *adab* litterateurs and 'historians').[37] Since Muslim readers interacted with *al-Jāhiliyya* through a myriad of stories about an ancient past replete with elaborate details of 'original Arab' life, we should approach the sources in the same manner. My readings accordingly adopt a narratological aspect which

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[35] White (1987) 17-21 does remind us that even bare names and dates in chronicles are in fact just as narratively 'fictional', though not as flowery as more discursive historical writing.

[36] See Ibn Khayyāṭ's (d.c.240/853) *al-Tārīkh* or *al-Tārīkh* of Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī (d.281/894).

[37] Given the similarities of the *akhbār* based fields, it should not be surprising that material about *al-Jāhiliyya* was widely shared and used for different discourses. In some cases, such as the story of the Yemeni invasion of Medina, the version in Ibn Hishām's Prophetic biography (1:19-26) has noteworthy differences from the version in the quintessential *adab* collection of poetry and *akhbār*, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (15:37-49), which are worthy of further study in themselves. In other cases, material was widely shared without substantial modification: see the tale of the four sons of Nizār (Arab ancestor figures) in al-Masʿūdī's 'historical' *Murūj al-dhahab* (§§1092-1099), al-Bakrī's 'geographical' *Masālik wa-l-mamālik* (1:§§211-212), Ibn al-Jawzī's 'historical' *al-Muntaẓam* (2:476-477), al-Damīrī's *al-Ḥayawān* (1:51-53) an *adab* text (which Van Gelder labels 'popular science' (2012) 297), al-Maydānī's *adab* collection of proverbs *Majmaʿ al-amthāl* (1:24-25), and even a version in popular storytelling (*Sīrat ʿAntara* 1:4-5).

interrogates the source texts in light of the discursive and historical contexts that influenced their creation. Instead of seeking to reconstruct 'what really happened' or determining the extent to which Muslim writers really remembered 'what really happened', my present purpose is to explore how and why Muslim writers reshaped memories of the past (or invented new 'memories') and so developed canonical ideas of the 'Arab' by retelling stories of *al-Jāhiliyya* and Arab origins.

Alan Jones invited the narratological reading of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry in a short analysis of Qurʾānic exegesis which he opens with a note that "the received text of the Qurʾān does not take us directly back to the time of Muḥammad", and continues with an off-hand, parenthetical addendum "(and one should not forget that there is a similar problem with pre-Islamic poetry: it exists only in an ʿAbbāsid guise)".[38] My method accepts Jones' invitation, but when searching for the "'ʿAbbāsid guise" – that lens through which pre-Islamic poetry and other memories were filtered before they were set into writing in the extant literature – I found further refinement is necessary. The Abbasid era spans more than five centuries, and writing about pre-Islamic Arabia occurred throughout that period: is there merely one, monolithic Abbasid guise, or will we need to be more specific when considering the discourses and agendas that coloured the recollection of pre-Islam in our extant sources? The results of three further studies of *al-Jāhiliyya* gives better shape to the approach the study will need to adopt.

1.2(b) Al-Jāhiliyya*: a first/seventh or second/eighth century topos?*

Fred Donner's 1998 *Narratives of Islamic Origins* probes the impetus behind the creation of Muslim narratives of *al-Jāhiliyya* and identifies the latter half of the first/seventh century as the period when Muslim interest in *al-Jāhiliyya* crystallised to bolster a 'national history' of the Arab people, especially as a foil to Persian pre-

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[38] Jones (1996) 57.

Islamic imperial history.[39] Donner liberates *al-Jāhiliyya* from the 'barbarism' stigma and suggests a different agenda that drove its reconstruction, but, due to the absence of texts from the first/seventh century, Donner was compelled to leave his proposal as a hypothesis. I return to Donner's theories in Chapter 4.2(c), but as a preliminary observation, it is noteworthy that he supposes the existence of a fairly certain and cohesive Arab community in the aftermath of the Muslim Conquests which marshalled memories of a shared *Jāhiliyya* to tell the story of its own origins. Whether or not this was the case will be considered more closely in the next chapters, but even if it was, the absence of any textual survivals from that period means that we cannot be sure that the conception of *al-Jāhiliyya* and Arabness as reconstructed in the first/seventh century actually resembled how the period and its inhabitants were imagined two-hundred years later when the earliest surviving Arabic texts were first written. Conceptions of the past can change over time, and there could be many *Jāhiliyya*s, meaning that Donner's 'unified Arab past' may have been obsolete and largely forgotten by later historians whose different contexts and agendas forced their hands into reconstructing new paradigms of *al-Jāhiliyya*. Hayden White is again instructive: "to understand historical actions, then, is to 'grasp together', as parts of wholes that are 'meaningful', the intentions motivating actions, the actions themselves and their consequences as reflected in social and cultural context".[40] White renders historical narrative a "symbolic discourse" that constructs a plot by which the past leads to the present,[41] and hence the *context* of writing history and the written historical *text* become impossible to neatly segregate: [42] as the situations of narrators/historians change, so will their

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[39] Donner (1998) 197.

[40] White (1987) 50.

[41] White (1987) 52.

[42] White (1987) 186.

imagination of the past and the connections they imagine link the past and present. Lowenthal's 1985 *The Past is a Foreign Country* gives a concrete example:

> we are bound to see the Second World War differently in 1985 than in 1950, not merely because masses of new evidence have come to light, but also because the years have unfolded further consequences – the Cold War, the United Nations, the revival of German and Japanese economies.[43]

Demonstrating the arrays of evidential, social, intellectual, political and economic factors that mould the remembrances of the past, Lowenthal epitomises history as "more than the past",[44] and *al-Jāhiliyya* – a momentous period of history in Muslim eyes – was bound to be remembered in various guises as the Muslim community developed over its first four centuries.

A second nuanced study that argues for an alternate *Jāhiliyya* is Rina Drory's 1996 "The Abbasid Construction of the Jahiliyya: Cultural Authority in the Making". Like Jones' "ʿAbbāsid guise", Drory posits that the idea of *al-Jāhiliyya* formed in the second/eighth century from nostalgic remembrances of the desert in conjunction with a desire to create an "institutionalised conception" of the Arab in the urban courts of early Abbasid Iraq.[45] She adduces a schematic model to retrace the construction of the stereotype of pre-Islamic history whereby three successive generations of cultural producers changed the portrayal of *al-Jāhiliyya* as stories about pre-Islamic Arabia were shared between poets, then urban poetry narrators and finally urban anthologists in early Abbasid Iraq. Drory argued that the anthologists, in order to "succeed in the royal court by tendering some body of knowledge or other, especially the Arab-Islamic", "fabricat[ed] Arab-Islamic

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[43] Lowenthal (1985) 217.
[44] Lowenthal (1985) 217.
[45] Drory (1996) 34.

learning" and "invented" *al-Jāhiliyya*.[46] Her article was the first to investigate the mechanics of how Islamic-era writers recast pre-Islamic history into the *Jāhiliyya* stereotype, but her arguments were sadly not further developed before her death in 2000.

By introducing nostalgia, the "invention" of *al-Jāhiliyya*, and by positing that the 'original Bedouin Arab' idea was the product of an urban, Iraqi imagination, Drory offers a fresh angle to understand the Muslim reconstruction of the pre-Islamic past. As opposed to politics of national identity and the inter-ethnic conflict of Donner's interpretation of the first/seventh century milieu, Drory makes *al-Jāhiliyya* the product of creative, literary activity of the second/eighth. But like Donner, Drory's thesis relies on anecdotes about the second/eighth century preserved predominantly in texts written in the fourth/tenth. She admitted this drawback,[47] but her article did not have the scope to address the ramifications of the possibility that the later texts upon which she relied may have unfaithfully remembered the conditions of the second/eighth which she sought to recover. Drory's ideas about the reconstruction of *al-Jāhiliyya* could thus be read as the product of her own reconstruction of second/eighth century Iraq from fourth/tenth century sources, and readers of her insightful thesis (which I revisit in Chapter 4.2(d)) are left wondering, once again, about the extent to which the *Jāhiliyya* imagined in the second/eighth century resembled the way *al-Jāhiliyya* was finally recorded in the earliest surviving sources of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. The 'early Abbasid guise(s)' need not necessarily have resembled the 'mid Abbasid guise(s)', let alone the 'late Abbasid guise(s)' within which the memories of pre-Islamic Arabia were presented.

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[46] Drory (1996) 43.
[47] Drory (1996) 36.

1.2(c) Al-Jāhiliyya *between heroic prehistory and world-chronology*

Another important modern approach to *al-Jāhiliyya* appears in Stetkevych's analysis of the era as a *topos* in Arabic poetry. She proposes that there were two, paradoxically divergent *Jāhiliyyas* in classical Arabic writing: one was a timeless heroic age depicted in pre-Islamic poetry, while the other was a chronological progression of human history towards the Prophet Muḥammad and the Caliphate in Arabic historiography. Stetkevych argues that the two narratives should be separated into parallel, isolated streams: "the theological pre-Muḥammadan age appears to be simultaneous with the heroic Jāhiliyya age, but within ʿAbbasid culture the two are never integrated nor do they affect one another".[48] She accordingly speaks of a "heroic tradition" of pre-Islamic Arabian lore transmitted by poets and the "theological tradition" maintained by scholars of the Qurʾān and hadith,[49] and carves *Jāhiliyya* studies in twain to explain how Muslims could appreciate 'pagan' pre-Islamic poetry without treading on sensitive theological toes. But pre-Islamic "heroic" and "theological" stories pervaded a vast swathe of Arabic writing, and classical Arabic historians and theologians were more interested in pre-Islamic Arab history, even its poetry, than Stetkevych proposed.[50]

Stetkevych's paper is an important reminder that the study of *al-Jāhiliyya* extends beyond traditional sources of history/*akhbār*/genealogy, and that a much wider swathe of literature must be considered to reveal the full extent of the

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[48] Stetkevych (1979) 51.

[49] Stetkevych (1979) 51.

[50] Trimingham commented that Muslim-era interest in the pre-Islamic *Ayyām* 'Battle Days' of the Arabs, especially those of Ghassān and Lakhm were "handed down simply because they flourished during the century preceding the Muslim era and served to bolster Arab pride and to elucidate aspects of early Muslim tradition" ((1979) 178), but interest in the *Ayyām* was likely more than merely philological or pro-Arabist: Retsö proposed poetry's entertainment value that appealed to a wide audience (1993) 34-35 which is also Montgomery's view (1997) 18(n). I have argued (2013a) that the *Ayyām* story-telling tradition even influenced early Muslim historiography, and that the separation of 'historical' *akhbār* from 'literary' *akhbār* into distinct 'genres' is unhelpful. *Jāhiliyya* memories were widely disseminated and enjoyed.

Abbasid era's plurality of notions concerning the pre-Islamic past, but, moving a step further, I propose that we must break down the well-established paradigm that Muslim historians/theologians have only expressed one impression about *al-Jāhiliyya* and pre-Islamic Arabs. Each modern theory about *al-Jāhiliyya*, though offering very different interpretations, can be correct if we understand that *al-Jāhiliyya* and the notion of 'original Arabness' were products of an on-going, organic process by which the meaning of the pre-Islamic past and the significations of Arabness were interpreted and reinterpreted by different scholars over time. First/seventh century politically motivated cultural producers, second/eighth century courtly poetry narrators and modern-era Islamicist polemicists such as Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and Sayyid Quṭb's *Maʿālim fī-l-ṭarīq* have each tried to 'own' the *Jāhiliyya* idea for their own purposes, and the key to approaching *al-Jāhiliyya* and the paradigm of the 'original Arab' is to read both as intellectual constructs with their own history. The first step towards learning how to read classical Arabic texts about *al-Jāhiliyya* and Arabness therefore begins with tracing the history of the *Jāhiliyya* idea itself.

1.3 *Al-Jāhiliyya*: development of the modern paradigm

1.3(a) al-Jāhiliyya*: its earliest citation and modern dictionary definitions*

The concept of *al-Jāhiliyya* can be traced to the Qurʾān's four citations of the word (3:154, 5:50, 33:33, 48:26).[51] Contrary to *al-Jāhiliyya*'s now paradigmatic connotation of the 'Age of Ignorance/Age of Barbarism",[52] modern scholars demonstrated that its Qurʾānic citation is suggestive of a state of being rather than a

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[51] *Pace* Horovitz, who suggested *Jāhiliyya* derives from the Greek *agnoia* found in Christian writings connoting "times of ignorance", *e.g.* Acts 17:30 (discussed in Rosenthal (1970) 34 and Hawting (1999) 99). This is brilliant detective work, but the seeming congruence may be a coincidence.

[52] 'Al-Jāhiliyya' has received various English renderings: 'Age of Ignorance' (Rosenthal (1970) 33), 'Age of Barbarism' (Goldziher (1889-1890) 1:202; Peters (1994) 21,36,39,40; Izutsu (1966) 27-28), 'impetuous passion" (Hoyland (2001) 9), and even 'Age of Obstinate Impetuosity' (Robinson (2003) 14).

precise period of time.[53] The Qurʾān invokes *al-Jāhiliyya* to convey the disquiet and ignorance of non-believers generally, and contrasts it with the repose of those believers who are aware of God. The modern Arabic dictionary, *Qāmūs al-maʿānī*, on the other hand, defines *al-Jāhiliyya* as "the ignorance [*jahāla*] and misguidedness [*ḍalāla*] of the Arabs before Islam".[54] This definition has three salient differences from the Qurʾānic connotations: the *Qāmūs*'s *Jāhiliyya* is (i) a period of history, the 'pre-Islamic era'; (ii) associated with Arabs; and (iii) synonymous with an Arabian anarchical community with certain ignorant and misguided characteristics.

Whereas the Qurʾān's *Jāhiliyya* is a moral state of being, the dictionary definition is a historical colligatory concept – a high order concept that simplifies a series of events into one intelligible whole. It takes the centuries of Arabian history before Muḥammad's prophethood and enforces a unity between them, bundling all of that time into one 'idea'. This *al-Jāhiliyya* colligatory creates an era of history resonating with the 'Dark Ages' or 'Middle Ages', the negative colligatory concepts *par excellence* in European historiography. But since the Qurʾān's first recorded citations of *al-Jāhiliyya* do not evidence a temporal/historical aspect, those qualities must have been acquired during the Islamic period. My investigation of the word's development begins with dating the point when *al-Jāhiliyya* was marshalled as a historical label.

1.3(b) Al-Jāhiliyya*: from a state to an era*

Jāhiliyya, in an indefinite form, is attested in Prophetic hadith. We read, for instance that Abū Dharr, a companion of Muḥammad, reportedly insulted the mother of another Muslim during an argument, and was upbraided by Muḥammad

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[53] Izutsu (1966) 29, Shepard (2001) 37.

[54] www.almaany.com "*Jāhiliyya*". See also *al-Munjid* 108 which defines *Jāhiliyya* as either the "state of *jahl*" or, similar to *Qāmūs al-maʿānī*, "the idolatry in the land of the Arabs before Islam".

who noted: "you are man in whom there is *jāhiliyya*".[55] Muḥammad also is reported to have described the Quraysh tribe as having "only recently adopted *jāhiliyya*".[56] This hadith cites *jāhiliyya* as a fluid state of being which could be adopted and presumably discarded. The conception that the Quraysh adopted *jāhiliyya* "recently" also implies that in an earlier era, they were free from *jahl*, a stark contrast to the modern perception that Arabians were endemically tarred with *jāhiliyya* for all time before Islam.

Hadith collections do also contain references to *jāhiliyya* connoting "time before Islam". For instance, the third Caliph ʿUthmān is reported to have said that he did not commit adultery, either in "*Jāhiliyya* [indefinite] or in Islam",[57] and Muḥammad himself is recorded observing a shooting star with his companions and asking them "what sign would you draw from this in *al-Jāhiliyya*?"[58] Given the well-rehearsed arguments over the authenticity of the hadith, it is difficult to prove that Muḥammad himself used *al-Jāhiliyya* in this way, but it seems that a temporal aspect could have attached to the concept relatively early.

Early Muslims could have employed *al-Jāhiliyya* as a label for time on the basis of a Qurʾānic precedent. Verse 33:33 mentions a time called "*al-Jāhiliyya al-ūlā*" in an admonition directed at women's modesty: "Stay in your homes and do not make a display of yourselves in the manner of the first/ancient *Jāhiliyya*". This *Jāhiliyya* is not quite akin to the modern idea, since the adjective "*al-ūlā*" – ostensibly translatable as "the first", though perhaps better understood as "ancient" (given

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[55] Al-Bukhārī *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Īmān*:22.

[56] Al-Nasāʾī *Sunan*, *al-Sahw*:99. See also al-Tirmidhī *Jāmiʿ*, *Manāqib*:65.

[57] Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ*, *al-Fitan*:1. It is possible that even this express contrast of *Jāhiliyya* and *Islām* is not temporal, but rather reflective of ʿUthmān's state; their indefinite rendering differs from the definite *al-Jāhiliyya*/*al-Islām* in later classical writing where the terms unambiguously denote eras.

[58] Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ*, *Tafsīr*:34.3.

the other citations of *ūlā* in the Qurʾān)[59] – gives it an archaic aspect of a past era more distant than the time immediately preceding Muḥammad's emigration from Mecca.[60] But while it may not refer to the same period now associated with *al-Jāhiliyya*, Qurʾān 33:33 does demonstrate the word's ability to conjure a 'time of *jahl*', *i.e.* when a state of ignorance and/or passion prevailed.

It is plausible, therefore, that early converts used *Jāhiliyya* to describe the ways of non-Muslims in general, and, by extension, their own behaviour before they converted. As such, they could equate the period of time before their conversions as a time of their *jahl*, *i.e.* their own *Jāhiliyya*. By the second and third generations of the Muslim community, when individual recollections of pre-converted life grew dim, *al-Jāhiliyya* would no longer practically connote individualised pre-Islamic pasts, but instead could become a communal byword for *the* pre-Islamic past: time before Muslim society existed.

Al-Jāhiliyya also connotes a more general "non-Islamic time" in early classical writings with present and future connotations. One hadith narrated by al-Tirmidhī reports Muḥammad expressing *Jāhiliyya* as contemporary with Islam in the statement "there is no prophethood [*nubuwwa*] without *jāhiliyya* in its midst [*bayna yadayhā*]".[61] And Nuʿaym ibn Ḥammād al-Khuzāʿī's (d.229/844) *Kitāb al-Fitan*, an early eschatological text containing thousands of anecdotes predicting the decline of order and the end of the world, refers to a future *Jāhiliyya* (a period preceding

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[59] Translating "*al-ūlā*" as "first" does not suit its Qurʾānic citations, *e.g.* the Qurʾān employs "*al-ūlā*" to describe the people of ʿĀd, a legendary Arabian kingdom depicted an example of un-believers. Classical commentators interpreted the Qurʾānic phrase "ʿĀd al-ūlā" (Q53:50) as the "first ʿĀd", and thus assumed that there must have been a "second" ʿĀd for whom they hunted in the genealogies with unconvincing results (Al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr* 17:102). *Ūlā* should be rendered "ancient", like Q20:51 and 42:28 describe "ancient peoples" (*al-qurūn al-ūlā*) and Q20:132 and 87:18 "ancient texts of revelation" (*al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*).

[60] Rosenthal (1970) 34 reached the same interpretation via different reasoning.

[61] Al-Tirmidhī *Jāmiʿ*, *Tafsīr*:22:1.

Judgement Day),[62] which he describes with traits of both ignorance and furious passion.[63]

The temporal aspects which *al-Jāhiliyya* acquired in the first Islamic centuries thus have a common idea of godlessness contrasting Islam, but *Jāhilī* time could point in various directions, from a pre-Islamic past to an apocalyptic future. *Al-Jāhiliyya* as a period accordingly elicits at least four sets of questions concerning its attributes in early Arabic writing.

i) Did audiences interpret every *Jāhiliyya* to be the same, or did they ascribe different characteristics to future and past "*Jāhiliyyas*"?

ii) In the case of the pre-Islamic *Jāhiliyya*, did it represent all time before Muḥammad's emigration or just some of the time, and on what basis was it delineated?[64]

iii) Did the pre-Islamic *Jāhiliyya* apply to the whole world before Muḥammad, or just Arabia?

iv) When encountering the word "*al-Jāhiliyya*" as a reference to the past, did classical audiences conjure conceptions of a certain way of life? And if so, did these mirror the 'Arab barbarism' of the modern *Jāhiliyya* stereotype?

The remainder of this chapter addresses these questions by starting with the succession of definitions of *al-Jāhiliyya* in classical dictionaries written between the late second/eighth to the seventh/thirteenth centuries which helpfully provide

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[62] Al-Khuzāʿī *al-Fitan* 67.

[63] Al-Khuzāʿī describes it as a time of ignorance when "ignoramuses [*juhhāl*] will be many and the knowledgeable people/scholars [*ʿulamāʾ*] will be few" (*al-Fitan* 21), and a time of fury when "*jahl* and *haraj* will descend upon you" (*haraj* is explained in the same passage as "killing") (*al-Fitan* 20).

[64] Writers commonly leave *al-Jāhiliyya*'s temporal imprecision unproblematized. *E.g.* Hitti (1947*)* 87 notes it could be all time "from 'the creation of Adam'", or the century preceding Muḥammad. Al-Jāḥiẓ considered pre-Islamic Arab poetry (a quintessential marker of pre-Islamic Arab times, which he did not specifically call *al-Jāhiliyya*) to the 150 to 200 years before Muḥammad (*al-Ḥayawān* 1:53).

datable evidence tracing a gradual shift in the word's connotations towards the now familiar stereotype.

1.4 *Al-Jāhiliyya* and Arabic lexicography

1.4(a) Before the fourth/tenth century

The first Arabic dictionary, al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad's *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* (late second/eighth to early third/ninth century)[65] defines *jahl* as the opposite of *ʿilm*, but does not explicitly connect *jahl* and the era of *al-Jāhiliyya* as an age of ignorance *per se*. It does cite the era with an intensive adjective – *al-Jāhiliyya al-Jahlāʾ* – but defines the word not in qualitative but in quantifiable, chronological terms: it is "the time of *al-Fatra*"[66] which, in turn, is defined as any period of time between two Prophets.[67] *Al-ʿAyn* neither equates *al-Jāhiliyya* with passion/barbarism, nor pre-Islamic Arab life, nor does it detail any corrupt traits for *al-Jāhiliyya* or *al-Fatra*: they are empirically identified as precise periods during which no prophets lived. *Al-ʿAyn*'s definition embodies a religious connotation similar to some citations of *jahl* in the Qurʾān where it is describes unbelief (*kufr*)[68] and the opposite to faith (*īmān*): "they would not believe unless Allah so willed. Howbeit, most of them are ignorant [*jāhilūn*]".[69]

Al-ʿAyn does not give precise dates for *al-Jāhiliyya*, but the definition of *al-Fatra*, provides for the possibility of many *jāhiliyya*s between each prophet since Adam. Ibn Qutayba (d.276/889) assists in narrowing the possible chronology: in his compendium of historical facts, *al-Maʿārif*, he defines *al-Fatra* as the period between

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[65] Al-Khalīl died in 175/791, but the text's current form may reflect alterations made by al-Khalīl's companion al-Layth ibn al-Muẓaffar (d.200/815-816) and scholars of subsequent generations. See Schoeler (2006) 142-163.

[66] Al-Khalīl *al-ʿAyn* 3:390.

[67] Al-Khalīl *al-ʿAyn* 8:115.

[68] Q11:27-29.

[69] Q6:111 (Pickthall's translation). See also Q6:35

Jesus and Muḥammad,[70] so implying that in at least some third/ninth century discourses *al-Jāhiliyya* connoted the six centuries before Muḥammad, though its geographical scope is open and does not only connote Arabia.

1.4(b) The fourth/tenth century

Al-Azharī's (d.370/980) dictionary *Tahdhīb al-lugha* provides more detailed commentary on *jahl* than *al-ʿAyn*, and makes several remarks stressing what it asserts to be *jahl*'s primary contrast with *ʿilm*, entailing both a lack of knowledge and *khibra* (experience/skill).[71] As for *al-Jāhiliyya* itself, al-Azharī only slightly expands the definition as "the time of *al-Fatra*, and no Islam [*wa-lā Islām*]".[72] The absence of Divine guidance on earth is emphasised.

The early dictionaries portray *al-Jāhiliyya* as a quantifiable era exterior to Islam. In stressing the opposition of *jahl* to *ʿilm*, they suggest that *al-Jāhiliyya* was interpreted as a period lacking knowledge/religious guidance, and they give no indication that *al-Jāhiliyya* connoted passionate disorder or that it was specific to Arabia as now defined in modern dictionaries. Outside of the two early dictionaries, citation of *al-Jāhiliyya* was undoubtedly broader – al-Ṭabarī's early fourth/tenth century *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* uses the word several times to refer to pre-Islamic Arab history, contrasting *Jāhiliyya* with Muḥammad's mission,[73] but he also refers to the history of Israel before Jesus as part of *al-Jāhiliyya*.[74] We have also seen that al-Khuzāʿī used *Jāhiliyya* to connote future time; so the term was variously used, but *al-ʿAyn* and *Tahdhīb* are consistent with each other and their equation of *al-Jāhiliyya* with *al-Fatra* must represent what early lexicographers perceived to be the primary signification of *al-Jāhiliyya.*

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[70] Ibn Qutayba *al-Maʿārif* 54.

[71] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 4:312-313.

[72] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 4:313.

[73] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:232, 2:308.

[74] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:590.

1.4(c) The sixth/twelfth century

Dictionaries from the sixth/twelfth century present a new style of definition. Zamakhsharī's (d.537/1143) *Asās al-balāgha* simply calls *al-Jāhiliyya* "*al-qadīma*" – the "old times", and he makes no reference to *al-Fatra*.[75] Later in the same century, Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī's (d.573/1178) *Shams al-ʿulūm* defines *al-Jāhiliyya* without any temporal reference, citing instead Qurʾān 48:26's reference to the "rancour/zealotry of *al-Jāhiliyya*" (*ḥamiyyat al-Jāhiliyya*), and a curious hadith attributed to Muḥammad stating: "He who dies and has not performed the Hajj has died a *jāhiliyya* death [*mīta jāhiliyya*]".[76]

The differences between the sixth/twelfth century definitions and those of previous centuries are subtle but significant. Contrasting the earlier dictionaries' association of *al-Jāhiliyya* with *al-Fatra*, al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ḥimyarī refrain from quantifiable chronology: the "old days" of al-Zamakhsharī, imply *al-Jāhiliyya* is simply "the past", and not a specific period. Al-Ḥimyarī is also the first lexicographer to define *al-Jāhiliyya* not in quantitative, but qualitative terms evocative of passion and antagonism to Islam. In this respect, al-Ḥimyarī's hadith is particularly notable. I have not found it in hadith compilations, but a very similar statement is recorded in an earlier collection but without reference to "*al-Jāhiliyya*": the earlier version reads "he who has not made the Hajj ... might as well have died a Jew or a Christian".[77] Both versions chastise those who do not make the intention of Hajj, casting them in a reprobate state outside of the Muslim community, and the hadith thus has an old pedigree, but al-Ḥimyarī reflects a telling semantic change by replacing the "Jew/Christian" with "*Jāhiliyya*", suggesting that by his time, the term *Jāhiliyya* had become the more appropriate epithet for "reprobate non-Islam". This

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[75] Al-Zamakhsharī *Asās* 107.

[76] Al-Ḥimyarī *Shams* 2:1199.

[77] Ibn Abī Shayba *al-Muṣannaf* 8:458-459.

notion is supported by al-Ḥimyarī's inclusion of Qurʾān 43:26's "zealotry" which, together with the hadith draw novel attention to *al-Jāhiliyya*'s connotations of both passion and un-Islamic behaviour.

On their own, these two definitions may seem only a slight variation to the earlier dictionaries, but the seventh/thirteenth century *Lisān al-ʿarab* shows that the sixth/twelfth century dictionaries point to a changing conceptualization of *al-Jāhiliyya*.

1.4(d) The seventh/thirteenth century

Ibn Manẓūr's (d.711/1311) *Lisān al-ʿarab* repeats al-Azharī's earlier definition that "*al-Jāhiliyya* was the time of *al-Fatra* and no Islam" which is to be expected since Ibn Manẓūr copied almost all the *Tahdhīb al-lugha* and then expanded upon it. Ibn Manẓūr's expanded definition is instructive:

> [*al-Jāhiliyya*] is the condition of the Arabs before Islam, consisting of an ignorance of God Almighty and the religious laws, and [a time] of boasting about genealogy, arrogance, despotism and the like.[78]

Ibn Manẓūr's definition departs from equating *al-Jāhiliyya* with *al-Fatra*, and suggests a more generalised time "before Islam" without a specific beginning, akin to al-Zamakhsharī's "old times". Ibn Manẓūr adds the additional territorial connection to Arabia which marks the first time a dictionary expressly links *al-Jāhiliyya* with pre-Islamic Arabs and specific habits of their community. His definition turns *al-Jāhiliyya* away from a precise period of years, and by focusing on the activities of the Arabs, he makes the era synonymous with its inhabitants' undesirable characteristics. Ibn Manẓūr's *al-Jāhiliyya* is thus not about when, but about how the Arabs lived and, as such, it is the first definition in the classical

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[78] Ibn Manẓūr *Lisān* 11:130.

dictionaries that wholly corresponds to the colligatory concept of *al-Jāhiliyya* expressed in dictionaries today.

Scholars have noted that the classical dictionaries intended to explain words encountered in the Qurʾān, hadith and old poetry, and were less concerned with vernacular usage, perhaps under the belief that Arabic words did not change their meaning.[79] While the lexicographers may indeed have been trying to describe what they believed was the 'original' meaning of *al-Jāhiliyya*, we have seen that the way in which they expressed it changed over time. The shift in the emphasis of *al-Jāhiliyya*'s interpretation from a specific chronological period lacking religious guidance to a more generic idea of an Arab past suggests that by the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, the word '*al-Jāhiliyya*' had become more readily evocative of a negative stereotype about pre-Islamic Arab origins and lifestyle than it had previously been. As we shall see in the next section, the same shift appears in Qurʾān commentaries, which suggests that the changing interpretation of *al-Jāhiliyya* in the dictionaries reflected a wider trend in classical Arabic writing.

1.5 *Al-Jāhiliyya* in Qurʾān commentaries:

I select the exegetical tradition for analysis because successive generations of Qurʾān commentators investigated each of the Qurʾān's four citations of *al-Jāhiliyya*, permitting diachronic analysis comparable to the lexicons. Amidst the many Qurʾān commentaries (*tafsīr*), I select four well-known and extensive texts contemporary with the dictionaries considered above to facilitate comparison. The first commentary, also the earliest extant *tafsīr*, is attributed to Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d.150/767), which like al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad's dictionary *al-ʿAyn*, likely

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[79] Carter describes the dictionaries as "deliberate instruments of conservatism" (1990) 116. Weiss (1984) 99 comments on the classical scholarly debates and tendency (but not unanimous consensus) to view Arabic as an ancient, unchanging language. See also Weiss (1992) 129 for medieval philological theories on the unchanging meanings of Arabic words.

reflects additions into the mid third/ninth century. For the fourth/tenth century, I investigate al-Ṭabarī's (d.310/923) *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, perhaps the most famous *tafsīr* of the entire classical period.[80] For the sixth/twelfth century, corresponding to al-Zamakhsharī's and al-Ḥimyarī's dictionaries, I review al-Zamakhsharī's literary exegesis *al-Kashshāf*. And al-Qurṭubī's (d.671/1273) *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān* offers a text nearly contemporary with Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān*.

1.5(a) Muqātil ibn Sulaymān:

In his commentary on Qurʾān 5:50 and 33:33, Muqātil identifies *al-Jāhiliyya* as the time before Muḥammad's Prophetic mission (*al-mabʿath*).[81] Unlike the contemporary dictionary *al-ʿAyn*, Muqātil makes no reference to *al-Fatra* in *al-Jāhiliyya*'s chronological parameters, leaving *al-Jāhiliyya*'s scope open-ended, possibly connoting the whole sweep of history before Muḥammad. But closer reading of each of Muqātil's explanations reveals that he confines *al-Jāhiliyya*'s chronological window to the events around Muḥammad's lifetime, evocative of the hadith describing Quraysh's "recent" adoption of *al-Jāhiliyya*.[82] Both imply that *al-Jāhiliyya* is specific to events immediately preceding Muḥammad, and not an encapsulation of all pre-Muḥammadic time. Muqātil explains the *ḥamiyyat al-Jāhiliyya* (*al-Jāhiliyya*'s zealotry) in Qurʾān 48:26 as the attitude of those Meccan unbelievers (*kuffār*) who refused Muḥammad entry to Mecca during the pilgrimage in Year 6.[83] He ascribes Qurʾān 3:154's *ẓann al-Jāhiliyya* (suppositions of *al-Jāhiliyya*) to the erroneous opinion of a specific group of Meccans: the "ignorant (*juhhāl*) Meccan polytheists (*mushrikīn*): Abū Sufyān and his companions" who falsely alleged that Muḥammad had been killed at the Battle of Uḥud in Year 3.[84] Muqātil interprets the

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[80] Rippen "Tafsīr" *EI[2]* 10:86.

[81] Muqātil *Tafsīr* 1:483,2:488.

[82] See Note 56.

[83] Muqātil *Tafsīr* 4:76.

[84] Muqātil *Tafsīr* 1:308.

ḥukm al-Jāhiliyya in Qurʾān 5:50 as the iniquity (*jawr*) of the leaders (*ruʾūs*) of the Medinan Jews before Muḥammad's emigration.[85] Muqātil's conception of *Jāhiliyya* in the Qurʾān is thus closely tied to the actual opponents of Muḥammad and evocative of their state of rejecting Muḥammad's Prophetic mission. Muqātil does not use the Qurʾānic verses as a platform to speak about the pre-Islamic Arabs generally, nor does he indicate that he believed all pre-Islamic Arabs shared a common *jahl* or that the whole era was a time of fury and immorality. Muqātil's conception of *al-Jāhiliyya* represents an *ethic* of 'not-Islam' exhibited by specific historical persons, not an *ethnic* aspect of pre-Islamic Arabness.

1.5(b) Al-Ṭabarī

Al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* provides more detailed analysis of the chronology of *al-Jāhiliyya* in his explanation of Qurʾān 33:33's "*al-Jāhiliyya al-ūlā*". He notes that "the community of exegetes disagree" on its meaning, and cites various opinions that identify it as either the period between Jesus and Muḥammad, Adam and Noah, Noah and Idrīs or Adam and Jesus.[86] Al-Ṭabarī accepts all possibilities; he appears to prefer the time between Jesus and Muḥammad – but in every case, each of his temporal definitions mirrors the early dictionaries' equation of *al-Jāhiliyya* with *fatra* – an era between prophets.[87]

In terms of the qualitative connotations of *al-Jāhiliyya*, al-Ṭabarī maintains Muqātil's emphasis that it represents antagonism against the Prophet. He also identifies the Qurʾānic citations of *al-Jāhiliyya* with instances of tension between Muḥammad and his opponents as Muqātil did,[88] but he shifts the emphasis slightly. For instance, whereas Muqātil interpreted "*ẓann al-Jāhiliyya*" as belonging to "Abū

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[85] Muqātil *Tafsīr* 1:482-483.

[86] Al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr* 22:6-7.

[87] Al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr* 22:7.

[88] For Q2:154 and the battle of Uḥud, see al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr* 4:188-189; and for Q5:50 and the Jews of Medina, 6:371.

Sufyān and his companions", al-Ṭabarī expands the ambit to include the whole "community of polytheists" (*ahl al-shirk*).[89] And whereas Muqātil interpreted "*ḥukm al-Jāhiliyya*" to refer to the iniquitous judgments of Muḥammad's Jewish opponents in Medina, al-Ṭabarī extrapolates beyond the specific context of Muḥammad and the Jews and interprets the words as indicative of the types of judgments derived from "the worship of idols by the community of polytheists".[90] Lastly, whereas Muqātil restricts the *ḥamiyyat al-Jāhiliyya* to the Meccan Arabs who opposed Muḥammad's entry to Mecca, al-Ṭabarī describes it as "the morals of the unbelievers" (*akhlāq ahl al-kufr*).[91] This notion that *al-Jāhiliyya* can connote a generalised group of people – the *ahl* – distinguishes al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* from Muqātil's: al-Ṭabarī's interpretations of *al-Jāhiliyya* evoke not just a conception of time and the actions of specific individuals, but also the way of life of the non-Muslims, as well as a non-Muslim moral code. Thus while al-Ṭabarī's literal interpretation of *al-Jāhiliyya* reflects al-Azharī's dictionary definition of a non-Islamic time defined as a *fatra*, his equation of *al-Jāhiliyya* with non-Muslims in general goes further, interpreting the word as eliciting a generalised idea of non-Muslim idol worshiper. But unlike the modern *Jāhiliyya* stereotype, al-Ṭabarī does not interpret *Jāhiliyya* as something particular to the Arabs or as synonymous with an Arabian pre-Islamic anarchical community. A shift in that direction, however, is manifest in later exegesis.

1.5(c) Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Qurṭubī

Akin to the change of *al-Jāhiliyya*'s definitions in the dictionaries since the sixth/twelfth century, the later Qurʾān commentaries also depart from the earlier exegesis of *al-Jāhiliyya* and shift to more closely resemble modern *Jāhiliyya* ideas. Al-

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[89] Al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr* 4:190.
[90] Al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr* 6:371.
[91] Al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr* 26:135.

Zamakhsharī and al-Qurṭubī's commentaries, though separated by some 150 years are similar in their treatment of *al-Jāhiliyya*, and I consider them together.

A new feature compared with the two earlier exegetical texts is the appearance of the phrase *millat al-Jāhiliyya* (the religious community of *al-Jāhiliyya*),[92] and *ahl al-Jāhiliyya* (the people of *al-Jāhiliyya*)[93] in the commentary on Qurʾān 3:154. Both phrases imply that their authors associated *al-Jāhiliyya* with a single eponymous *Jāhilī* community. Whereas Muqātil equated *Jāhiliyya* with a precise group of Muḥammad's opponents and al-Ṭabarī considered it a trait of polytheists, al-Zamakhsharī and a-Qurṭubī render it a trait of a whole period of history, tarring the generations of people before Islam with *al-Jāhiliyya* en masse by virtue of the era in which they lived. The Qurʾānic verse makes no indication that *al-Jāhiliyya* is meant to be equivalent to a period of time and its population, and al-Qurṭubī seems to be aware of this, hence he goes to extra lengths to "prove" his interpretation by explaining that the word *ahl* (people) which engenders the interpretation of the *Jāhiliyya* colligatory concept is implied in Qurʾān 3:154 but elided (*maḥdhūf*)![94]

In terms of dating *al-Jāhiliyya*, the sixth/twelfth century al-Zamakhsharī offers two explanations. One follows the exegetical tradition of al-Ṭabarī that *al-Jāhiliyya* was a *fatra* period between prophets,[95] but al-Zamakhsharī's first explanation is that *al-Jāhiliyya* is simply "*al-qadīma*" – the "old days" identical to his dictionary definition.[96] Interpreting the same verse one hundred years later, al-Qurṭubī (like his contemporary Ibn Manẓūr's *Jāhiliyya*) makes no reference to *al-*

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[92] Al-Zamakhsharī *al-Kashshāf* 1:420.

[93] Al-Zamakhsharī *al-Kashshāf* 1:420, al-Qurṭubī *al-Jāmiʿ* 4:156.

[94] Al-Qurṭubī *al-Jāmiʿ* 4:156.

[95] He proposes it is between Adam and Noah, Noah and Idrīs, or, bizarrely, David and Solomon (al-Zamakhsharī *al-Kashshāf* 3:521).

[96] Al-Zamakhsharī *al-Kashshāf* 3:521. *C.f. al-Asās* 107.

Fatra, and follows al-Zamakhsharī's generic conception of *al-qadīma*, writing that "*al-Jāhiliyya* is applied to that period which was before Islam."[97] Citing the fact that pre-Islamic poets are called *jāhilī* and interpreting citations of *al-Jāhiliyya* in the hadith to mean pre-Islam, al-Qurṭubī reflects the current generalised notion that *al-Jāhiliyya* is simply the pre-Islamic past.

Having generalised all pre-Muḥammadic time as *al-Jāhiliyya*, al-Qurṭubī also generalises about the era's qualities, using each Qurʾānic citation of *al-Jāhiliyya* to comment on pre-Islamic way of life and stereotypes about the Arabs. None of his observations are expressly supported by the Qurʾān's text, neither are they adduced in earlier exegesis of which I am aware: al-Qurṭubī's glosses are imported from his own conception of the *Jāhiliyya* idea. He mentions the Arabs' "fanaticism" (ʿaṣabiyya) and the pre-Islamic Arabians' defence of their idols al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā as well as their disdain for worshipping God in the context of the Qurʾānic *ḥamiyyat al-Jāhiliyya*;[98] and he explains the Qurʾān's *ḥukm al-Jāhiliyya* as representative of the injustice of *al-Jāhiliyya* where the strong and rich were constantly favoured, forsaking the weak and poor.[99] He even mentions a reading of the Qurʾān's *ḥukm* as *ḥakam*, changing the interpretation from "judgment of *al-Jāhiliyya*" to "judges of *al-Jāhiliyya*" and thereby proposing that the verse refers to the priests (*kuhhān*) of pre-Islamic Arabia and their mysterious judgments.[100] Such a reading presupposes readers have a fixed conception of the general, paradigmatic habits of 'pre-Islamic judges', which like the *ahl al-Jāhiliyya* mentioned above, renders *Jāhiliyya* a property of people, not just time, and presumes a stereotyped cohesiveness to one 'judge type'. Interestingly, this reading, though attributed to early Qurʾān readers, is first

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[97] Al-Qurṭubī *al-Jāmiʿ* 14:117.
[98] Al-Qurṭubī *al-Jāmiʿ* 16:190.
[99] Al-Qurṭubī *al-Jāmiʿ* 6:139.
[100] Al-Qurṭubī *al-Jāmiʿ* 6:139-140.

cited in Ibn Khalawayh's *Mukhtaṣar* at the end of the fourth/tenth century (and is repeated by al-Zamakhsharī),[101] suggesting again the negative generalisations about pre-Islamic Arabia's fabric became more frequently cited from the fourth/tenth century and paradigmatically associated with *al-Jāhiliyya* by the sixth/twelfth.

As an example of a further negative stereotype at work, Qurʾān 33:33's reference to women prettifying themselves confused al-Qurṭubī who notes "the Arabs were [before Islam] primarily a people living in destitute (ḍank) and miserable (qashf) conditions".[102] Al-Qurṭubī was unable to explain how such poor Arabs had the material capacity to ornament themselves, and he reasoned that the verse must refer to "prior ages" (al-azmān al-sābiqa)![103] This comment is revealing: al-Qurṭubī portrays *al-Jāhiliyya* as a time/condition specific to the Arabs, and assumes *a priori* that their life was wretched. Whereas the original verse makes no express indication of any of this, and while previous commentators made no such assumptions either, al-Qurṭubī's interpretation reveals an impression of pre-Islamic Arabia that seemingly did not occur to earlier exegetes, but it does correspond the modern colligatory concept of the Arabian "Dark Age" of *al-Jāhiliyya.*

Al-Zamakhsharī similarly associates *al-Jāhiliyya* with negative impressions of the Arabs, explaining the period was one of "whim (hawā) and ignorance (jahl)",[104] and also explains Qurʾān 5:50's ḥukm al-Jāhiliyya via reference to legendary pre-Islamic judges, such as King Afʿā of Najrān whose judgments he considers inferior to Muḥammad's, the "seal of the Prophets".[105] Such references to characters and attributes of the pre-Islamic Arabs can be found across Arabic literature since the

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[101] For the history of the citations of this reading, see al-Khaṭīb (2002) 2:288.

[102] Al-Qurṭubī *al-Jāmiʿ* 14:117.

[103] Al-Qurṭubī *al-Jāmiʿ* 14:117.

[104] Al-Zamakhsharī *al-Kashshāf* 1:628. He specifically contrasts *jahl* with *ʿilm*, hence my translation of *jahl* as "ignorance".

[105] Al-Zamakhsharī *al-Kashshāf* 1:628-629.

third/ninth century, however, their absence in the earlier *tafsīr*s and their appearance in the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth century texts to gloss the word *al-Jāhiliyya* would suggest that they were becoming increasingly synonymous with associations of stereotyped Arabian life. Much like modern texts about *al-Jāhiliyya* commonly describe idol worship, baby-killing and the iniquitous judgments of tyrants as emblematic of the era, the later Qurʾān commentators, unlike earlier generations, endorsed a canonical impression of *al-Jāhiliyya* as an endemic anti-Islamic time and interpreted the word via stereotyped vices.

When read in conjunction with the lexicons, the *tafsīr*s reveal a similarly dated shift towards an interpretation of *al-Jāhiliyya* as the "bad old days" of pre-Islamic Arabia. The now axiomatic association of *al-Jāhiliyya* with reprehensible Arabian pagandom only gained currency among lexicographers and exegetes following the fourth/tenth century, while prior to that watershed, the word elicited less elaborate, less impassioned impressions. In the final section of this chapter, I turn back to the third/ninth century to explore how scholars in that period connected *al-Jāhiliyya* to their notions of the pre-Islamic Arabs. A review of well-known "*akhbārī*" texts shall shed more light on the early stages of the *Jāhiliyya* idea.

1.6 *Al-Jāhiliyya* in third/ninth century discourses on Arabness

In tandem with the common generalisation that Muslim scholars disparaged *al-Jāhiliyya* in their writings, it has also been assumed that pious Muslims shunned even the memory of *al-Jāhiliyya* – as noted by one Western historian of pre-Islamic Arabia: "some early Muslim scholars would perform expiation after studying pre-Islamic poetry, just as medieval Christian monks might do penance after reading the classics".[106] Our analysis so far, however, has suggested that the negative stereotypes of *al-Jāhiliyya* were not reported by all early Arabic writers, and the

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[106] Hoyland (2001) 9. He does not cite the Arabic source from which such anecdotes were derived.

assumptions about Muslim disavowals of *al-Jāhiliyya* may not accurately reflect the era's status amongst Arabic writers before the fourth/tenth century.

The Muslim perception of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry itself gives little support to the idea of the inveterate 'wretchedness' of *al-Jāhiliyya*. The extant poetry is not a compendium of violence, baby-killing and despotism; it contains almost no information betraying inveterate paganism,[107] and pre-Islamic poets extoll values antithetical to *Jāhiliyya* 'barbarism'. They sing of honour, perseverance, generosity, martial prowess and even their good manners (*adab*)[108] and *ḥilm* – the supposed opposite of *jahl*. Consider, for example, the pre-Islamic Hudhalī poet Iyās ibn Sahm who described his ideal companion as:

> Mighty, generous, neither ignorant [*jahūl*] nor unsociable
>
> Neither frivolous in his speech nor headstrong;
>
> But of noble equanimity [*ḥilm*], whose generosity stands the test
>
> And whose liberality flows freely to those who seek it.[109]

Even more telling is the verse of the early Abbasid poet, Muḥammad ibn Munādhir (d.198/813)

> Relate to us some Islamic knowledge (*fiqh*) transmitted from our Prophet
>
> To nourish our hearts;
>
> Or relate the stories of our *Jāhiliyya*
>
> For they are wise and glorious.
>
> …

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[107] Hawting (1999) 30. Hawting cites Carl Brocklemann's "Allah und Die Gotzen, der Ursprung des islamischen Monotheismus" *Archiv fiir Religionswissenschaft* 21 (1922) 99-121: Brocklemann notes that references to the apparently monotheistic Allāh in pre-Islamic poetry far outnumber citations of pagan idols; though surveying references to the Hajj in pre-Islamic poetry, I found that even mention of this supposedly key pre-Islamic practice is absent in the well-known classical poetry collections (Webb (2012b) 13, Note 3). Pre-Islamic poetry seems curiously 'non-sectarian'.

[108] See Abū Tammām's *al-Ḥamāsa*'s section on *adab* in pre-Islamic and Islamic era poetry (al-Marzūqī *Sharḥ* 3:1115-1211).

[109] Al-Sukkarī *Sharḥ* 2:543.

> If you are ignorant of any of these
>
> Then you shall be a lesson to onlookers.[110]

Poetry lauding pre-Islamic ethics is repeated throughout Arabic *adab* writing of the third/ninth century and beyond, and Ibn Munādhir's verses demonstrate how knowledge of the pre-Islamic Arabs shared equal footing with Islamic-era rulings as a scholarly pastime. When analysing pre-Islamic poetry in light of the *Jāhiliyya* paradigm, however, scholars such as Goldziher and Izutsu rather curiously adopted a dismissive approach to the pre-Islamic poets' expressed gallantry: both scholars stressed that pre-Islamic *ḥilm* was of a lesser quality than Islamic *ḥilm* and that the praiseworthy traits of pre-Islamic Arabs, such as generosity, were motivated by boastfulness, not "true virtue".[111] It seems that by defining Islam as a "great work of moral reformation",[112] and by determining that the 'original' meaning of *al-Jāhiliyya* was passion and/or barbarism, Goldziher and Izutsu erected a conception of pre-Islamic times so rigid that they could not accept that pre-Islamic Arabs possessed 'true' forbearance and civility, and when faced with ostensibly 'civil' pre-Islamic poetry, they explained it away as a second-class form of refinement!

Stetkevych's observations regarding the heroic tenor in which pre-Islamic poetry was received by some Muslim audiences is a necessary corrective, but we recall that she accepted classical historians and theologians embraced a more negative impression of the era.[113] Analysis of 'historical' and 'theological' writings prior to the fourth/tenth century watershed in the development of the *Jāhiliyya* idea

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[110] Al-Nuwayrī *Nihāya* 3:268. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi *al-ʿIqd* 2:314 narrates the same poem, though relates "wonders [aʿājīb] al-Jāhiliyya", not "stories [aḥādīth] of al-Jāhiliyya". Yāqūt ascribes the same poem to Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Malik al-Zayyāt with "stories [aḥādīth] of al-Jāhiliyya" (*Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ* 1:61).

[111] Goldziher (1889-1890) 1:207; Izutsu (1966) 67.

[112] Izutsu (1966) 29.

[113] See Note 49.

towards barbarism reveals that Stetkevych's dichotomy does not hold for the earlier periods. Even the canonical collections of hadith contain positive impressions of memories from *al-Jāhiliyya*:

> [Jābir ibn Samra] said the Prophet – God's blessings be upon him – would pray Fajr and then sit in his place of prayer until sunrise and his Companions would converse about stories of *al-Jāhiliyya* and they would recite poetry and they would laugh, and he [the Prophet] would smile.[114]

And in another hadith, reported by Ibn Ḥabīb (d.245/859-860) in *al-Muḥabbar*, Muḥammad orders his people to "appoint as your leader he who used to lead you during *al-Jāhiliyya*".[115] Ibn Ḥabīb relates this hadith without a chain of authorities and I have not found it in the main collections, but its citation in *al-Muḥabbar*, a book relating the history of the Arabs and what could be called 'trivia' about Arabness,[116] is noteworthy. The hadith teaches that Muḥammad sanctioned continuity between pre-Islamic and Islamic times and that the rise of Islam did not represent a complete break with *al-Jāhiliyya*. I shall not investigate whether this was Muḥammad's actual stance on the transition of *Jāhiliyya* to Islam; rather I am interested in why this opinion was endorsed by a third/ninth century Muslim scholar in a book about Arabs.

The material Ibn Ḥabīb gathered in *al-Muḥabbar* consists of hundreds of anecdotes drawn in almost equal measure from pre-Islamic times and from the early Islamic era (up to the Umayyad Caliphate). The material explores manifold

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[114] Al-Nasāʾī *Sunan*, *al-Sahw*:90. See also a very similar hadith in al-Tirmidhī *Jāmiʿ*, *al-Adab*:70.

[115] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 500. *Al-Muḥabbar* has survived in the recension of al-Sukkarī, student of Ibn Ḥabīb who died in 275/888 or 290/903. The extant text may reflect some edits of al-Sukkarī, evidenced by two mentions in the texts of Caliphs who ruled after Ibn Ḥabīb's death (*al-Muḥabbar* 44,62).

[116] In addition to genealogies, names of famous Arabs and practices of ancient Arabia, *al-Muḥabbar* also relates unusual, trivial details like the names of "noble men who lost an eye in battle" (261), "the names of men who were so handsome that they would cover themselves in fear of women" (232), and "Arabs named Muḥammad before Islam" (130).

aspects of Arab culture and in so doing, Ibn Ḥabīb occasionally splits topics temporally into two halves – *Jāhilī* and Islamic: for instance he relates stories of "Generous Men (*ajwād*) of al-Jāhiliyya", and "Generous Men of Islam";[117] or "Brigands (*futtāk*)[118] of al-Jāhiliyya" and "Brigands of Islam".[119] Contrary to what modern audiences may expect, the reported traits of these characters do not differ. The generous men of *al-Jāhiliyya* are praised for feeding their guests, keeping additional camels on hand to slaughter for unexpected guests,[120] and thinking only of helping others, even to their own detriment.[121] The generous of Islam are similar: Ibn Ḥabīb does not relate stories of lavish spending Caliphs, but instead narrates more modest anecdotes of those who generously gave food or selflessly dispersed money to the needy.[122] The narrative suggests a continuity of this 'innate Arab' trait, not a change with the advent of Islam, and in three cases, Ibn Ḥabīb relates Islamic era poetry praising the memory of pre-Islamic benefactors.[123] The split into pre-Islamic and Islamic seems merely temporal, and not reflective of differing qualities of generosity after Islam.

Similarly, the swashbuckling *futtāk* of *al-Jāhiliyya* reflect the violence and antagonisms of the modern *Jāhiliyya* stereotype, but the group Ibn Ḥabīb relates for Islam are similar: both are ascribed a sense of honour, a heedlessness of authority and a willingness to kill in defence of their pride. In the Islamic period, the political order of the Islamic state is not portrayed as affecting these brigands in the desert:

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[117] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 137-146,146-155.

[118] The term *fātik* implies a bellicose spirit, impervious to authority who reacts violently from his own whim, without consideration of consequences (Ibn Manẓūr *Lisān* 10:472).

[119] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 192-212,212-232.

[120] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 140,142,144.

[121] For instance, see the story of Kaʿb ibn Māma who allegedly distributed his water to the thirsty until he himself died of thirst (Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 144)!

[122] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 150,153,155.

[123] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 141,145,146.

their crimes are reported as often unpunished,[124] or only nominally so, even when religiously significant figures such as the Caliph ʿUthmān were involved.[125]

The emphasis on continuity, not change of Arab identity from *al-Jāhiliyya* to Islam, can also be inferred from Ibn Ḥabīb's lists of tribal leaders,[126] and in curious lists such as "men whose ancestors were all traitors",[127] or "men whose ancestors were all killed".[128] For example, the last list names ʿUmāra ibn Ḥamza whose father and grandfathers, spanning five generations were all killed in battle or executed for their political affiliations. The list of his ancestors begins with pre-Islamic generations and crosses into the Islamic era, indicating that understanding Arab heritage required an amalgamation of both periods. Express indications of continuity from *al-Jāhiliyya* include Ibn Ḥabīb's lists of "rulings of *al-Jāhiliyya* that correspond with Islamic Law", including inheritance.[129] Ibn Ḥabīb also lists the religious practices of *al-Jāhiliyya* that were continued in Islam.[130]

Beyond the continuity, *al-Muḥabbar* relates numerous positive qualities about *al-Jāhiliyya* in its own right: it lists pre-Islamic Arabs who shunned alcohol,[131] refused to worship idols,[132] were famous for their honesty,[133] praiseworthy traits of pre-Islamic tribes,[134] and the six "merits of the Arabs" in *al-Jāhiliyya*, of which Ibn Ḥabīb notes three survived into Islam while three (hostels for feeding the poor)

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[124] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 212-233.

[125] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 217.

[126] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 254.

[127] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 244.

[128] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 189.

[129] Ibn Ḥabīb reports the will of ʿĀmir ibn Jusham who decreed his son's share would be twice each daughter's, anticipating the Islamic rule (*al-Muḥabbar* 236).

[130] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 309-311.

[131] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 237-240.

[132] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 171-175.

[133] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 312-320.

[134] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 146.

were closed.[135] Ibn Ḥabīb even gives a positive twist to idol worship, now deemed the quintessential *Jāhiliyya* pagandom: he reports idols were worshipped "along with God – and there is no God but He,"[136] a significant contrast to al-Qurṭubī's seventh/thirteenth century exegesis of Qurʾān 46:26 noted above regarding the pre-Islamic Arabians' zealous refusal to worship God in favour of their idols.[137]

From Ibn Ḥabīb's third/ninth century perspective of Arab history, therefore, *al-Jāhiliyya* was not a time to be repudiated and forgotten, but rather it constituted Arab origins. Praiseworthy characteristics of the Arabs are shown as deriving from *al-Jāhiliyya* and the memories of pre-Islamic Arabia are retained as the 'first half' of Arab identity. Ibn Ḥabīb narrates the reports from *al-Jāhiliyya* in the same matter-of-fact chronological fashion we encountered in the first dictionary definition.

If we interpret *al-Jāhiliyya* to mean 'the pre-Islamic origin of the Arabs', and not the 'reprehensible pagan days', we can also explain an important comment of al-Jāḥiẓ (d.255/868), a renowned *adīb* contemporary with Ibn Ḥabīb. Al-Jāḥiẓ writes in *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, another compendium of Arabian lore cast in a discourse on language and communication that

> the Arabs better retain what they hear and better memorise what is narrated; and they have poetry which registers their glories and immortalises their merits. They followed in their Islam the practices from their *Jāhiliyya*. And on the basis of that [the Umayyads] established great honour and glory [i.e. more than the Abbasids].[138]

Al-Jāḥiẓ's comment supports his argument in the same section that the Umayyads, whom he describes as an "Arabic Bedouin Arabian" state (*dawla ... ʿarabiyya,*

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[135] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 241-243.

[136] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 315.

[137] See note 98.

[138] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 3:366.

aʿrābiyya) were superior to the "Persian Khorasanian" Abbasid caliphate (*dawla …ʿajamiyya, khurāsāniyya*) ruling the Islamic world in al-Jāḥiẓ's day.[139]

Al-Jāḥiẓ was not alone in this assertion: his near contemporary, Ibn Qutayba (d.276/889) wrote *Faḍl al-ʿarab* to defend Arabs against their detractors, and he used anecdotes from pre-Islamic times to the Umayyads to develop his arguments. He states the "Arabs of *al-Jāhiliyya* were the world's bravest nation"[140] and maintained "vestiges of pure monotheism (*al-ḥanīfiyya* – the Qurʾānic designation for Abraham's monotheism)".[141] He repeats Ibn Ḥabīb's theme of continuity, reporting on "judgments of *al-Jāhiliyya* which were affirmed by Islam"[142] as part of a wider discourse on the extent of the Arab's knowledge (*ʿilm*) during *al-Jāhiliyya*.[143] Given the third/ninth century definition of *jahl* as the opposite of *ʿilm*, Ibn Qutayba's emphasis on the Arabs' *ʿilm* from *al-Jāhiliyya* seems an express rehabilitation of the era's reputation, rejecting assumptions about its "ignorance".

The pro-Arab agenda observed in al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba is a natural corollary of their explicit aim to defend Arabness, but several other third/ninth century texts on broader subjects narrate Arabian history before Muḥammad in a similar manner. Consider the long section on pre-Islamic Arabia in al-Yaʿqūbī's (d.275/888 or 292/905) world history, *al-Tārīkh*. Al-Yaʿqūbī opens by stating the Arabs have a common ancestor in Ishmael, son of Abraham, emphasising the Arabs' origins in prophethood, not paganism.[144] Quraysh and Maʿadd, two important tribal divisions of the Arabs, are said to have always followed the Religion of Abraham,[145]

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[139] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 3:366.

[140] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 84.

[141] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 87-89.

[142] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 89.

[143] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl passim*, in particular 89,141,146.

[144] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:221.

[145] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:254;248.

and the Hajj is noted throughout al-Yaʿqūbī's account of pre-Islamic Arab history.[146] As for idols, al-Yaʿqūbī, like Ibn Ḥabīb, makes no derogatory associations with *jahl*, and instead reports the Arabs' adoption of idols was "only a means [of worship], and they continued to make the Hajj and practice its *talbiya* like their father, Abraham".[147] The pre-Islamic practice of adjusting the calendar (*al-nasīʾ*), described as an "excess of disbelief" in Qurʾān 9:37 is noted by al-Yaʿqūbī as one of the "virtues" of the Kināna tribe, aside their right to announce the Hajj.[148] Throughout, al-Yaʿqūbī describes Arabian tribal ancestors as "noble" (*sharīf*),[149] "generous" (*karīm*),[150] "forbearing" (*ḥalīm* – the opposite of *jāhil*)[151] and of "innumerable virtues".[152] His analysis of the pre-Islamic Arabs is a generous and complimentary account of their pre-Islamic origins.

Al-Yaʿqūbī's approach is also apparent in Diʿbil al-Khuzāʿī's (d.246/860) *Waṣāyā al-mulūk*,[153] a history of Yemeni kings from primeval times to shortly before Muḥammad. Diʿbil reconstructs ancient Yemen as a community blessed with Islamic guidance and traces the preservation of Islam's sacred message via a nearly unbroken chain of Yemeni kings following the ancient Arabian prophet Hūd. This vision of an Islamic Arabia before Muḥammad was not uncommon: Wahb ibn Munabbih's *al-Tījān* and ʿUbayd ibn Sharya's *Akhbār al-Yaman* also depict pre-Muḥammadic Yemenis (and some North Arabians too) as enlightened with Islam. The narrative neatly encourages the conception of continuity between pre- and post-Muḥammadic Arabs: readers can understand that the Arabs of early Islam

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[146] Al-Yaʿqūbī Tārīkh 1:239

[147] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:255.

[148] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:237.

[149] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:223,237,241.

[150] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:226.

[151] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:226.

[152] Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1:232,228.

[153] The text may actually be the work of his son – see the introduction to the text's modern edition (Diʿbil *Waṣāyā* 12-13).

emerged from a monotheistic past; they were not converts to something entirely new, but rather re-adopters of a deep tradition particular to their homeland, Arabia.

The monotheistic continuity narrative helps us better understand another contemporary text, Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī's (d.204/819 or 206/821) *Kitāb al-Aṣnām*. It is a catalogue of Arab idols – ostensibly a monograph on pre-Islamic Arab pagan folly, but akin to Ibn Ḥabīb and al-Yaʿqūbī, *al-Aṣnām* opens with a stress on the monotheistic origins of Arab worship, depicting Arab idolatry as the product of originally sincere and devout Abrahamic monotheism.[154] He renders the Arabs somewhat inadvertent pagans: they maintained vestiges of monotheism while gradually (and innocently) shifting into misguidedness.[155] *Al-Aṣnām*'s inclusion of references to non-Arabian idols such as those of Noah's era,[156] suggests moreover that idol worship is not exclusively Arab, thus exonerating them from their seeming excess of paganism before Muḥammad.[157] In this light, it is interesting that Ibn al-Kalbī reports the absence of reference to various idols in pre-Islamic poetry – does

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[154] Al-Kalbī *al-Aṣnām* 6. He also explains that the statues of Isāf and Nāʾila were originally erected as warnings to those who violate Mecca's sanctum, but over time they were converted into objects of worship (29).

[155] While Ibn al-Kalbī notes that Arabs did change the religion of Abraham and Ishmael (*al-Aṣnām* 6-8), he backtracks too, reporting "the descendants of Maʿadd preserved part of the religion of Ishmael. Rabīʿa and Muḍar also followed this" (13). The political importance of these three groups in early Islam has likely influenced the rehabilitation of pagan memories towards monotheism. Akin to Ibn Ḥabīb's *al-Muḥabbar*, *al-Aṣnām* also details the different tribal *talbiya*s with express statements that the repetition of these proclaimed the unity of God and so preserves their link to their monotheistic Abrahamic/Ishmaelite origins, a point Ibn al-Kalbī stresses, whilst admitting the intrusion of error into this practice (*al-Aṣnām* 7).

[156] Ibn al-Kalbī *al-Aṣnām* 13, 53.

[157] Ibn al-Kalbī develops this via his description of idol worship after the death of Adam. Adam's sons are said to have established a monument to pay respect, but afterwards a son of Cain misinterpreted the monument and set his people on the path of idol worship (*al-Aṣnām* 53-54). The affinities with Ibn al-Kalbī's narrative of the originally innocent origins of Arab idol worship are apparent.

he intend by this for readers to infer that worship of these idols did not take deep root?[158]

Al-Aṣnām leaves no doubt that Muḥammad's mission against idols was necessary,[159] but Muḥammad's purpose appears as righting the Arab ship, not introducing a novel monotheism to a pagan community. Ibn al-Kalbī also avoids generalised, negative conclusions about ancient Arabs: his narrative treads a rather fine line that stresses monotheistic origins rather than 'barbarous' idolatry. Reading *al-Aṣnām* with modern preconceptions of *Jāhiliyya* barbarism in mind risks overlooking these important subtleties of Ibn al-Kalbī's text: it is grounded in the contemporary belief that the pre-Muḥammadic past was not simply Arabian 'barbarism', but a more gentle forgetting of the right path. Ibn al-Kalbī harmonises pre-Muḥammadic idol worship, Islam and Ishmaelite origin tales to show Islam as a basic continuity in Arab history, both ancient and modern: the negative *Jāhiliyya* is not the Arab origin, but only the middle-part of their story.

Another third/ninth century text emphasising continuity between the pre- and post-Muḥammadic Arab past is al-Balādhurī's (d.c.279/892) *Ansāb al-ashrāf*. The title is instructive: it is a genealogical history of nobility – the text reveals that the nobility is exclusively Arab, and it begins in pre-Islamic times. Though al-Balādhurī worked as a favoured courtier of Abbasid Caliphs,[160] he interestingly narrates noble

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[158] For example, he notes that Hamdān and Ḥimyar were associated with the idols Yaʿūq and Nasr, respectively, but that neither names nor pre-Islamic poetry record them (10-11). Ibn al-Kalbī follows this with a reference to Ḥimyar's conversion to Judaism, a nod to the pious Yemeni narratives noted above. Consider also the instructive comment about the idol Riʾām: "The Arabs did not remember [the idol] in poetry except shortly before Islam" (*al-Aṣnām* 12), an observation reminiscent of the hadith regarding Quraysh's "recent" adoption of *Jāhiliyya* (see Note 56).

[159] Ibn al-Kalbī details the destruction of idols, often by fire (*al-Aṣnām* 17, 31). This is perhaps a deliberate contrast to his accounts of idol destruction during the Flood (*al-Aṣnām* 53-54): fire's more total destructive power signals that after Muḥammad, there will be no more false worship.

[160] Al-Balādhurī's connection with the court is recounted in Yāqūt *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ* 2:50-54 and al-Kutubī *Fawāt* 1:155-157. He was also entrusted to teach the son of the Caliph al-Muʿtazz, ʿAbd Allāh (Ibn al-ʿAdīm *Bughya* 3:1220).

biography only to the end of the second/eighth century. Nobility emerges as a property of Arabs from their pre-Islamic beginnings until the reigns of the Abbasid al-Manṣūr and al-Mahdī,[161] and so crosses the *Jāhiliyya*/*Islām* barrier without pause, ending at the fourth *fitna* (193-212/809–827). I revisit the *fitna* in Chapter 4.3, but so far as *Ansāb al-ashrāf* concerns *al-Jāhiliyya*, it reveals yet again that the pre-Muḥammadic past was a core component of the 'noble' Arab story, quite apart from modern expectations of pagandom and barbarism.

The fourth *fitna* is also a seminal event for a close contemporary of al-Balādhurī, Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ (d.240/855), whose annalistic *Tārīkh* shuns the history of the *fitna* as well as the history of the post-*fitna* Abbasid world, seemingly in the hope of banishing it into oblivion through silence.[162] Ibn Khayyāṭ does, however, differ from authors considered above in his approach to pre-Muḥammadic history: his *Tārīkh* begins with Year 1 AH.[163] Ibn Khayyāṭ prefaces his annals with a discussion of methodology wherein he reports that whilst all peoples, ancient Arabs (and Persians) included, devise systems of chronological reckoning,[164] Muḥammad's *hijra* was a decisive historical juncture: the Prophet's physical movement from the land of *shirk* (polytheism) to the land of *īmān* (faith) symbolically coincides with the moment *ḥaqq* (truth) was separated from *bāṭil* (falsehood).[165] Whether Ibn Khayyāṭ considers all history before Muḥammad as irrelevant '*Jāhiliyya*' is not clear: the absence of all pre-Muḥammadic history in his *Tārīkh* could suggest that possibility,

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[161] These are the last two Caliphs for whom he narrates a biography (*Ansāb* 3:289-321). There is also brief mention of al-Rashīd and his contemporaries (*Ansāb* 3:316).

[162] Khalīfa devotes only 15% of his *Tārīkh* to Abbasid history (the century 132-232/750-846) (*Tārīkh* 330-395); events after the reign of al-Rashīd (d.193/809) are particularly abbreviated: the siege of Baghdād in recounted only in the briefest terms, and he never mentions al-Amīn by name, preferring the pointed *al-Makhlūʿ* (the deposed) (*Tārīkh* 384-385).

[163] Barring a brief discussion of the year of Muḥammad's birth (Ibn Khayyāṭ *Tārīkh* 26-28).

[164] Ibn Khayyāṭ *Tārīkh* 24.

[165] Ibn Khayyāṭ *Tārīkh* 25. The journey reference and the theological statement are narrated in separate *akhbār*, though their juxtaposition adjacent to each other suggests Khalīfa intends his readers to make the connection.

but he does not use the word *Jāhiliyya*, and he omits all pre-*hijra* prophetic history too, including Muḥammad's early life. Ibn Khayyāṭ differs from all authors hitherto mentioned since he was a hadith scholar by training;[166] his different approach to pre-Islamic history could stem from this, or perhaps also the absence of a reliable pre-*hijra* (BH?) dating system ran counter to Ibn Khayyāṭ's interests which concerned annalistic synthesis of specifically Islamic history, in part to establish the relative chronology of the generations of hadith scholars.[167] Whatever the case, Ibn Khayyāṭ's *Tārīkh* may represent a further third/ninth century discourse for conceptualising the pre-Muḥammadic past, and it may be a historiographical precursor of what would later flourish as a construction of *Jāhiliyya* as something opposite to (as opposed to a continuity with) Islam.

1.7 The 'meritorious' *al-Jāhiliyya*?

Many third/ninth century writers clearly did not espouse negative impressions of *al-Jāhiliyya*, and on the contrary, the employed memories of *al-Jāhiliyya* as a repository of anecdotes about Arab culture in its 'original' state, before the Arabs left the Arabian Peninsula during the Islamic conquests. For an author concerned with constructing the parameters of an Arab identity, *al-Jāhiliyya* was a primary point of reference, and judging from the mixture of pre-Islamic to Umayyad era anecdotes marshalled in the above writings, authors did not rigidly separate the two periods, but instead conceived of both pre-Islamic and Umayyad times as representing 'Arab eras', before the 'Persification' of political rule by the Abbasids (at least after the fourth *fitna* and the Caliphate of al-Maʾmūn 198-218/813-

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[166] Khalīfa's classical-era biographies are found in compendiums of hadith narrators: we may think of him as a 'historian', but his contemporaries saw him as one of the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* (see al-Nadīm *al-Fihrist* 288 where he is listed with hadith transmitters; see also al-Rāzī *Jarḥ* 3:378; Ibn Ḥajar *Tahdhīb* 3:160).

[167] Dating the lives of hadith scholars is the main preoccupation of Ibn Khayyāṭ's other surviving text, *al-Ṭabaqāt*.

833). The pre-Islamic and early Islamic eras represented separate temporal components of Arab identity, but together offered the material to reconstruct a conception of Arabness: the emphasis was one of broad continuity rather than complete change.[168]

Authors working under this conception would associate *al-Jāhiliyya* with 'original Arabness' before 'barbarism' or 'pagandom'. Authors such as Ibn Qutayba and al-Jāḥiẓ were also Arab partisans, so they can be expected to have portrayed both 'halves' of Arab history in as positive a light as possible. Their partisanship seems influenced by the cultural context of the third/ninth century scholarly environment when conflicts over cultural merits led Persians and Arabs into disagreement over who possessed a more illustrious past. Arab partisans had good reason to focus on the positive aspects of *al-Jāhiliyya.*

In addition, during the first two centuries of Islam, Arab tribes were cohesive socio-political units often in competition with each other, and the memories of pre-Islamic battle days and tribal antagonisms played a central role in tribal memory which spilled into the politics of the early Islamic world. In this environment too, tribes would naturally seek to remember their pre-Islamic history in terms of heroism and nobility as each tribe could be expected to want to portray its past in a positive light. For them, disparagement of *al-Jāhiliyya* would hamstring their own reputations. By the third/ninth century, these tribal memories would form a large part of the repository of pre-Islamic lore which scholars utilised to reconstruct *al-Jāhiliyya.*[169] Given both the pro-Arab bias evidenced in most surviving third/ninth century texts on the subject and the Arabian tribal origins of much of the then

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[168] This is perhaps a key distinction between the generous treatment of pre-Islam in most of the texts cited, in contrast to Ibn Khayyāṭ's *Tārīkh* whose intention was to create a synthesised *hijrī* chronology, not to narrate Arab history.

[169] Al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-ashrāf* cites from many Arab 'tribal' informants as evidenced by its *isnāds*. Closer analysis of these sources would be enlightening.

available source material, it is not surprising that many third/ninth century writers have such positive things to say about *al-Jāhiliyya.*

For so long as Arab tribes represented cohesive political actors in Iraq, and for so long as Persians and Arabs sparred in a meaningful debate over cultural superiority, *al-Jāhiliyya* can logically have elicited associations of nobility, learning and Arab prowess. By the later fourth/tenth century, however, when the Arab tribes, the cohesion of Abbasid rule and the old antagonisms were being replaced by new political and social orders,[170] *al-Jāhiliyya*'s utility would change. Interestingly, this coincides with the shift we noted in the impressions of *al-Jāhiliyya* in dictionaries and Qurʾānic exegesis where *al-Jāhiliyya*'s negative aspects came into focus and pre-Islamic Arabness was expressed as a 'barbaric' society awaiting enlightenment. The modern stereotypes of *al-Jāhiliyya* are clearly indebted to the arguments of this later classical period, so meticulously copied and preserved in the manuscript tradition and then perpetuated in European discourses since the Enlightenment.[171]

The foregoing underlines the importance of a diachronic approach to our sources which avoids generalisations about the 'classical Muslim' or the 'Abbasid guise' of a given discourse, and instead recognises how the interpretations of history during the first centuries of Islam were developing. The supposed tradition of *al-Jāhiliyya* barbarism and innate Arab Bedouinism seems to be a later innovation: only by the fourth/tenth or fifth/eleventh centuries can we speak of *al-Jāhiliyya* portrayals in such stark terms. The observation of the pre-Islamic era's multiple identities in Muslim writing has ramifications for the question of Arab identity too, given the close nexus in Arabic literature between the pre-Islamic era and Arab

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[170] These changes, and their affects on the interpretation of history are explored in Chapter 4.

[171] See, Chapter 1.1's discussion that Arabic sources available to Enlightenment writers all post-date the fourth/tenth century, i.e. after the *Jāhiliyya* idea's key watershed.

origins. In the light of the gradual development of notions of the 'Arab past' as a period of history, we must now consider whether the notions of Arab identity were also reshaped during the period of classical Islam. Was Arabness yet another conceptual category which Muslim authors forged in response to their changing contemporary contexts? This is the investigation of the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Contested Arabness: Classical Definitions and Genealogy

The prospect that Arab identity, like the Muslim reconstructions of *al-Jāhiliyya*, was developed during the Muslim-era is, depending on one's point of view, either radical or anticipated. For anthropologists and scholars who study identity in the modern world, the mutability of ethnic identity is familiar: over time, people construct and rearticulate notions of the group to which they claim belonging in response to changing socio-political circumstances. Static conceptions of race are accordingly rejected as a "naïve belief that identities are compact ... closed in on themselves and unchanging".[172] Arabness today is cited as one of the most difficult ethnicities to categorise, as there is no scholarly consensus on a definition of Arabness that cogently unifies the peoples from Mauritania to southwest Iran who all call themselves Arabs.[173] But historical Arab identity has almost entirely avoided such analysis.

Whilst fascinating studies have recently explored the rich complexities of ethnicity in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean and in the Medieval European worlds, [174] pre-Islamic and early Islamic-era Arabness are treated as a straightforward ethnos. Pre-Islamic Arabs are equated with a pan-Arabian Bedouin community,[175] and, thanks to the thorough Arabisation of the Caliphate from the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik (r.65-86/685-705), the Arabic-speaking populations of Iraq

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[172] Corm and Foissy (2012) 25.

[173] Ibrahim (2011) 14 cites the Arabs as a quintessential example of the difficulties in determining racialist categorisations. Rodinson's *The Arabs* provides a thoughtful array of parameters by which Arabness can be defined, depending on circumstances (1981) 5-47.

[174] Geary (1983) and Pohl (1998) examined Medieval ethnic formation, see Gruen (2011) for the Ancient Mediterranean. Pohl (2012) contains fascinating essays on Islamic minority identities, but, perhaps as a direct function of the powerful archetypes, no articles directly problematize Arab identity.

[175] Even Rodinson's brilliantly nuanced notion of Arabness which rejects questions of "where did [the Arabs] come from" as "naïve" ((1981) 49), nonetheless identifies the Arabian Peninsula as the "birthplace of the Arab people" (50): the long-established meld of Arabian space and Arab race exerts much power over writings about Arabness.

and Syria, as well as the producers of the copious Arabic-language writings of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries are treated as predominantly ethnic Arabs who are presumed to have been conscious of their 'Arabness' as the marker of their civilisation's identity.[176] Modern scholars debate the origins of the Arab people by proposing different historical 'moments' when Arab communal self-awareness formed and adducing different catalysts that could have prompted its formation;[177] yet in adopting this approach, each of the competing theories treats Arabness as a tangible object that can be 'found', and, once it comes into existence, acts as a marker of ethnic identity for a certain community of people.[178] This is likely a corollary of reading classical Arabic literature which does tend to speak of Arabs in generalised and straightforward terms that facilitate a conceptualisation of Arabs as a monolithic 'nation', but the recent scholarly critique of ethnicity and race across the globe and across history should prompt us to revisit the supposed ethnic cohesiveness of the early first/seventh century Muslim 'Arab' conquerors, the Arabness of the Umayyad state, and the Arabisation of the cosmopolitan milieu of the central Abbasid lands which produced today's Arab Iraqis and Syrians. The Arabness paradigm is beginning to attract scholarly critique which I outline in the next section, and this and the following three chapters shall broaden the analysis and increase the scrutiny to demonstrate how Arabness, as opposed to being a pre-formed identity of the Muslim conquerors, was in fact (like *al-Jāhiliyya*) a multi-

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[176] McCants' 2011 *Founding Gods* is a recent example which examines the construction of the 'Arab' Islamic civilisation's identity, operating on an assumption that the civilisation can be straightforwardly classified as 'Arab'.

[177] Donner's proposal that Islam did not begin as a "'national' movement" ((2010) 17) suggests that that Arab ethnic cohesion did not pre-Islamic Arabian society; Hoyland strongly rejects this, arguing that Arab identity must have existed as a socio-politica group pre-dating Islam ((2012) 574).

[178] For example, the Umayyad Caliphate is called the 'Arab Caliphate' or "Arab Kingdom" (Wellhausen (1927)), and even "the Arab *Staatsnation*" (Von Grunebaum (1963) 5-6). More recent writing, such as Montgomery ((2006) 56) critiques von Grunebaum's observations about the 'natural temperament' of the 'Arab race', but nonetheless approves von Grunebaum's argument of the *Kulturnation* notion of pre-Islamic Arab cultural/ethnic cohesion.

faceted construction of Muslim imaginations that gradually evolved over the first four centuries of Islam.

2.1 Problematizing Arabness: scholarly precursors

My reappraisal of pre-Islamic Arab identity draws inspiration from D.H. Müller's 1896 thesis that the Arabs as a people did not pre-date Islam. Müller proposed that the Prophet Muḥammad coined the term 'Arab' as a novel "national designation" for his new religious community and that the Arab people therefore only came into existence with Islam.[179] His theory was perhaps too radical for its day; it was written at a time when Europeans held fixed and primordialist notions of racial identity which stipulated that the world's 'nations' were natural, biological divisions of humanity, and nineteenth century Europeans could not accept the possibility that ethnicities can be made and un-made by socio-political circumstances.[180] It is therefore not surprising that in 1899 Nöldeke rejected Müller's hypothesis outright and marshalled comparative philology to 'prove' that ancient Semitic roots related to ʿ-r-b connote 'desert' and 'nomad', and so 'confirmed' that the Arabs indeed existed as Bedouin for more than a millennium before Muḥammad.[181] Nöldeke's defence of the Arabs' ancient lineage banished Müller's theory for a century,[182] but today the primordialist paradigm of national

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[179] Müller (1896) 344 "Die Araber selbst kennen in alter Zeit [*i.e.* pre-Islamic times] den Name 'Arab' nicht ... Muhammad, der die arabischen Völkerschaften zu einer Nation geeinigt und zu eine Glaubens- und Staatsgenossenschaft umgebildet hat, redet zuerst von einer 'arabischen' Sprache und einem 'arabischen' Koran".

[180] Modern theories of ethnic identity formation cite Weber's essay on ethnicity published posthumously in 1922 as the first argument against primordialist racialist paradigms, though Weber's nuanced approach did not become widespread until after the Second World War (Weber (1996)). See Raum (1995), Vermeulen and Govers (1997), Banton (2007) and Jenkins (2008).

[181] Nöldeke (1899) 272-273.

[182] Nöldeke's etymological evidence that Arabs were ancient Bedouin is oft repeated: Caskel (1954) 38; von Grunebaum (1963) 12 "the Arab, by etymology and cultural convention, was the Bedouin"; Rodinson (1981) 15; Robin (2010) 85; Dousse (2012) 43.

and racial purities has itself been undermined,[183] and the century of scholarship built upon those foundations is ripe for revision. It is upon a recent return to reassessing historical Arabness that I seek to build.

James Montgomery's 2006 essay on the "Empty Ḥijāz" expressed reservations concerning the "seductiveness of the Bedouin" as a means to explain early Arab identity and the "hermetically sealed" image of pre-Islamic Arabia as the Arab homeland. [184] The "Empty Ḥijāz" urges a reappraisal of the Bedouin/Arab/Arabian nomad conceptual triad, but stops short of a radical reconceptualization of Arabness: in the final analysis, Montgomery reverts to the traditional Nöldeke/von Grunebaum thesis that a shared poetic koine united an Arab cultural community and paved the way for the acceptance of the Qurʾān in the early seventh century CE.[185] Perhaps for this reason, Montgomery did not cite two sweeping deconstructions of Arab ethnic identity in Early Islam published in 1984 and 1997 by Suliman Bashear which critiqued the whole century of Nöldeke-esque paradigms of Arab primordial ethnic unity and rejected the belief that "Arab conquistadores"[186] waged the Muslim conquests.[187] Read together, Montgomery's reservations about Arabness-qua-Bedouin-ness and Bashear's radical revisionist theory reveal the problematic underpinnings of the pre-Islamic Arab archetype, and suggest the time has come for fresh analysis. But first, a closer reading of Bashear is needed to ground this thesis' approach.

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[183] See chapter 4.1 for fuller discussion of ethnic theory and Arabness.

[184] Montgomery (2006) 46, 50.

[185] Montgomery (2006) 58, 97.

[186] Or in Montgomery's words, "the tribal *ghazwa* as the Muslim *jihad*" (2006) 58.

[187] He critiqued the *a priori* assumption that "the rise of the Arab polity and Islam were one and the same thing from the beginning" (Bashear (1997) 2-5), and in particular rejected von Grunebaum's 1963 argument, based on Nöldeke, that Islam converted the ethnic Arab *Kulturnation* into a *Staatsnation* (3). Bashear's 1984 *Muqaddima fī Tārīkh al-Ākhar* is more pointed, focusing on the Byzantine Christian and Jewish roles in forming Islam and the 'Arabisation' of Islam in the Umayyad period to 'forget' its true origins (331-369).

Akin to Müller, Bashear suggested that the modern notion of Arab identity is a Muslim-era construct, though, even more radically, he argued that Muḥammad never called himself an Arab prophet and proposed that 'Arab' as it is understood today only became a "nationality" via "a general process during the early to mid-second/eighth century, which marked the assertion of the national characters of the Prophet and his message to the Arabs".[188] He contended that the Arabness of early Islam, along with the whole narrative of early Islamic history, was the result of a thorough Muslim re-writing in the second/eighth century to portray Islam as an 'Arab religion'.

Bashear's questioning of the relationship between Arabness and Islam is a stimulating and logical corollary of the more open-ended notions of ethnicity as well as the radical critical ethos that entered scholarly analysis of early Islamic history during the latter twentieth century, but his conclusions were unfortunately hasty and cannot be uncritically accepted. Bashear sadly died before the final completion of his later English manuscript, so we lack his final conclusions. Moreover, his thesis was profoundly influenced by the then ascendant notion in Islamic studies that Islam was a non-Arabian phenomenon of Rabbinical origins.[189] Accordingly, Bashear paid very little attention to the role of the Qurʾān in shaping notions of Arabness,[190] and proposed instead that second/eighth century Arabs sought to insert themselves into Islam, portraying themselves, akin to the Jews, as Islam's 'chosen race'.[191] The most extreme critiques of early Islamic history that

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[188] Bashear (1997) 119.

[189] See Wansbrough's (1977) Rabbinical-inspired analysis of Qurʾānic exegesis; and Crone and Cook's (1977) historical analysis of "Judeo-Hagarism" and "Sadducee Islam".

[190] For Bashear's cursory consideration of the Qurʾān, see (1997) 48-49 and dismissal of the religious aspect of early articulations of Arabness (50-52).

[191] Bashear (1997) 121.

motivated Bashear's analysis have been dampened in the last decade, however,[192] and this accordingly leaves Bashear's concomitant reconstruction of Arabness in need of reconsideration. In this thesis I embrace Bashear's misgivings about the contemporary notions of historical Arabness, but I argue for a different reading of classical Arabic writing about Arabs. First, I set out a brief rationale for my scepticism of Bashear's conclusions.

Bashear's thesis is ambivalent towards Arabness as an ethnic identity. On the one hand, he opens his work by denying Arab identity's significance in the first century of Islam, arguing it "was not their problem, but one of the modern student".[193] For Bashear, Arabness simply 'happened' as "people of varying backgrounds would feel distinct from each other and express their prejudices in a discourse eventually formulated in traditional statements in Arabic, which emerged [by the early second/eighth century] as the predominant linguistic tool of Islam".[194] Yet later he speaks of Arabness as a very certain phenomenon with political importance: "the basic orientation during the Umayyad period seems clearly to have been an Arab one".[195] This ambivalence reveals the extent to which Bashear's belief that Islam was in an embryonic stage until the second/eighth century affected his approach to Arabness: his goal was to prove Islam's non-Arab/Arabian origins, and this focus came at the expense of analysing who the Arabs actually were in early Islam. Bashear stacked his evidence towards debunking the notion of

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[192] Ṣaḥḥāb (1992) refutes Crone's 1987 *Meccan Trade* that argued Mecca was neither Islam's original shrine nor a major sixth century trading centre. Heck (2003) offers another possible corrective. Hoyland (1997) 546-547 accepts that Islam developed over the course of the first/seventh century but notes that "the endeavours to strip off the classical veneer and reveal the formative undercoat [of Islam – he intends Wansbrough (1977) and Crone and Cook (1977)] have been cavalier and conjectural". Hoyland's findings from non-Arabic early Muslim-era sources reveal important corroborations which bolster the general tenor of the Muslim narratives recorded in the third/ninth century (550-559).

[193] Bashear (1997) 3.

[194] Bashear (1997) 4.

[195] Bashear (1997) 40.

the Arabs' formative role in Islam, and left all other considerations of Arab identity in the margins. The result is a superficial account of the early Muslim-era Arabs that entirely overlooks the knotty issues of Arab genealogy, Arabic language and tribal conflicts which have obvious relevance to the question of early Arab history and should not be excluded from the study of Arabness and early Islam.

By conceptualising "Arabism"[196] as a second/eighth century "nationalist" discourse that "rehabilitated" the Bedouin to "reconcile them with Islam and [promoted a narrative] of an Arab ethnic entity related to its Bedouin roots",[197] Bashear leaves pre-Islamic Arab identity unproblematized and ironically defaults back to Nöldeke's classic paradigm that the Arabs were all originally Bedouin. By leaving the Arab/Bedouin archetype unexamined, Bashear offers no alternate explanation for Arab ethnic development, and in stressing only that 'Arab' was 'not-Muslim' during the first/seventh century, Bashear misrepresents the classical literary accounts of Arabness.

Scholars today are less radical in their dating of the Qurʾānic *Muṣḥaf*, and usually propose a first/seventh century date,[198] so given the Qurʾān's eleven citations of "Arabic",[199] the relationship of Arabness and Islam must have been both closer and more fundamental than Bashear proposed. My findings will demonstrate that the relationship was not as straightforward as Müller originally articulated, but

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[196] Bashear uses "Arabism" throughout; Rodinson differentiated 'Arabhood' from 'Arabism', using the latter for modern-era nationalist ideologies (1981) 89-128, and preferring 'Arabhood' to speak of the pre-modern Arab ethnos (49). I accordingly avoid 'Arabism' and use 'Arabness', a term more popular today than 'Arabhood' (see Dousse (2012) 44).

[197] Bashear (1997) 53.

[198] Donner (2009) summarises current scholarship, and argues that the interaction of orality and literacy, *qirāʾāt* and manuscript evidence suggest an early codification of the ʿUthmānic *muṣḥaf*. See also Gillot (2006) 48, Déroche (2003). Scholars continue to debate whether or not the "Ur-Qurʾān" is identical to the current *muṣḥaf*, and whether some sections in the Qurʾān even pre-date Muḥammad (Böwering 2008), but the current text we have today seems to have been faithfully copied since at least the later first/seventh century.

[199] I explore the meanings of the word "ʿarabī" in the Qurʾān in Chapter 3.7, below.

Bashear's total rejection is too extreme, especially since the evidence he adduced in support is also unconvincing on methodological grounds. Bashear gathered myriad hadith and anecdotes from exegetical texts which he wove into a detailed depiction of a putative second/eighth century Arab nationalist discourse. But no texts from that period survive. Bashear had to hazard a reconstruction of how early Muslims conceptualised Arabness from material only recorded much later, in many cases, as late as the seventh/thirteenth century. This method has attendant, and salient, shortcomings.

Bashear's free drawings of hadith from compendiums written between the third/ninth and seventh/thirteenth century seem indiscriminately selected and lack consideration of context. Hayden White's narratological historiography stresses the crucial importance of reading historical records in the context of their narration and it is hazardous to assume that widely different texts are interchangeable sources for historical reconstruction. In Bashear's case, how can we assume that all Muslim writers over a 500 year period held such similar notions of the past that they can be imagined as singing from the same proverbial hymn sheet? Bashear argues that debates in the second/eighth century radically shaped the idea of Arabness, but then assumes that Arabness ossified entirely thereafter, allowing him to use any text written over the next half-millennium as equal witnesses. But this implies that later Muslim authors had no input into their material and simply copied old arguments.

As an example of the methodological drawbacks, consider an anecdote Bashear cites in which Muḥammad states, "I belong to the Arabs, but the Bedouins do not belong to me". Bashear adduces it as the 'real' status of Arabness in the early second/eighth century that proves the 'real' Arabian Bedouin were not part of the

Muslim community in its first generations.[200] But the lone source for this anecdote is the sixth/twelfth century jurist/polemicist Ibn Taymiyya's *Aḥādīth al-quṣṣāṣ*. Bashear neither considers Ibn Taymiyya's opinion of *quṣṣāṣ* stories, nor does he address why all earlier texts ignored the hadith, nor even does he comment on the significance of the fact that the hadith is derived from *quṣṣāṣ* storyteller lore. The *quṣṣāṣ* were roundly derided by classical era Muslim scholars, including leading scholars of Ibn Taymiyya's Ḥanbalite school such as Ibn al-Jawzī,[201] so it is very difficult to believe that Ibn Taymiyya's collection of material drawn from the tales of populist preachers in the sixth/twelfth century reliably takes us back to notions of Arabness 500 years before. It is perilous to simply detach hadith from their sources and plug them like jigsaw pieces into a mosaic reconstruction of second/eighth century Islam.

In explaining the multi-century gap between the recording of his evidence and the second/eighth century debates which he sought to reconstruct, Bashear relied exclusively on Schacht's *isnād* criticism to prove that each of his anecdotes is in fact an early/mid-second/eighth century relic.[202] The applicability of Schacht's method to Bashear's material, however, is difficult. Schacht studied legal hadith, whereas Bashear's research concerns hadith about historical Arabness which have no bearing on early Islamic jurisprudence and were not recorded in the collections of *fiqh* and legal hadith which Schacht studied. Bashear ignores the fact that his material has a different genesis and development to Schacht's, and he seems to have employed Schacht not as a methodological framework but as a *topos*, a means to assert a blanket assumption about hadith's inauthenticity. Schacht's methods have,

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[200] Bashear (1997) 53-54.

[201] From the third/ninth century, Muslim historians and jurists critiqued the *Quṣṣāṣ* as unreliable, unauthoritative and even dangerous characters associated with rabblerousing and insurrection (Juynboll (1982) 165; Athamina (1992); Pellat *EI²* "Ḳāṣṣ" 4:735-735, Pedersen (1953) 217-222).

[202] Bashear (1997) 5.

however, been critiqued and some legal hadith seem to be much older than Schacht argued,[203] but correcting Schacht's theories not the most pressing correction to Bashear's findings: rather the Arabness hadith are documents about history, they demand more discursive analysis that situates them not within a juridical framework with which they had no connection, but within the socio-political discourses about Arabness in early Islam.

Had Bashear sought to historically contextualise his material, he would have been able to study the enormous body of classical sources central to the issue of Arabness such as lexicography, grammar, genealogy, poetry and other *adab*. Without recourse to these important texts, Bashear presents broad-brushed and alarmingly certain conclusions based on an incomplete and un-contextualised survey of early Arabness. He accepts that his material is "anachronistic, representing retrojections of later controversies",[204] but in nonetheless venturing conclusions from dramatic extrapolations based on an unreasonably narrow selection of material,[205] his conclusions are doubtful. I concur with his identification of serious problems in the modern understanding of the historical Arabs and that

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[203] Azami (1992) is a broad refutation of Schacht skepticism, Motzki (1991) is more reserved, though offers cogent evidence that at least some hadith should be securely dated to the first/seventh century. Motzki (2005) 210-212 also critiques Schacht and considers that methodology the "most inaccurate" (252) compared with subsequent scholarly work on hadith.

[204] Bashear (1997) 112.

[205] Consider also a lynchpin of his belief that first/seventh century Arabs did not impute religious significance to the Arabic language which he based on an anecdote ascribed to the Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik instructing his sons to learn "Arabic genealogy, the Arabic language and astrology" (Bashear (1997) 55, repeated in his conclusion, 119). Because this single anecdote contains no mention of Islam or Arabic as a liturgical language, Bashear concluded that no Arabs in the first/seventh century could have associated Arabic with Islam. This anecdote, however, was only recorded in a sixth/thirteenth century text, and Bashear did not consider why earlier texts do not record it. Nor did he compare the anecdote with any other events associated with ʿAbd al-Malik (the construction of the Dome of the Rock with its Arabic Qurʾānic inscription comes to mind), nor did he consider whether the anecdote tells us the whole story of early Arabness.

Arabness was a "burning issue"[206] during the second/eighth century, but Bashear's methods missed the opportunity to properly understand how the Muslim reconstruction of the pre-Islamic past helped create the canonical notions of Arab ethnic identity. We can do better by more closely investigating the classical depictions of Arabness itself and questioning *why* Muslims developed it in the way that they did. To do so, I propose a more judicious use of a wider array of early sources, reading the sources diachronically and in their historical contexts, and using theories of ethnicity to aid textual interpretation in order to understand the development of Arab ethnic identity without having to rely solely on potentially anachronistic texts.

In striking a different path to Bashear's critique of contemporary stereotypes of Arabness, I start with a key body of texts to which Bashear made no reference: classical Arabic lexicons that define the word 'Arab' and its cognates. Reading the dictionaries diachronically as I analysed *al-Jāhiliyya* in Chapter 1, I demonstrate that there were debates about Arabness in the third/ninth century, but they neither tried to rehabilitate the image of Bedouin nor represent the Arabs as Islam's 'chosen race' as Bashear argued; rather it seems a more fundamental 'Arabness conundrum' of 'how can Arabs be identified' occupied scholarly writing to a greater degree than is recognised today.

2.2 'Arabs' defined in classical writing

2.2(a) 'Arabs' in classical lexicons

At the outset of the Arabic lexical tradition in the late second/eighth and early third/ninth centuries,[207] al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad's *al-ʿAyn*'s definition of 'Arab' opens with mention of "*al-ʿarab al-ʿāriba*" whom it calls "*al-ṣarīḥ minhum*" (the pure

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[206] Bashear (1997) 55.

[207] See Note 65 on the dating of the first Arabic dictionary.

of them).[208] The basis for their purity is not elaborated, but third/ninth century texts identified *al-ʿāriba* as the first Arabic speakers (the scion of Yaʿrub ibn Qaḥṭān),[209] and *al-ʿAyn* also stresses the importance of language in defining Arabness. It adduces the related verb *aʿraba* as meaning "to speak correctly/clearly" (*afṣaḥa*),[210] and it defines non-Arabs (*ʿajam*) as "the not-Arabs" (*ḍidd al-ʿarab*), the people "who do not speak correctly/clearly" (*alladhī lā yufṣiḥ*).[211] It also describes prayer in which no Qurʾān is recited as *ʿajmāʾ*, and any speech which is "not Arabic" as *ʿajam*.[212] *Al-ʿAyn* engenders the impression that anyone who speaks Arabic according to the rules (and the use of *ʿajmāʾ* to refer to Qurʾān-less prayer as "non-Arabic" implies these rules are from an "Arabic Qurʾān" – as the Qurʾān calls itself on six occasions)[213] could be part of *al-ʿarab*.

There is no mention of tribes, Arabia or even Bedouins in *al-ʿAyn*'s definition of 'Arab'. The dictionary notes the word *aʿrāb* (which has a long history of connoting Bedouins which I consider in chapter 5), though it does not relate *aʿrāb* to Arabness and admits no connection between *aʿrāb* Bedouins and *ʿarab* people; *al-ʿAyn* only records the word's plural form (*aʿārīb*).[214] Its attention to the 'correct' plural of *aʿrāb* can be better understood when read with Sībawayh's *al-Kitāb*, a grammatical and philological text contemporary with *al-ʿAyn* that explicitly classifies the word *aʿrāb* as neither a plural of nor a collective noun related to the word *ʿarab* (Arabs).[215] For

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[208] Al-Khalīl *al-ʿAyn* 2:128. I translate *ṣarīḥ* as 'pure' based on *al-ʿAyn*'s definition of the word as *maḥḍ, khāliṣ* (3:115). It also states that *ṣarīḥ* can mean *ḥasab* in the case of men and horses which it defines as noble (*sharīf, karīm*) (3:148), but I am unaware of any classical uses of the term *al-ʿarab al-ʿāriba* as equivalent to noblemen.

[209] This is a common theme in pro-Yemeni writing (see Wahb ibn Munabbih *al-Tījān* 34,37-38) and endorsed widely in later writings, considered below.

[210] Al-Khalīl *al-ʿAyn* 2:128.

[211] Al-Khalīl *al-ʿAyn* 1:237.

[212] Al-Khalīl *al-ʿAyn* 1:237.

[213] Q12:2; 20:113; 39:28; 41:3; 42:7; 43:3.

[214] Khalīl *al-ʿAyn* 2:128.

[215] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 3:379.

reasons more closely considered in Chapter 5, *al-Kitāb* instructs that the word for 'Bedouin'/*aʿrāb* is separate from the word for 'Arab' (*ʿarab*), and so it appears that second/eighth century philologists separated Arabness from Bedouin-ness, and defined Arabness linguistically, presenting *ʿarab* (Arabs) as those who comply with a set of speech rules.

A century and a half after *al-ʿAyn*, the second-oldest extant classical lexicon, al-Azharī's (d.370/980) *Tahdhīb al-lugha* presents Arabness with different emphasis and different terminology. It repeats the language-based definition of *al-ʿAyn* (and expressly cites the earlier dictionary), but contradicts it with the statement "others say an Arab (*ʿarabī*) is someone whose lineage (*nasab*) can be securely established as Arab, even if he cannot speak correct Arabic (*faṣīḥ*)".[216] The passage reveals a specific debate on the question of Arabness, and al-Azharī prefers the latter formulation: he emphasises the lineage based identification of Arabs by adding that a speaker of correct/clear Arabic is properly called a *muʿrib*, "even if he is of non-Arabic lineage (*ʿajamī al-nasab*)";[217] *i.e.* according to al-Azharī, a learner of Arabic can never become *ʿarabī*, but only *muʿrib.* He thus distinguishes Arabic linguistic mastery from Arab ethnicity by assigning them different lexical terminology not cited in *al-ʿAyn.*

Al-Azharī pursues a similar dichotomy for the 'non-Arab' *ʿajam*: he adduces two terms, one ethnic (*ʿajamī*), the other linguistic (*aʿjamī*). The former connotes "one whose lineage traces to the non-Arabs (*ʿajam*), even if he speaks correct [Arabic] (*yufṣiḥ*)"; the latter describes one who "does not speak correctly (*faṣīḥ*) even if he has Arabic lineage (*ʿarabī al-nasab*)".[218] *Tahdhīb al-lugha* thereby rejects and rewrites *al-ʿAyn*'s definition of the 'not-Arab', transforming *ʿajam* from non-Arabic

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[216] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:166.

[217] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:166.

[218] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 1:352.

speech to non-Arabic lineage. The new definitions categorically entail that mastery of the Arabic language is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition to confer membership to Arabness. By al-Azharī's logic, an ethnic ʿarabī Arab could, if he does not speak correct Arabic, be called an aʿjamī (non-Arabic speaker), but this is merely a linguistic adjective without prejudice to his belonging to the Arab people – an Arab by birth can never turn into an ʿajamī (non-Arab). And the reverse is identical: a non-ethnic Arab could learn enough Arabic to be called muʿrib, but he can never become ʿarabī – al-Azharī renders lineage and language conceptually and lexically separate.

Al-Azharī's long definition of 'Arab' continues a comprehensive downplaying of language's role in defining Arabness by adducing spatial restrictions to the lineage requirement. Unlike al-ʿAyn's space-neutral definition of 'Arab', al-Azharī references the "land from which Arabs derive" and "the country of the Arabs" (bilād al-ʿarab)[219] in his definition of 'Arab', and in another departure from al-ʿAyn, these formulae lead al-Azharī to incorporate both Bedouin and settled populations as component parts of the Arab people. I analyse his inclusion of the Bedouin aʿrāb into the ambit of Arabness (he calls them "people from the desert lands of the Arabs" (qawm min bawādī al-ʿarab))[220] in Chapter 5, but as far as his broad definition of Arabness is concerned, both desert-dwellers (aʿrāb) and residents of towns/villages (ʿarab) are "Arabs" by virtue of the fact that they hail from 'Arab lands', "even if they do not speak [the Arabic language] correctly/clearly" (wa-in lam yakūnū fuṣaḥāʾ)[221] – note again the express dismissal of language's role in defining Arabness. Al-Azharī delineates the "country of the Arabs" through a discussion of the five 'Arab prophets' (Ishmael, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shuʿayb and Muḥammad), explaining that

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[219] Al-Azharī Tahdhīb 2:167,171.
[220] Al-Azharī Tahdhīb 2:167.
[221] Al-Azharī Tahdhīb 2:167.

their Arabness is axiomatic by virtue of their residence in various parts of the Arabian Peninsula.[222] Al-Azharī's additions to the definition of Arab reverse the thrust of *al-ʿAyn*'s Arabness: if Arabness can be conceptualised via language alone, then there is no need to restrict it to a specific place, but writing 150 years later, al-Azharī purposely constructs Arabness around a fixed notion of Arab lineage and Arab space.

Lastly, when considering the origin of the word *ʿarab* itself, al-Azharī considers two possibilities: does the name derive from (i) the descendants of the purported first speaker of Arabic, Yaʿrub ibn Qaḥṭān; or (ii) the descendants of Ishmael who allegedly lived in the town ʿAraba, and from thence, spread across Arabia?[223] The options once again divide between language and place – are Arabs an eponymous linguistic community or an ethnos with a common homeland after which they are named? Interestingly, al-Azharī prefers the second option, underlining his rooting of Arabness in notions of Arab land, not as a function of Arabic language.[224] His final word on the matter, "all those who lived in the land of the Arabs and their Peninsula and spoke the language of its people are Arabs",[225] reveals that language remains a part of Arabness, but his departure from the earlier dictionary is clear: al-Azharī adduced evidence that refuted *al-ʿAyn*'s conception of Arabs *qua* a linguistic collective and remodelled it around a defined homeland and kinship ties. Shared language did not create Arab unity; for al-Azharī, it was a consequence of their shared lineage and land.

Al-Azharī's emphatic shift from language to lineage/common homeland is perpetuated in the subsequent classical dictionaries, revealing the eclipse of *al-*

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[222] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:170-171.
[223] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:171.
[224] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:170-171.
[225] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:171.

ʿAyn's linguistically defined Arabness. Al-Jawharī's (d.c.393/1002-3) *al-Ṣiḥāḥ* written one generation after al-Azharī, states plainly that Arabs are an "ethnic group" (*jīl min al-nās*),[226] distinguished as the people of "clear Arabness" (*bayyin al-ʿurūba*) and the inhabitants of the first cities of Islam (*al-amṣār*). Like al-Azharī, al-Jawharī does not rigorously separate Arabs from Bedouin, notwithstanding their distinct domiciles; he defines the *aʿrāb* as "those of them [the Arabs] who specifically inhabit the deserts",[227] unambiguously members of the Arab *jīl*. Al-Jawharī is not explicit about the meaning of 'Arabness'/ʿurūba, but he does cite it as a verbal noun connected with speaking Arabic,[228] suggesting, as al-Azharī also accepted, that language remains a key part of the identity, but unlike *al-ʿAyn*, there is no stipulation that 'Arab' connotes a speaker of correct/pure Arabic, it is instead a designation for a specific race of people.

Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī's (d.573/1178) *Shams al-ʿulūm* even more closely follows al-Azharī's definition of Arab, defining ʿarab as "the opposite of the non-Arab" (ʿajam),[229] and distinguishes between ethnically non-Arab ʿajam and linguistically not-Arabic aʿjam in the same terms as al-Azharī: "one who does not speak Arabic correctly/clearly, even if he is from the Arabs".[230] Lastly, Ibn Manẓūr's (d.711/1311) *Lisān al-ʿarab* repeats all of al-Azharī and al-Jawharī's definitions, but (pointedly) not *al-ʿAyn*'s: he speaks of the Arabs as a *jīl*/ethnic group who share blood-relations, making several mentions of *nasab*.[231] Ibn Manẓūr notes that a speaker of correct Arabic should be called ʿarabī al-lisān (Arabic-tongued), a decisive remark that intimates an Arabic learner can never become truly ʿarabī (Arab) himself, only his

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[226] Al-Jawharī *al-Ṣiḥāḥ* 1:178. He defines *jīl* as a "type of people" (*ṣinf min al-nās*), giving examples of the Turks and Rūm as distinct *jīl* (4:1664).

[227] Al-Jawharī *al-Ṣiḥāḥ* 1:178.

[228] Al-Jawharī *al-Ṣiḥāḥ* 1:179.

[229] Al-Ḥimyarī *Shams* 7:4456.

[230] Al-Ḥimyarī *Shams* 7:4381,4383.

[231] Ibn Manẓūr *Lisān* 1:586-587.

tongue can earn association with Arabness.[232] The shift away from, and the eventual eclipse of *al-ʿAyn*'s linguistic Arabness suggests that the identity experienced paradigmatic changes during the third/ninth century that call for closer scrutiny.

2.2(b) Arabs between language and lineage in classical philology

The distinction between *al-ʿAyn* and *Tahdhīb al-lugha*'s definitions of Arab has substantial practical consequence. *Al-ʿAyn*'s linguistic paradigm implies Arabness can be conceptualised as open-ended – anyone could be classified as *ʿarabī* if they learn to speak Arabic since there is no indication that Arabness is determined by other factors; likewise the non-Arab (*aʿjam*) are simply non-Arabic speakers. Al-Azharī's lineage-based system, however, is closed: it determines membership of the Arabic family by ancient bloodlines that cannot accept new members regardless of Arabic linguistic ability. Does *al-ʿAyn*'s definition imply that at the earlier date, a cohesive Arab genealogy was yet unformed and was incapable of acting as the touchstone of Arabness? To determine if *al-ʿAyn* indeed represents a 'pre-genealogical' notion of Arab identity, philological and exegetical texts written in the generation after al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad add context to the shift observed in the lexicons that reveals the genesis of a novel Muslim-era ideas of Arabness.

Evidence for the existence of debate over the linguistic or lineage conception of Arabness can be traced in early grammatical texts and exegesis of Qurʾān 41:44's challenging phrase "*[a]aʿjamiyyun wa-ʿarabiyyun*" ("non-Arabic and Arabic"). One reading of the verse follows the linguistic model which interprets the verse to mean that the Qurʾān rejects the notion that it contains a mixture of "non-Arabic and Arabic language". [233] Al-Ṭabarī's Qurʾānic exegesis, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān* evidences that a number of early Qurʾān readers interpreted the verse this way – this accords with *al-ʿAyn*'s linguistic parameters of Arabness: Arabic is a linguistic

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[232] Ibn Manẓūr *Lisān* 1:588.
[233] Al-Farrāʾ *Maʿānī* 3:19.

feature of the Qurʾān and not a marker of kin-based ethnicity.[234] But this was not the only exegesis: both al-Ṭabarī and the grammarian al-Farrāʾ (d.207/822-3) in his *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* note that other scholars imputed ethnic meanings into the verse, interpreting it as the Qurʾān's response to claims that the ethnic Arab Prophet (Muḥammad) had received non-Arabic language revelation.[235] This interpretation is now common, c.f. Abd al-Haleem's 2004 translation of the verse that reads "[the Qurʾān is not] foreign speech to an Arab",[236] which unequivocally affirms the Prophet's ethnic Arabness, but *al-ʿAyn*'s linguistic notion of "*ʿarabī*" and the alternative, early exegesis permit the translation "foreign speech to an Arabic speaker", leaving the question of Muḥammad's ethnic identity open-ended.

The two interpretations of Qurʾān 41:44 reflect the dichotomy of dictionary definitions: was Muḥammad an Arab by blood, or does the adjective *ʿarabī* merely refer to a language he understood or one used in liturgical contexts? This is relevant to the question Bashear posed over the relationship between Arabness and Islam, but Bashear only cursorily examined this verse, remarking that "several commentators set forth the notion that Muḥammad was an Arab prophet",[237] and perhaps because he did not consider the lexicographical evidence, he did not investigate how the articulations of Arabness in the lexicons illuminates debates between the early exegetes. Does the debate reveal a seismic shift in Muslim conceptualisation of Arabness towards genealogy? And what does this entail for our notions of the Arab community at the dawn of Islam?

I am aware of only two other very early extant texts which interpret Qurʾān 41:44. The earlier of them is Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's (d.150/767) *Tafsīr*, the extant

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[234] Al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr* 24:157-158.

[235] Al-Farrāʾ *Maʿānī* 3:19, al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr* 24:157-158.

[236] Abd al-Haleem (2004) 310.

[237] Bashear (1997) 49.

form of which dates to the period of *al-ʿAyn*. Muqātil interprets the verse as: "they say the Qurʾān is non-Arabic (*aʿjamī*) and it is revealed to Muḥammad and he is Arabic (*ʿarabī*), so [ordering Muḥammad] say: 'God revealed it Arabic (*ʿarabī*) so that you may understand it'".[238] Modern conceptions of Arabness and early Islam would interpret Muqātil's statement as endorsing Muḥammad's Arab ethnicity, but it must be noted that Muqātil never mentions Muḥammad's *nasab* (lineage) in his exegesis. This is significant since later exegetes (explored below) make unfailing comment on Muḥammad's genealogy, expressly defining his Arabness through Arabic tribal *nasab*. Since Muqātil eschews an ethnic/tribal connection, is his conception of *ʿarabī* more linguistic than hereditary? I am led to such an interpretation by Muqātil's treatment of Arabness and ethnicity throughout the rest of his *Tafsīr*. He speaks of Persians (*ahl Fāris*), Copts and Byzantines (*Rūm*) and he names many groups that would later be classified as 'Arab tribes', but he never intimates that those groups were unified as Arabs, nor does he ever refer to *al-ʿarab* as an ethnic group. Even when glossing the Qurʾān's references to "Arabic revelation", Muqātil does not state that the Qurʾān was revealed in the "language of the Arabs" (*lughat al-ʿarab*) as later exegetes would do;[239] he instead interprets the Qurʾān's references to "Arabic" as being essential for the Qurʾān's audience to understand (*fahima*)/contemplate (*ʿaqala*) the revelation.[240] Muqātil's treatment of *ʿarabī* has close parallels to *al-ʿAyn*'s *ʿarabī* definition's focus on linguistic comprehension without imputing genealogical cohesion.

As further evidence of Muqātil's idea of Arabness, consider the key Qurʾānic verse 9:128 "We have sent you a messenger from amongst yourselves". The major commentators from the fourth/tenth century onwards unanimously interpret the

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[238] Muqātil *Tafsīr* 3:746.

[239] See, for example, Ibn Kathīr *Tafsīr* 2:432,4:114.

[240] Muqātil *Tafsīr* 2:318,3:735

verse to mean that Muḥammad was an ethnically Arab prophet sent to the Arab ethnos. Al-Ṭabarī remarks: "God said *to the Arabs:*[241] 'Oh people (*qawm*), the messenger of God has come from amongst you'",[242] al-Zamakhsharī is even more explicit: "'from amongst you' means from your race (*jins*) and from your genealogy (*nasab*), Arab, Qurashī",[243] and al-Qurṭubī further still: "the verse entails praise of Muḥammad's genealogy – he is from pure Arab stock".[244] Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Qurṭubī's references to *jīl* and *nasab* echo the terminology used to define 'Arab' in dictionaries of their day, however, Muqātil interprets the verse with no mention of Arab *nasab* or even Quraysh tribe, and suffices to say the verse was addressed to the "people of Mecca",[245] the immediate audience of Revelation. That Muqātil eschews what all other exegetes assume to be a clear reference to the ethnic Arab community suggests he did not have such an axiomatic notion that a unified 'Arab race' was the Qurʾān's intended audience. This is again in keeping with *al-ʿAyn*'s emphasis on Arabic as a linguistic register, not a marker of a cohesive kin-based community, and we begin to appreciate that the developed discourse about Muḥammad's ethnic Arabness took some time for exegetes to articulate.

Fifty years after Muqātil's death, verse 41:44 was explained in *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, a grammatical Qurʾān commentary by the grammarian al-Akhfash (d.215/830). Compared with al-Farrāʾ's text of the same name noted above, al-Akhfash more laconically appraises the issue and clearly prefers the non-linguistic reading. He states that *aʿjamī* refers to the question of whether the Qurʾān was revealed in non-Arabic language and that *ʿarabī* refers to the person of the Prophet,

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[241] My emphasis.

[242] Al-Ṭabarī *Tafsīr* 11:101.

[243] Al-Zamakhsharī *al-Kashshāf* 2:314.

[244] Al-Qurṭubī *Jāmiʿ* 8:191. Later commentators repeat the notions of Arab race (*jīl* or *jins*) and lineage (*nasab*): see Ibn Kathīr (d.774/1373) *Tafsīr* 2:372 and al-Bayḍāwī (d.791/1389) *Tafsīr* 1:426.

[245] Muqātil *Tafsīr* 2:204.

not the Arabic language.[246] Considering the evidence diachronically, the early third/ninth century grammarians-cum-exegetes express an Arab community with shared lineage and shared history as the original ethnos addressed by the Qurʾān in starker terms than hitherto. The latter interpretation gained widespread acceptance by the fourth/tenth century when lexicons and exegetes speak straightforwardly about one 'Arab race' inhabiting the Arabian Peninsula in the Prophet's day. To explain the shift, I propose that notions of pan-Arab unity and a genealogical model to unify peoples who would become known as 'Arab tribes' must not have been well developed prior to the third/ninth century. I hypothesise that much more fluid notions of Arab identity circulated in the earlier period and that these were only gradually fashioned by genealogists into a cohesive whole. A closer review of Arabness and early genealogy is now required.

2.2(c) Arabness and contested lineage

The hypothesis that al-ʿAyn's avoided mention of Arab lineage (*nasab*) because a pan-Arab genealogical unity had not been systematised in his day is supported by a fascinating anecdote dated to the same period (the end of the reign of al-Rashīd (170-193/786-809) and the beginning of al-Amīn's (193-198/809-813)) recorded in Abū ʿUmar Muḥammad al-Kindī's (d.after 355/966) *Kitāb Quḍāt Miṣr*. Al-Kindī describes a peculiar situation in which the population of the town of al-Ḥaras in Egypt's Eastern Delta reportedly claimed to be Arabs of the Quḍāʿa group in order to be included in the official *Dīwān* and so gain entitlement to a government stipend.[247] Their claim was not accepted, and despite being offered a bribe of six thousand dinars to include them on the *Dīwān*, the Egyptian presiding judge deferred decision, referring the matter to the Caliph. The Ḥarasīs' subsequent

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[246] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 2:509.
[247] Al-Kindī *Governors* 397-399.

delegation to Baghdad was also expensive,[248] but they eventually forged or bribed their way to receiving an opinion from an Iraqi scholar of genealogy, al-Mufaḍḍal ibn Faḍāla, that proved their lineage to the Arab tribe of Quḍāʿa. The Caliph al-Amīn accepted the 'evidence' and ordered their names be entered on the Egyptian *Dīwān*, but in Egypt, the governor still demanded further Arab witnesses to confirm that the Ḥarasīs were indeed Arabs, and while they were eventually successful, al-Kindī notes that the witnesses were all from the Syrian Desert and al-Ḥawf (the edge of the Sinai), implying that the other Arabs in Egypt did not accept the Ḥarasīs' Arabness, and the domicile of the witnesses – exterior to *Jazīrat al-ʿArab* – may also be a mark against their true Arabness-credibility. Al-Kindī closes the story with a pointed remark that the Ḥarasīs "hounded" the judge day and night in this petition,[249] further implying that the final acceptance of their Arabness was perhaps more a matter of convenience than conviction of the genuineness of their claim. Al-Kindī also relates an invective poem against the Ḥarasīs from an Egyptian Arab:

> How strange a matter it is that a gang,
>
> Copts from amongst us have become Arabs!
>
> They say 'Our father is the [Arab] Ḥawtak',
>
> But their father is a Coptic lout of uncertain past,
>
> They brought witnesses – brutes from al-Ḥawf
>
> Who shouted out daft allegations of their relation;
>
> May God curse those satisfied with their claim 'til the very last setting of the sun!

The anecdote reveals the role of kinship in proving Arabness as a practical matter at the end of the second/eighth century, but also shows how contested (and fluid) kinship could be (in keeping with the hypothesis that genealogy had not yet been

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[248] They are said to have spent a "great sum of money" (*māl ʿaẓīm*) (397). In a related anecdote al-Kindī notes it may have cost a further two thousand dinars (398).

[249] "The people of al-Ḥaras would hound (*yuṭīfūn*) [the judge] al-ʿUmarī and his secretary Zakariyā ibn Yaḥyā, coming by day if he went by day, and coming by night if he went by night" (399).

wholly systematised). Al-Kindī's story was only recorded in the fourth/tenth century, but it mirrors the tenor of an anecdote written in the early third/ninth century by al-Jāḥiẓ, in his *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*,[250] where he reports a story from his informant Abū al-Jahjāh about

> an old man who claimed he was from the tribe of Kinda before looking at all into the lineage (*nasab*) of Kinda. I asked him one day when he was with me: 'Who are you from?' He responded: 'From Kinda', to which I asked: 'From which [sub-tribe] of them?' He responded: 'This is not the place for such speech, God bless you!'[251]

Al-Jāḥiẓ places this anecdote in one of his many sections of witty diversions, classifying it as a droll tale (*nawādir*), but it evidences an environment of uncertain Arab tribal lineages. For a scholar such as al-Jāḥiẓ, ignorance of the proper proof of lineage was amusing, but for the old man, he had either circulated in society falsely masquerading as a Kindite, or actually was a Kindite but was unable to establish his connection to one of the tribal sub-groups which genealogists had determined to be 'correct'.[252]

When read in the context of *al-ʿAyn*'s non-lineage definition of 'Arab', al-Kindī's tale of contested lineage and al-Jāḥiẓ's sarcastic recounting of a flawed claim to Arab lineage depict an early third/ninth century Arabness fluidity when genealogy was for sale and pan-Arab family trees were only imprecisely articulated. In this context, al-Jāḥiẓ is again instructive. His remarkable definition of Arabness in

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[250] Pellat dates *al-Ḥayawān* "anterieur à 232" ((1984) 139).

[251] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Ḥayawān* 3:5.

[252] In a modern anthropological context considered below, Lancaster observed that actual living memories do not recall the complete lineage of a given tribe (1981) 26. He found a wide, unfilled gap between a tribe's supposed founding fathers and the remembered ancestors of contemporary tribesmen which would make the establishment of comprehensive family trees completely conjectural; a problem al-Jāḥiẓ's third/ninth century Kindite aspirant evidently encountered!

Risāla fī Manāqib al-Turk (written between 218-227/833-842)[253] reveals an attempt to articulate Arab unity in the face of genealogical uncertainty. Al-Jāḥiẓ writes:

> If you ask: how can all of the children of [ʿAdnān and Qaḥṭān – the progenitors of the 'Northern' and 'Southern' Arabs, respectively] be Arabs since they come from different fathers?
>
> We reply: when the Arabs became one, they became equal in their land, language, characteristics, motivation, pride, zealotry, ethics and character. Then they were [as if] cast into one mould and poured out as one, they were all in one form; their component parts were similar. When that similitude became pronounced in all generalities and particularities ... they reached a decision about noble descent [ḥasab], this became the cause for a second birth, such that they married along these lines and became in-laws because of it. ʿAdnān absolutely prohibited intermarriage with the tribe of Isaac, the brother of Ishmael, but over time they openly welcomed intermarriage with the tribe of Qaḥṭān, son of ʿĀbir[254] ... This proves that genealogy was agreed between them, and these concepts took the place of close relationships of common birth.[255]

The above intersects with a longer discourse in the *Risāla* about the relationship between *umma* (people/ethnos) and genealogy. It is noteworthy that al-Jāḥiẓ sidesteps precise lineage by proposing that the Arab *umma* did not arise from one eponymous ancestor, but that different peoples who recognised their similarities on account of various commonalities agreed amongst themselves to form a kin relationship and to maintain it, achieving the "second birth", *i.e.* the basis of lineage-based Arabness. For al-Jāḥiẓ, similarity engendered blood ties, not the other way around. His notion of subjective, consensual Arabness thus sits between

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[253] The date range as proposed by Pellat (1984) 161.

[254] *I.e.* the sons of ʿAdnān descended from Ishmael did not marry into their own kin (the descendants of Isaac), but accepted marriage into the descendants of a different lineage altogether: Qaḥṭān, who was believed to have no relation with them.

[255] Al-Jāḥiẓ *Rasāʾil* 1:11.

the fully open-ended linguistic definition of 'Arab' in *al-ʿAyn* (originally written about fifty years earlier) and al-Azharī's entirely closed lineage-based model (written over a century later), and adds weight to the proposition that the supposedly 'traditional' genealogies of the Arab tribes so consistently maintained in later literature were not traditional at all, but rather novel solutions of second/eighth and third/ninth century scholars to create a sense of ethnic cohesion around formerly separate groups. These Muslim writers created an entirely new concept of pre-Islamic Arab kin-based identity which eventually crossed into the dictionary definition of *ʿarabī*.

2.3 Arab genealogy in early Islam

Exploring the constructedness of Arab genealogy confronts yet another well-worn paradigm in Arabic studies. Modern scholars traditionally accept that the Arabs envisage history through a "genealogical imagination",[256] and that, from the earliest times, the Arab fixation on genealogy filtered into manifold forms of Arabic literary output. Since later classical times, Muslim authors emphasised the pre-Islamic Arabs' special expertise in the 'science of genealogy' (*ʿilm al-nasab/ansāb*),[257] and modern scholars have tended to follow suit,[258] proposing that pre-Islamic genealogical expertise played a formative role in shaping Arabic historiography,[259]

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[256] I borrow the apt term from the title of Andrew Shryock's 1997 monograph on Bedouin tribal history discussed below.

[257] See, for example, al-Shahristānī's heresiographical *al-Milal* 662 Ibn Fāris' philological *al-Ṣāḥibī* 76. Ibn Ḥazm's *Jamhara* 4-5 notes the Arabs' early expertise in genealogy and argues that the Prophet himself urged its study.

[258] Qaṭṭāṭ (2006) 190 identifies genealogy as a unique hallmark of pre-Islamic Arabs. Khalidi (1994) 5 refers to pre-Islamic genealogy as "the well known Arabian tribal preoccupation", and Rosenthal proposes that genealogical writing may have pre-dated historical writing in Arabic (1968) 99. See also Rosenthal *EI²* "Nasab" 7:967 and Duri (1987).

[259] Genealogy "conditioned the Muslim mind for the acceptance of world history" (Rosenthal (1968) 21-22). Duri (1962) 46 argues that genealogy and memories of pre-Islamic battles were "not history per se" (he adopts a positivist definition of history), but accords genealogy a key role in fostering a pre-Islamic Arabic interest in narratives of the past.

and even fostered the reliance on *isnād* in hadith studies.[260] The innate 'Arab penchant' for genealogy, however, is a generalisation based on assumptions about a primordial Arab character which I problematized at the outset of this thesis. Whilst the bi-partite ʿAdnān/Qaḥṭān model of 'Northern Arab'/'Southern Arab' ancestry is assumed to reflect pre-Islamic conceptions of the Arab ethnos,[261] studies of genealogy in the modern Middle East reveal the fluidity of family trees which enables us to probe classical genealogies and explore the extent to which they only gradually articulated Arab origins on ancestral lines.

2.3(a) Contemporary observations on Arabian Genealogy

The tribal arrangement of *Arabian* society today perpetuates the notion that tribalism is an innate form of *Arab* social organisation and that kinship is the secure basis of tribal identity. But modern studies of Arabian tribes reveal that the ostensible straightforwardness of family tree schemata of tribal interrelation are much more complex. William Lancaster's 1981 analysis of the genealogy of Rwala Bedouin groups in Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia critiqued three stereotypes that supposedly underpin Arab tribal genealogy: that (a) tribes are named after eponymous ancestors; (b) tribesmen can trace their lineage directly from those ancestors; and (c) descent is traced patrilineally. Lancaster discovered the contrary to be true: the supposed ancestor figures were unlikely to have ever really existed,[262] there was a long gap of many generations in remembered genealogy between an individual's immediate ancestors and the supposed 'founding fathers' of his tribe,[263] and kin groups could just as easily form on matrilineal as patrilineal lines – matrilineal relatives were simply made to appear patrilineal by recasting them as

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[260] Shryock (1997) 320-321.

[261] Rentz *EI²* "Ḏjazīrat al-ʿArab" 1:544-545.

[262] Lancaster (1981) 24-25.

[263] In relation to this fundamental gap between living memory and ancient ancestors, Lancaster observed that no one "attempted, even as a joke, to invent ancestors to fill in between" (1981) 26.

relations via *ibn ʿamm* (sons of an uncle).[264] Most importantly, Lancaster observed that "practical considerations lead to the use of all sorts of relationships, which are seen as used as assets giving access to a wider variety of options than would otherwise have been the case".[265] In describing genealogy as an "asset", he stressed its utilitarian functions whereby groups cement current economic and political relationships by expressing their contemporary shared interests in terms of historical genealogy. As a result, tribesmen "manipulate the genealogy to fit in with the working arrangements of groups on the ground",[266] and ostensible kin-relationships are not indicative of ancient blood ties, but rather of shared political/economic interests in the present.

The genealogical edifice is inherently fluid: "a society that appears to be constrained by the past ... is in fact generating the very genealogy through which it explains the present",[267] and Andrew Shryock's study of tribal history-making in Jordan reached similar conclusions. He argued that expressions of kin relationships are suited to an oral context: they are descriptive of current political and economic alliances and so necessarily must be malleable to reflect changing circumstances.[268] Shryock witnessed what he called the "creation of a new tribe", which he argued was an "old Bedouin practice",[269] inasmuch as the past is constantly invoked in tribal discourses, but their narratives of the past and the genealogical edifices they construct "serve as a commentary on *now* as it happened *then*".[270] Tribal history is "not simply an ideal image of lineage structure projected backward in time. It is just the opposite: an ideal image of the past ... told in the face of a world that is rapidly

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[264] Lancaster (1981) 20-22,29-30.

[265] Lancaster (1981) 23.

[266] Lancaster (1981) 34.

[267] Lancaster (1981) 35.

[268] Shryock (1997) 34.

[269] Shryock (1997) 325.

[270] Shryock (1997) 146 (his emphasis).

changing".[271] The "genealogical imagination" Shryock identified is thus not amenable to written records: writing, which ossifies 'true' lineage relationships is neither accurate nor useful: to record a genealogical structure that exists at a given time merely fixes the political relationships prevailing at that moment, and once set in writing, written genealogies lack the flexibility to invent new blood-ties necessary to reflect changing circumstances.

Hence the Jordanian tribesmen invoke their ancient ancestors not to investigate who they are, but rather to explain who they want to be; genealogical history is aspirational and forward looking as opposed to empirical and grounded in a fixed past. If genealogy is so inherently mutable, and if every tribesman is involved in reworking lineage structures, one may ask why Lancaster and Shryock's Bedouin continued to invoke genealogy as a serious discourse, but we must grasp the practical utility of genealogy. Notions of kinship are extremely strong emotive bonds that offer concrete means for groups to express otherwise chance relationships that bring them into alliance or war. Nothing explains why we are at war so well as 'memory' of an ancient blood feud, and nothing can cement an alliance so well as notions of shared ancestry. Akin to Benedict Anderson's theories of European nationalism, whereby the nation is constructed to appear to "loom out of an immemorial past",[272] notions of lineage construct a "genealogical nationalism"[273] by which seemingly cohesive *ethnicity* can emerge. Notions of lineage allow formerly disparate groups to imagine shared kinship, and inventing a common genealogy is perhaps the most efficient means to create a consciousness of ethnic identity.

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[271] Shryock (1997) 212.
[272] Anderson (1991) 11.
[273] Shryock (1997) 326.

Lancaster and Shryock's observations appear applicable to classical models of Arab genealogy. As Lancaster found to be the case in modern tribal lineages, Ḥayāt Qaṭṭāṭ uncovered a wealth of matrilineal links in the classical Muslim genealogy that belie the supposed patrilineal system.[274] The ubiquitous use of the verb *daraja* (he left no offspring) in classical genealogies' discussions of ancient ancestors also permits a powerful streamlining of early steps in the family tree to connect near contemporaries with eponymous ancient ancestors without unwieldy bifurcated models. The '*daraja* model' allowed classical genealogists to effectively 'kill-off' past generations to traverse memory gaps similar to those explored by Lancaster. Furthermore, Hugh Kennedy suggested that the constructedness observed in modern oral tribal genealogies and Lancaster's notion of "generative genealogy" on a "must-have-been" basis[275] also apply to the material which Arab genealogists began to gather, and then recorded in written encyclopaedic pan-Arab family trees during the generation of the famous Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d.204/819 or 206/821).[276] Ibn al-Kalbī became a seminal figure in Arab genealogy whom almost all third/ninth and fourth/tenth century genealogists cited as their primary authority; and while his two extant works, *Jamharat al-Nasab* and *Nasab Maʿadd wa-l-Yaman* do not contain all the details of later works, they established the parameters of subsequent genealogical writing.[277] Regarding Shryock's observations

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[274] Qaṭṭāṭ (2006) 192-209.

[275] Lancaster (1981) 32.

[276] Kennedy (1997) 539-544.

[277] 'Arab genealogy' is, like the rest of Arab lore written in the third/ninth century supposed to record an oral tradition preserved since pre-Islamic times. Modern scholars note that "the uninterrupted transmission of genealogy from the times of the *Jāhiliyyah* was conditioned by the social-political situation of the Arab empire" (Kister and Plessner (1976) 50), and the reign of al-Maʾmūn and the generation of Ibn al-Kalbī are cited as a seminal period in *nasab* writing (*ibid*). Classical scholars note Ibn al-Kalbī was the "head of genealogy" (*raʾs fī al-nasab*), he is widely cited by Ibn Ḥabīb and Ibn Durayd, important writers about Arab culture and language in the third/ninth and early fourth/tenth century, and Ibn Ḥazm's famous genealogy *Jamhara* owes its model to Ibn al-Kalbī. W Atallah dubs Ibn al-Kalbī "the uncontested master of Arab genealogy", and "the source, arbiter

on the difficult transition from oral to written genealogy, Chase Robinson proposed that the mid-third/ninth century experienced an analogous process that "amalgamat[ed] disparate and fragmented accounts into the large synthetic works" and entailed a major rethinking of history and integration of previously contested versions of the past.[278] Closer study of third/ninth century constructions of genealogy is, therefore, a necessary next step in analysing Arabness.

Notwithstanding the above critiques of the empirical veneer classical genealogies present, genealogical texts are usually not brought into dialogue with other third/ninth century writings. For example, Khalidi explains the heightened third/ninth century attention to genealogy as an attempt of a dwindling Arab political elite to maintain its grip on power by invoking the glories of their past ancestors,[279] an argument that reflects the traditional paradigm that the Arab ethnos 'must have' existed as a cohesive community at the dawn of Islam. But as Suliman Bashear warned, such *a priori* assumptions are anachronistic. Perhaps the amalgamation of Arabian genealogy was not made at the behest of Arabs keen to promote their ethnos, but was instead part of a wider historical reconstruction that enabled Arabness to be conceptualised in a brand-new way. Whilst genealogy was undoubtedly important for earlier Muslims (though we lack texts to prove it),[280] it seems relevant that Ibn al-Kalbī and the first extant encyclopaedic genealogies were exactly contemporaneous with the period in which we found that philologists started to shift their definition of 'Arab' from a linguistic to a lineage-based model. Perhaps only from Ibn al-Kalbī's generation can we can speak of '*Arab* genealogy'

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and sometimes abused dispenser of titles of nobility" (*EI²* 4:495), and more recent surveys of Arab genealogy cited Ibn al-Kalbī as the "immensely popular ... skeleton upon which all later manufactured genealogies could be attached" (Szombathy (2002) 5). See also Kennedy (1997) 531.

[278] Robinson (2003) 41. See also Rosenthal *EI²* "Nasab" 6:967, Khalidi (1994) 50.

[279] Khalidi (1994) 50.

[280] Kennedy (1997) 540-543 names earlier genealogists, but it must be stressed that they are known anecdotally, and not through surviving works.

replacing '*Arabian* tribal genealogies', and his generation may mark the first fruits of conceptualising 'Arabs' as a kinship community. The new pan-Arab genealogy logically would have induced the grammarians to shift their interpretation of the Qurʾān as being revealed not just in an "Arabic language", but also to a now clearly conceptualisable Arab ethnos. Reading philology and genealogy together thus prompts fresh questions about the cohesiveness of the Arab ethnos at the dawn of Islam. Was there such a thing as an Arab collective identity, or did the late second/eighth century interest in genealogy actually create the sense of an Arab past by plotting an imaginary bloodline into ancient times and so radically recast the notion of Arabness? I next interrogate the traditional model of the Arab genealogical past to reveal the genesis of a 'must-have-been' model that crafted a history for an Arab people.

2.3(b) Arab origins expressed through lineage: the traditional 'classical' model

The traditional ʿAdnān/Qaḥṭān 'Northern'/'Southern' Arab genealogical system depicts the Arabs as an ancient ethnos. Qaḥṭān is situated in classical Muslim chronologies at the point of the dispersal of the world's people from the Tower of Babel, and two prophets frequently mentioned in the Qurʾān, Hūd and Ṣāliḥ are imagined to be ancient 'Arab Prophets' related to the ancestral Qaḥṭān.[281] This model is supposedly deep rooted in Arabic historiography: for instance, the sixth/twelfth century Ḥanbalite jurist Ibn al-Jawzī's (d.597/1200-1201) *al-Muntaẓam*, a chronological history from Creation to Ibn al-Jawzī's own lifetime, narrates a

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[281] The identification of Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shuʿayb as 'Arab Prophets' is a function of the conceptual meld of Arab/Arabian in modern thought. The stories of these extra-Biblical prophets are located in Arabia, and hence it is easy for scholars to slip into identifying them as 'Arabs': Tottoli calls them "Arabian Prophets" (2002) 45, but also "Arab stories" (2002) 50. Though not all scholars directly emphasise the Arabness of those prophets, (Gilliot writes the term "Arab Prophets" in inverted commas (2003) 3:525), there is a tendency to assume Arabness (Grill (2003) 3:393, Böwering (2004) 4:218); consider also Wheeler's 2006 "Arab Prophets of the Qurʾān and Bible". 'Arab Prophets' tend to be under-problematized in terms of ethnicity.

marfūᶜ hadith on the authority of the Companion Abū Dharr in which Muḥammad reveals that there have been 124,000 prophets since Creation and lists the well-known ones, *i.e.* those commonly encountered in the Qurʾān and later exegesis, saying:

> Four are *Suryānī*: Adam, Shīth [Seth], Akhnūkh [Enoch] – he is Idrīs, the first to write with a pen – and Noah. Four are from the Arabs: Hūd, Shuᶜayb, Ṣāliḥ and your Prophet, Muḥammad … The first of the Israelite Prophets was Moses, and the last was Jesus.[282]

The hadith is recorded in a chapter on the summa of prophetic history and invites an ethnic conceptualisation of prophecy, grouping prophets by their respective 'peoples'. This approach enables readers to think about 'Arab prophets' as a distinct category, as modern scholars do, and the inclusion of Muḥammad in the Arab group naturally privileges 'Arab prophecy'. Emphasising the cohesion and importance of 'Arab prophecy', Ibn al-Jawzī next relates further hadith with ethnic insinuations, narrating from Ibn al-ᶜAbbās that "the Persians had no prophet",[283] and from Muᶜāwiya ibn Ḥayda a hadith in which Muḥammad says his companions are "the fulfilment of seventy 'peoples' (*umma*) … the best and most honourable [people] before God".[284] Ibn Ḥayda's hadith makes no express mention of the word 'Arab', but given its context in *al-Muntaẓam*, placed after the identification of Muḥammad as an 'Arab prophet' and the pointed remark about the absence of Persian prophets, the chapter's ethnic undertones prompt a positive interpretation of ancient Arabs in the history of prophecy.

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[282] Ibn al-Jawzī *al-Muntaẓam* 1:400.

[283] Ibn al-Jawzī *al-Muntaẓam* 1:402.

[284] Ibn al-Jawzī *al-Muntaẓam* 1:403.

Al-Muntaẓam purports to be a quintessentially orthodox history: it is based on al-Ṭabarī's earlier canonical *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*,[285] Ibn al-Jawzī used the traditionist methodologies of narrating each story with rigorous *isnād*, and expressly edited his text to avoid what he styled "legends" (*khurāfāt*) and "far-fetched details" (*baʿīdat al-ṣiḥḥa*).[286] By narrating the discussion of 'Arab prophets' via sayings attributed to Muḥammad with accompanying *isnād*,[287] Ibn al-Jawzī purports to communicate the 'orthodox', 'Prophet-endorsed' view maintained since Muḥammad's day. Closer analysis of *al-Muntaẓam*'s material, however, suggests otherwise.

The innovativeness of Ibn al-Jawzī's 'orthodoxy' is hidden within the Abū Dharr hadith. Ibn Qutayba (d.276/889) narrated the hadith in a nearly identical form 300 years earlier in *al-Maʿārif*,[288] but it is crucial to note that while the text of the anecdote is the same, Ibn Qutayba does not ascribe the hadith to Muḥammad or even to the Companion Abū Dharr. Instead, Ibn Qutayba relates it on the authority of Wahb ibn Munabbih and Ibn ʿAbbās, two narrators who commonly appear in Arabic literature as sources of material from Biblical and other pre-Islamic traditions, and whose trustworthiness is often critiqued.[289] Ibn Qutayba studied

[285] For identification of al-Ṭabarī's history as *al-Muntaẓam*'s "main work of reference", and Ibn al-Jawzī's edit of earlier material to be "more careful of chronology", see de Somogyi (1932) 58-59,65. See 69-76 for a list of concordances between the two histories.

[286] Ibn al-Jawzī *al-Muntaẓam* 1:6.

[287] Of the opening nine statements in the chapter of *al-Muntaẓam*, seven are ascribed to Muḥammad (1:400-404).

[288] Ibn Qutayba *al-Maʿārif* 56.

[289] G Vajda dates scepticism to the Ibn al-ʿAbbās, Wahb ibn Munabbih *Isrāʾīliyyāt* source milieu to the third/ninth century, noting "extravagant flights of fancy" which became attached to these stories (*EI*² "Isrāʾīliyyāt" 4:212). Khouri is much more sympathetic, seeking to rehabilitate the image of Wahb as a reliable narrator (*EI*² "Wahb ibn Munabbih" 11:34-35), and the reality is likely somewhere between: Wahb/Ibn ʿAbbās anecdotes existed at an early date and were open to later manipulation, as Colby (2008) reveals was the case for narratives of Muḥammad's Night Journey. In the third/ninth century discursive milieu, a prophetic hadith would clearly be deemed more authoritative than potentially suspect *Isrāʾīliyyāt* tales.

hadith,[290] and it is curious that he would narrate the anecdote from a weaker authority if he had the option to ascribe it to Muḥammad. But he may not have had that luxury: analysis of the Abū Dharr hadith's citation outside of Ibn al-Jawzī's *al-Muntaẓam* reveals that the anecdote may not have actually existed in the form of a Prophetic hadith in the third/ninth century – it only first appears in mid-fourth/tenth hadith compilations of Ibn Ḥibbān (d.354/965) and al-Ājurrī (d.360/970).[291] When Ibn Qutayba mustered evidence for the concept of 'Arab prophets' in the third/ninth century, therefore, the Prophetic hadith was probably not available, thus calling into question whether Muḥammad and the first Muslims ever expressed opinions about earlier 'Arab prophets'. The early fourth/tenth century shift in the hadith's ascription from Wahb ibn Munabbih and the Judeo-Christian source milieu to Muḥammad is suggestive of an attempt to generate enhanced credibility for the notion of Arab prophethood by invoking the higher authority of Prophetic hadith. It also implies that Hūd and Ṣāliḥ's 'Arabness' was contested, and that scholars eventually shifted 'proof' to Muḥammad in order to silence doubts. The existence of dispute raises fundamental questions of Arab identity: if early generations of Muslims did not always believe that Hūd and Ṣāliḥ or their respective peoples, ʿĀd and Thamūd, were Arabs, how exactly did they conceptualise Arab history, and can we trace the steps by which a genealogy was created to extend Arabness back to an ancient past?

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[290] Lecomte (1965) 259-264. Ibn Qutayba's familiarity with hadith appears in his section on hadith scholars in *al-Maʿārif* where he lists brief biographical information typical of contemporary ʿilm al-rijāl texts (*al-Maʿārif* 501-527). In *Taʾwīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, Ibn Qutayba also vigorously defends the methods of hadith scholars amongst whom he presumably counted himself a member.

[291] Ibn Balbān *Ṣaḥīḥ* 2:77; al-Ājurrī *al-Arbaʿūn* 125. The early fourth/tenth century al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* quotes a version of the Abū Dharr hadith in which Muḥammad enumerates the prophets since Creation, but it contains neither mention of 'Arab prophets' nor other ethnic groupings (1:150-151).

2.3(c) Differing Memories of ʿĀd, Thamūd and the Arabs up to the fourth/tenth century

Excepting the Qurʾān, the earliest surviving text to describe the so-called 'Arab prophets' is Muqātil ibn Sulaymān's exegesis, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, which comments on each Qurʾānic reference to Hūd and Ṣāliḥ. Notably, and in accordance with the hypothesis that ʿĀd and Thamūd were not initially incorporated into a unified conception of 'Arab history', Muqātil makes no reference to their Arabness. Whilst he adds stories that flesh out the brief citations of these ancient people in the Qurʾān, Muqātil counts ʿĀd and Thamūd among the "past people" (*al-umam al-khāliya*) destroyed by God,[292] and never as *al-ʿarab al-bāʾida* (the "disappeared Arabs") as later exegetes and historians identify them.[293] Furthermore, Muqātil cites Thamūd as a distinct and past *umma* (race/people),[294] never implying that they were part of the Arab *umma.* Muqātil groups Thamūd with the people of Lūṭ (Lot) by virtue that both shared neighbouring homelands on the borders of the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant, though Lūṭ's community would never, to my knowledge, be counted as 'Arabs' in later exegesis.[295] The absence of express mention of 'Arab prophets' or the Arabness of ʿĀd and Thamūd, together with the absence of any concrete references to Arab ethnicity in Muqātil's *Tafsīr* more generally as noted

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[292] Muqātil *Tafsīr* 2:181 in reference to Q9:70.

[293] Jawād ʿAlī accepts, with some reservations, the divisions of Arabs into the 'disappeared', 'Arab Arab' and 'Arabised' "*ṭabaqāt*" (1968-1973) 1:294-298. In respect of Hūd and ʿĀd, ʿAlī notes the genealogies linking first/seventh century Arabs to the ancient prophet was likely politically motivated and spurious (1968-1973) 1:313-314, but he does not accept what he calls the "rulings" of the "Orientalists" (*aḥkām al-mustashriqīn*) about ʿĀd's status as myth (1968-1973) 298, and he does not problematize ʿĀd's Arabness. See also Nāfiʿ (1952) 29-32.

[294] Muqātil *Tafsīr* 2:399.

[295] Muqātil *Tafsīr* 3:748.

above, calls into question whether any early Arabic writers ever conceptualised these ancient *Arabians* as part of '*Arab* history'.[296]

2.3(c)(i) – Literary accounts of Arab Origins: Sources

Ibn al-Jawzī's citation of Prophetic hadith to assert the Arabness of Hūd and Ṣāliḥ follows an earlier model. Extant third/ninth century texts also preserve numerous Prophetic hadith to support their conceptions of Arab origins, but they narrate such divergent reconstructions that it is implausible that Muḥammad himself could have been responsible for all the views ascribed to him. Whatever Muḥammad's own opinions on Arab history were, the recorded hadith must include a large number of later forgeries adduced to support different competing notions of Arab origins. The fact that Arab genealogy was articulated through the voice of the Prophet – the highest form of terrestrial authority – underlines the vibrancy and importance of debates about Arabness, but the spectre of forgery prompts questions as to how these hadith can be evaluated.

Goldziher and Schacht's famous critiques argue for widespread hadith fabrication between the mid second/eighth and early third/ninth century.[297] They ground their arguments in study of hadith content (*matn*) and ignore the *isnād* that Muslims use to vouch for authenticity. Schacht argued that *isnād* was essentially a

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[296] J. Stetkevych (1996) analysed Thamūd stories at length through the lens of mythology and the creation of an Arabic cultural "self" (2). Studying pre-Islamic history as a literary exercise of mythification is stimulating, but I argue it needs firm roots in historical analysis too. J. Stetkevych grounds his work in the two paradigmatic stereotypes I critique in this thesis – *al-Jāhiliyya* and Arabness (5-9), and so does not see the Thamūd stories as part of a wider, developing discourse. He instead uses Muslim-era Arabic literature as an essentially monolithic bloc that imported a pre-Islamic myth of Thamūd as the "Arabic *Götterdämmerung*" (see, especially, 69-77); this is an erudite analogy, though one which transfers Wagner's sophisticated nineteenth-century German secular nationalism to the Late Antique Muḥammad and Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. He makes little reference to the historical contexts of the Thamūd stories and their use in early Islam – which I note presently – I argue herein that we can trace how Thamūd only eventually became part of Arab history; though J Stetkevych's reasoning offers interesting background as to why Thamūd entered the Arab story.

[297] Goldziher (1889-1890) 2:89,126; Schacht (1950). More recent partisans of the sceptical approach can be found in Wansborough (1977) and Cook (1981).

ruse to engender authority for material that had been concocted by later Muslim jurists, this theory bolsters the argument that the hadith in *al-Muntaẓam* about Hūd and Ṣāliḥ's status as 'Arab prophets' was first developed by Muslim scholars and only later shifted into the mouth of the Prophet with an appropriate *isnād* to assert its 'orthodoxy'. But in various other contexts, Goldziher and Schacht's methods are themselves critiqued: some, such as Azami and Nabia Abbott attempted to refute Schacht entirely,[298] while others, such as Motzki and Juynboll demonstrated that *isnād* are in fact a useful means to appraise some hadith.[299] Motzki's findings, based on examination of al-Ṣanʿānī's (d.212/828) *Muṣannaf* which was not available in a scholarly printed edition during Schacht's lifetime, argued that we can confidently date a large number of hadith to the mid-late first/seventh century, only one generation after the Prophet's death.[300] It is now untenable to assume that all hadith are later fabrications and that the *isnād* is simply smoke and mirrors, but readers faced with the dizzying array of preserved hadith about Arab origins will naturally wonder how we can make sense of the web of contradictory statements.

In approaching the Arab origin hadith, I propose that the on-going debates on hadith authenticity are in fact a red herring. The hadith in al-Ṣanʿānī's *Muṣannaf* and those in Ibn Abī Shayba's (d.235/849) much larger *Muṣannaf* which Scott Lucas recently studied[301] were shown to be, more or less, datable to a very early period, but they are legal hadith of which only a small minority were actually ascribed to

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[298] Azami (1992), Abbott (1967) 7*ff*.
[299] Motzki (1991) and (2005), Juynboll (1983).
[300] Motzki (1991) 21 stresses "the material cannot be regarded as completely truthful. This even Muslims themselves did not claim", but he accepts hadith are a more reliable source for first/seventh century research than Schacht *et al* supposed.
[301] Lucas (2008).

the Prophet himself.[302] The Arab origin hadith, on the other hand, sit in a much less analysed and separate corner of hadith studies, and are unlike legal hadith since (a) they have no manifest legislative value; (b) each claims to record the words of the Prophet; and (c) almost none are contained in well-known hadith compilations. The famous hadith collectors make limited reference to Arabness when recording hadith about Muḥammad's own ethnicity; for example, both Ibn Ḥanbal's *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba* and Ibn Abī Shayba's *al-Muṣannaf* narrate a hadith in which Muḥammad describes himself at "the forefront of the Arabs" (*sābiq al-ʿarab*),[303] but ethnic allusions are rare. If the Arab origin hadith did pass between the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* (hadith experts) in the early period, none of the well-known collections record them (with only one exception).[304] The Arab origin hadith were instead recorded in histories, genealogies and prophetic biographies which presumably conformed to different standards of hadith criticism. The Arab origin hadith are thus unlike early Islamic jurisprudence which the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* preserved reasonably faithfully in the massive third/ninth century collections: they are statements that support different theories about Arab ethnicity and the past, and these hadith could perhaps be read as examples of the extreme end of what Wael Hallaq notes was a dubious body of material. Hallaq explains that hadith scholars were sceptical about all but a score of definitively authentic hadith (the *mutawātir*), hence the question of the Arab origin hadith's authenticity need not detain us too long. As Hallaq concluded:

> the two most important groups in the study of hadiths … acknowledged the precarious epistemological status of the [hadith] literature, [so] we need not squander our energies in arguing about the matter of authenticity. We have been

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[302] Motzki and Lucas demonstrated that Muḥammad features in only some 10% of hadith in the legal chapters of al-Ṣanʿānī and Ibn Abī Shayba; 90% relate the legal opinions of first/seventh century jurists and traditionists.

[303] Ibn Abī Shayba *al-Muṣannaf* 16:465. Ibn Ḥanbal *Faḍāʾil* 2:909. It is perhaps a case in point that Ibn Ḥanbal does not narrate the hadith in his more authoritative *Musnad*.

[304] See Note 327.

told that except for a score of hadiths, the rest engenders probability, and

probability … and as we have also been unambiguously told by our sources - allows

for mendacity and error.[305]

The Arab origin hadith use the authority of the Prophetic voice to ground their

content in an authoritative-sounding shell, and to interpret them, we must read

them in the context of the books of *akhbār* and genealogy that cited them. The

results reveal a multidimensional third/ninth century debate over the fundamental

questions of Arab identity expressed through genealogy.

2.3(c)(ii) – Arabs and Maʿadd

One narrative emerges from a hadith reported in the main genealogical texts

of the early third/ninth century: Ibn al-Kalbī's *Jamharat al-Nasab*, Ibn Saʿd's

(d.230/845) *al-Ṭabaqāt* and Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ's (d.240/855) *al-Ṭabaqāt*. A version of

the hadith is also repeated in the *Nasab* section of Ibn Wahb's hadith collection,[306]

but none of the known third/ninth century hadith scholars repeated it. The hadith

details Muḥammad's ancestry, and "when Muḥammad recited genealogy and

reached [the ancestor] Maʿadd ibn ʿAdnān he would stop and then say, 'the

genealogists lie'".[307] Maʿadd was an ancient ancestor, about 20 generations removed

from Muḥammad,[308] but Maʿadd's lineage bears no connection to ʿĀd, Thamūd or

'Arab prophets', and Ibn al-Kalbī's *Jamhara* makes no reference to them within his

reconstruction of Arab genealogies either. If Maʿadd was the oldest known Arab

progenitor, the Arab ethnos was not nearly as old as later historians would intimate.

Ibn al-Kalbī's *Jamhara* respects the hadith and retains Maʿadd's seniority on

the Arab family tree, but by the latter part of the third/ninth century, the hadith's

citation dwindled and its text was even altered to downplay Maʿadd's position at the

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[305] Hallaq (1999) 90.

[306] Ibn Wahb *al-Jāmiʿ* 1.

[307] Ibn al-Kalbī *Jamhara* 17, Ibn Saʿd *Ṭabaqāt* 1:47, Ibn Khayyāṭ *Ṭabaqāt* 2-3.

[308] Ibn Khayyāṭ *Ṭabaqāt* 3.

top of the Arab family tree. Al-Balādhurī's (d.c.279/892) *Ansāb al-ashrāf* repeats the hadith's formula "the genealogists lie", but replaces the reference to Maʿadd with "Udad ibn ʿAdnān ibn Maʿadd", Maʿadd's grandfather.[309] Al-Balādhurī narrates further anecdotes (considered at the end of this chapter) in the same section that completely forget Maʿadd's status as Arab progenitor, focusing on ʿAdnān, Udad and Yemenis which bestow much greater antiquity to Arab origins than the Maʿadd model permits. Fourth/tenth century writers almost unanimously ignored the hadith – I have found it cited only in Ibn Durayd's (d.321/933) *al-Ishtiqāq*,[310] and like al-Balādhurī, Ibn Durayd also gives no indication that he believes Maʿadd represents the terminus of Arab lineage. Rather, he infers that the hadith intends that the names of prior generations are "Syriac [*sūriyānī*] names" which cannot be studied as Arabic language derivatives.[311] Ibn Durayd was a philologist, and his *al-Ishtiqāq* is not a strict genealogical text, but rather an etymological enquiry into Arab tribal names, and while it is interesting that he noted the generations of 'Arabs' prior to Maʿadd did not have 'Arabic' names, he gives no indication that he suspected Maʿadd's ancestors were ethnically non-Arab. The fact that Ibn Durayd did not deem non-Arabic names as incompatible with Arab ethnicity supports my thesis that later scholars considered bloodlines, not language, as the primary hallmark of Arabness. As I presently demonstrate, by the fourth/tenth century, ample narratives had been developed that broke through the 'Maʿadd barrier' and depicted the Arabs as a much more ancient people,[312] so even the philologist's observation about non-Arabic names did not alter his conviction of the Arabs' greater antiquity.

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[309] Al-Balādhurī *Ansāb* 1:14.

[310] Ibn Durayd *al-Ishtiqāq* 4-5,32.

[311] Ibn Durayd *al-Ishtiqāq* 32.

[312] Ibn Durayd himself examines the names of these 'more ancient', Yemeni Arabs in *al-Ishtiqāq* 361-362.

In Chapter 3, I consider additional evidence that Maʿadd indeed may have been the most ancient ancestor in pre-Islamic northwest Arabian memory, and the thesis that an Arab ethnos initially dated its origins to Maʿadd can be inferred from third/ninth century genealogical texts too. Although later texts trace Arab lineage far beyond Maʿadd, it is instructive that whilst the genealogy between Muḥammad and Maʿadd is consistently reported, there is no consensus on the names of Maʿadd's ancestors, indicating that those ancient generations were filled not from lingering memories from the past, but from creative constructions by later genealogists to forge an older lineage. In accordance with Lancaster and Shryock's observations of genealogy's malleability, meaning second/eighth century genealogists may have identified Maʿadd as the putative first Arab, but this model would not survive: Ibn al-Kalbī's *Jamhara* is the lone text to accept Maʿadd's seniority, and a second hadith, more widely cited and more elaborated upon with comments and supporting *akhbār* demonstrates that by the early third/ninth century, the Maʿadd-rooted identity was receding into a minority opinion.

2.3(c)(iii) – Arabs and Ishmael

The second narrative appears in a hadith where Muḥammad declares "All the Arabs are descendants of Ishmael son of Abraham".[313] Ishmael lived long before Maʿadd: al-Zubayrī's (d.236/851) *Nasab Quraysh* provides two possibilities for counting the missing generations between them, enumerating ten and forty, and other third/ninth century texts reflect a similar range.[314] The hadith thus not only makes the Arabs an older ethnos, but also creates a prophetic origin for their history with Ishmael and Abraham at the top of the family tree. The establishment

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[313] Ibn Saʿd *Ṭabaqāt* 1:43; Ibn Wahb *al-Jāmiʿ* 5

[314] Al-Zubayrī *Nasab* 3-4. Ibn Hishām's (d.218/833) *Sīra* 1:2 posits nine generations between Maʿadd and Ishmael while Ibn Saʿd (d.230/845) reports a range of between five and forty-one (*Ṭabaqāt* 1:47-48).

of blood relation between Muḥammad and a previous prophetic family is attractive, and it explains why third/ninth century texts concerned with sacred topics such as Muḥammad's ancestry[315] and the Quraysh tribe (unlike Ibn al-Kalbī's more 'secular' genealogical *al-Jamhara*)[316] narrate this hadith and refute the Maʿadd hadith above. Ibn Saʿd's *Ṭabaqāt* also glosses the hadith with *akhbār* that illustrate how arguments over Muḥammad's ancestry related to different reconstructions of Arab history in the first half of the third/ninth century.

Ibn Saʿd narrates that Ishmael was the "first to speak Arabic", and that before Ishmael travelled to Mecca with Abraham, he spoke Hebrew (*ʿibrāniyya*).[317] Ibn Saʿd also reports an opinion, ascribed to "more than one scholar [lit. people of knowledge (*ahl al-ʿilm*)]", that Ishmael was inspired by God to speak Arabic from birth.[318] Curiously, he follows this with a contradictory statement that Ishmael did not speak Arabic and that only his children did, but Ibn Saʿd reveals his preference for the 'Arabic speaking' Ishmael by narrating more anecdotes in support of it and by following it with the Prophetic hadith that "all of the Arabs are the children of Ishmael son of Abraham".[319] Ibn Saʿd next describes Ishmael's construction of Mecca's sanctum (a story derived from Qurʾān 2:125-127) and lists his children down

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[315] The hadith also appears in Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* 1:8 and the Prophetic biography section in Ibn Saʿd's *al-Ṭabaqāt* 1:43.

[316] Khurshīd Aḥmad Fāriq notes the importance of Quraysh genealogy in pro-Hashemite discourses intended to bolster the Abbasid Caliphs' authority (1985) 7-8. The articulation of prophetic ancestry in the above hadith renders *all* Arabs as the scion of prophecy, not just the Abbasids, however, and its appearance in "pro-Quraysh" texts such as al-Zubayrī's *Nasab*, Ibn Ḥabīb's *al-Munammaq* and biographies of the Prophet (*e.g.* Ibn Saʿd) suggests this genealogy emanated from a pro-Arab discourse, and not simply from praise for the Abbasids. Ibn al-Kalbī's *al-Jamhara* does begin with the Hashemites – certainly betraying the influence of early Abbasid agendas, but the absence of Abraham and Ishmael do not expressly draw attention to prophetic legacy, and focus instead on blood-heierarchy of Arabian tribes.

[317] Ibn Saʿd *Ṭabaqāt* 1:42-43.

[318] Ibn Saʿd *Ṭabaqāt* 1:43.

[319] Ibn Saʿd *Ṭabaqāt* 1:43.

to Maʿadd.[320] And so he deftly intertwines Arab history and Arabic linguistic origins with sacred history to promote a perception that Arabness emerged directly from prophecy.

There is modern debate regarding the antiquity of the Ishmaelite Arab genealogy, but most posit that it was first articulated in the Muslim era,[321] and it therefore appears to have been a modification of the Maʿadd model to conflate Maʿaddite Arabness with prophecy. The fact that the Maʿadd model was backed by hadith would have necessitated that the Ishmael argument be supported by its own hadith in turn, and the presence of the Ishmael hadith in biographies of the Prophet Muḥammad and genealogies of Quraysh evidences a desire of certain authors to recast Arab origins beyond northwest Arabian tribalism and into the Judeo-Christian prophetic tradition. The fact that none of these particular Ishmaelite hadith were recorded in the main hadith collections of the later third/ninth century and beyond should also be cause to query their purported connection to the actual words of Muḥammad.

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[320] Ibn Saʿd Ṭabaqāt 1:43-44.

[321] Firestone (1989) 129 proposed the Ishmaelite lineage was developed in the first two Islamic centuries, and Dagorn speaks of "l'inexistence absolue et radicale dans la tradition arabe pré-islamique, des personnages d'Ismaël, d'Agar se mere, et meme d'Abraham" (1981) 377. This cannot be proven conclusively because the first century CE Latin Jewish author Josephus speaks of "Arabs" who claimed descent from Ishmael (Millar (1993)) and Sozomen's *Ecclesiastical History* 6:38 describes an Ishmaelite-alleged ancestry of certain "Saracens" bordering Phoenicia and Palestine. Whilst these texts evidence that certain groups in the Transjordan had a history of claiming ancestry to Ishmael, connecting these peoples to Muḥammad's Muslim community is difficult. Josepheus probably intended Nabataeans by his "Arabs", and Sozomen's "Saracens" seem to be one "tribe" led by a queen who are entirely forgotten in Musim-era Arabic history. Sozomen's story also concerns the conversion of this tribe to Christianity, hence it is not illogical to read their conversion and the historical reconstruction of their lineage into a Biblical structure as connected: much like Muslims three or four centuries later would do. Since there is little to connect the two Palestinian references to Muḥammad's much later Muslim community in central Arabia, both Ephʾal (1976) and Bakhos (2006) 159-160 consider the Muslim claims of Ishmaelite legacy to be separate from the earlier records.

Both Maʿaddite and Ishmaelite concepts of Arab origins, however, lack mention of Hūd/Ṣāliḥ and ʿĀd/Thamūd. The identification of either Maʿadd or Ishmael as the first Arab renders the earlier Peninsular peoples both genealogically and linguistically outside of the Arab family. This accords with Muqātil's early *Tafsīr* which classifies ʿĀd and Thamūd as memories from the past without blood connection to Muḥammad's *umma*, and gives good grounds to believe, and good reason to understand why some Muslims at the dawn of the Arabic literary tradition did not have room to place ʿĀd and Thamūd within Arab history and assumed that they were merely "destroyed peoples" as they are expressly mentioned in the Qurʾān.[322]

2.3(c)(iv) – Arabs, Yemenis and Ishmael

Exactly why Arab history would be amended to expand beyond the Maʿadd/Ishmael models and why the legendary Thamūd and ʿĀd would retrospectively muscle their way into Arab history is a complex question that can be explored, at least in part, via a third set of Arab origin hadith connected to Yemeni interests. Yemenis were early converts to Islam and major participants in the Islamic Conquests,[323] and a 'third way' set of hadith seem intended to redress the absence of Yemenis in the 'Arab family' by arguing that Qaḥṭān, the legendary Yemeni ancestor, was related to Ishmael. The workings of this narrative are on display in Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ's mid-third/ninth century genealogical text, *al-Ṭabaqāt* where Ibn Khayyāṭ appears to endorse the most restrictive concept of Arab origins by reporting the Maʿadd hadith on the authority of both Muḥammad and the Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb,[324] but adds, on the lesser authority of the narrator

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[322] The utter destruction of ʿĀd and Thamūd is a common Qurʾānic refrain: "He destroyed ancient ʿĀd, and Thamūd and let nothing remain" (53:50-51). As they are symbols of disobedience, it is vital for the Qurʾān to express the totality of their destruction to illustrate God's ultimate power.

[323] For discussion of the Yemeni's role in the Conquests, see Mad`aj (1988) 64-75 and Smith (1990) 134.

[324] Ibn Khayyāṭ *Ṭabaqāt* 2-3.

Ibn ʿAbbās, that Yemenis constitute a separate group of Arabs who were not related to Maʿadd, but were nonetheless related to Ishmael.[325]

Ibn Khayyāṭ's narrative proposes that all Arabs descend from Abraham/Ishmael's prophetic family, but Maʿadd's group are only *part* of the Arab people, while Yemenis constitute a second, equally Ishmaelite Arab group who trace their lineage via a separate line of descent from Ishmael through Qaḥṭān. To support this model, Ibn Khayyāṭ proffers his own gloss in which he explains that the Yemenis had called themselves the sons of Ishmael until the time of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, the Umayyad governor of Iraq (75-95/694-714).[326] This is a defensive self-justification: it admits that the assertion of Yemeni descent from Ishmael sounded novel or unfamiliar to his readers, and it attempts to bolster credibility with reference to the past – *i.e.* by stating that this was the manner Yemenis *originally* thought of themselves. The fact Ibn Khayyāṭ does not adduce any reason why Yemenis stopped claiming that ancestry prompts doubt as to the real historicity of the offhand gloss, and, as if anticipating incredulity when detailing Yemeni genealogy later in *al-Ṭabaqāt*, he marshals two Prophetic hadith to support the claim. Both hadith are similar: one narrates that as the Prophet passed a group from the Aslam tribe (Yemenis related to Khuzāʿa) who were contesting an unspecified matter, the Prophet said to them: "Shoot, children of Ishmael! Your father was an archer!"[327] The second hadith relates the same statement, but sets it in the context of the Prophet speaking to the *Anṣār* (the people of Medina, another branch of the 'Yemen' Arabs).[328]

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[325] Ibn Khayyāṭ *Ṭabaqāt* 3.

[326] Ibn Khayyāṭ *Ṭabaqāt* 3.

[327] Ibn Khayyāṭ *Ṭabaqāt* 66. This hadith, unlike any other hadith cited in this section, also appears in al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Manāqib*:4 where it takes an unusual form, describing Muḥammad encouraging people to shoot arrows in a marketplace!

[328] Ibn Khayyāṭ *Ṭabaqāt* 66. According to my searches, this hadith is not reported in any other text.

As further indication of what appears a swell of very early opinion that argued Yemenis were Arabs via Ishmaelite lineage, Ibn Wahb's collection of hadith contains two hadith in which the Prophet specifies that the tribes of Ashᶜar and Ḥaḍramawt (Yemenis by all accounts) were "sons of Ishmael".[329] These hadith are didactic expressions of genealogy devoid of context, and as such arouse suspicion: under what circumstances would Muḥammad need to inform the Ashᶜarīs and Ḥaḍramīs that they were Ishmaelites? Did these tribesmen really need to learn their lineage from the Prophet? It seems more likely that these terse statements were retrospective fabrications to embed certain tribes within Ishmaelite models of Arab origins. It is also noteworthy that these hadith, according to my searches, were never repeated in later texts, indicating that they were connected to a discourse that became obsolete, and analysis of later writings indicates that this was indeed the case.

The Yemeni/Ishmaelite model was evidently contested and would not long survive. The linkage of Yemeni ancestry with Ishmael appears to have come from groups of Yemenis themselves, likely in the second/eighth century, as Ibn Hishām's very early third/ninth century biography of the Prophet notes that "some of the people of Yemen say that Qaḥṭān is one of the sons of Ishmael and that Ishmael is the father of all Arabs".[330] But Ibn Hishām does not endorse this view himself, and by the early fourth/tenth century, even the Yemeni scholar al-Hamdānī notes in the genealogical section of *al-Iklīl* that hadith in which Muḥammad appears to call Yemenis the "sons of Ishmael" have been misinterpreted, and that the Prophet never intended that Ishmael was the progenitor of the Yemenis.[331] After the fourth/tenth century, I have not found any writers repeating this model, except the

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[329] Ibn Wahb *al-Jāmiᶜ* 5,6.
[330] Ibn Hishām *Sīra* 1:7.
[331] Al-Hamdānī *al-Iklīl* 1:129-130.

fifth/eleventh century genealogist Ibn Ḥazm who only mentions a prior assertion of a link between Qaḥṭān and Ishmael which he categorically rejects.[332]

The 'third way' thus unsuccessfully attempted to expand the Ishmaelite-Arab prophetic genealogy to non-Maʿaddite tribes. But Yemenis ventured a second model which attained more success, paving the way for the 'orthodox' history of Arabness we find in later texts which enabled ʿĀd and Thamūd to enter Arab history and thus bridged the gap between the early Maʿaddite/Ishmaelite Arabness schema and the narrative in Ibn al-Jawzī's *al-Muntaẓam.* This fourth genealogical model was so successful that both the Maʿadd and Ishmael hadith about Arab origins would virtually disappear from the fourth/tenth century.[333]

2.3(c)(v) – Arab origins and 'Arab Prophets' in the third/ninth century

Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* provides perhaps the earliest surviving construction of Arab genealogy which separates the Yemeni father-figure, Qaḥṭān, from Ishmael and declares that both were progenitors of different strands of the Arab people: "All of the Arabs are descendants of [either] Ishmael [or] Qaḥṭān".[334] Interestingly, a second surviving genealogical text ascribed to Ibn al-Kalbī, *Nasab Maʿadd wa-l-Yaman*, divides genealogy into two unrelated branches: Maʿadd and Yemen, but as a very early text, it is not surprising that Ibn al-Kalbī emphasises Maʿadd as forefather of the northern Arabs without mention of Ishmael, demonstrating that the Ishmaelite lineage of Muḥammad was not yet universally embedded at the end of the second/eighth century, however the depiction of Yemenis as a separate group evidences a movement to promote their equal Arabness to the Maʿaddites. Ibn al-Kalbī makes no mention of Hūd and Ṣāliḥ within the Yemeni branch, however: it

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[332] Ibn Ḥazm *Jamhara* 7.
[333] In texts dating after the third/ninth century, I found no citations of the Ishmael hadith.
[334] Ibn Hishām *Sīra* 1:7.

would take almost one hundred more years for this non-Ishmaelite Qaḥṭān model to mature, and in the interim various navigations of Arab origins emerged.

One such version appears in Ibn Wahb's hadith collection. He narrates the "All Arabs are the children of Ishmael" hadith, but with an unusual exception for the Thaqīf and Ḥimyar tribes.[335] Thaqīf are cast as descendants of Thamūd, while the Ḥimyar Yemenis are called descendants of Tubbaʿ (a mysterious figure mentioned in Qurʾān 44:37 about whom Yemeni historians would greatly elaborate tales of pre-Islamic Yemeni history).[336] The intrusion of Tubbaʿ and Thamūd (who appear in the Qurʾān without any connection to Arabness or current Arabians) into Arab history reveals how early Muslims grasped ambiguous historical figures from the Qurʾān and co-opted them into a genealogical story of Arabness.[337] As Shryock observed, narratives of the past offer fertile ground for groups in the present to weave novel stories of their origins, and in a similar vein, Ibn Ḥabīb's (d.245/859) *al-Muḥabbar*[338] reveals further efforts to include the ancient Peninsular peoples mentioned in the Qurʾān into Arab history. Ibn Ḥabīb reports that the first speakers of Arabic were émigrés from the fall of the Tower of Babel who populated the Peninsula many generations before Abraham and Ishmael,[339] thus counting various groups, including ʿĀd and Thamūd as "Arab tribes" (*qabāʾil ʿāriba*).[340] This use of *ʿāriba* is interesting. The word is an active participle which implies an underlying verb *ʿaraba* or *ʿaruba*

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[335] Ibn Wahb *al-Jāmiʿ* 5.

[336] For Yemeni narratives of Tubbaʾ and the pre-Islamic past, see Diʿbil *Waṣāyā*, Wahb ibn Munabbih *Kitāb al-Tījān* and al-Ḥimyarī *Mulūk*.

[337] Herein I depart from J. Stetkevych's 1996 *Muḥammad and the golden bough*, for he analyses the Thamūd story with only one reference to Thaqīf (1996) 41, and that in a pre-Islamic context. I maintain the connection constructed between the Muslim-era tribe Thaqīf and the myth of Thamūd has vital political ramifications which must be taken into account when studying these stories and their development in Arabic literature. See below, page 109.

[338] *Al-Muḥabbar* is ascribed to Ibn Ḥabīb, but the extent to which the text bears marks of slightly later edits, see Note 115.

[339] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 384-385.

[340] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 395.

('to be an Arab', 'to speak Arabic'?), but, to my knowledge, neither verbs appear in poetry or early sources. *ʿĀriba* must instead have been derived from the noun *ʿarab* itself and, as such, derives from its fluid context. It is instructive that Ibn Ḥabīb's *ʿāriba* is also different from the *ʿāriba* in the earlier *al-ʿAyn*, which invokes the noun linguistically as pure Arabic speakers.[341] Ibn Ḥabīb's historically ancient *ʿāriba* outright contradicts the Ishmaelite model of the first Arabic speaker, and hence we can appreciate that the word's interpretation is intertwined with debates over Arab origins. Later lexicographers define *ʿāriba* as the 'Ancient Arabs',[342] which corresponds with the disappearance of the Ishmaelite 'first Arab' narrative in other sources, and hence *al-Muḥabbar* seems to evidence the vanguard of a movement to tweak the reconstruction of Arab history to include ancient Arabian peoples like ʿĀd and Thamūd.

Al-Muḥabbar also pays special attention to anecdotes about the circumcision of prophets which, though at first glance appears a rather abstruse area of study, does, on closer inspection, relate to ideas of Arabness and a privileging of the Arabs. *Al-Muḥabbar* relates an anecdote which states that of all the prophets, *only* Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shuʿayb and Muḥammad were created circumcised.[343] This is the earliest mention of which I am aware in which the quartet later familiar as the 'Arab prophets' are singled out as a distinct group to themselves, and the fact that they share the miraculous trait of circumcision at birth seems a thinly veiled lauding of Arab prophethood as the most divinely favoured group. Since it does not include Ishmael, we see further decoupling of the Ishmaelite model from Arabness and an

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[341] See Note 208.

[342] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:170.

[343] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 131-132. He recites three different lists of circumcised prophets, Hūd and Ṣāliḥ feature in two.

association of Muḥammad with the earlier Qaḥṭān-branded prophets Hūd and Ṣāliḥ instead.

Reading *al-Muḥabbar* as a text that seeks to gather scattered material and produce new knowledge from it, in this case a novel approach to Arab history, accords with Julia Bray's suggestion that Ibn Ḥabīb's

> main objective as a historian – perhaps one should call him a historical technician – appears to be to use the *organisation* of data (a) to clarify the relationship of probable, possible or unascertainable points of reference ... and (b) to throw up a new order of data.[344]

By selecting data on pre-Ishmaelite peoples and presenting them as Arabs, as well as neglecting mention of the Maʿadd Arab genealogies, *al-Muḥabbar* "fashion[s] a new kind of cultural memory"[345] for Arab history.

The novelty of the efforts to convert the Qurʾān's ancient Arabian past of ʿĀd, Thamūd, Sabaʾ and Tubbaʿ into Arab history can be gauged from the scholarly incredulity the narrative provoked in early third/ninth century literature. For example, the Ibn Wahb hadith about Thaqīf's Thamūdic ancestry was roundly rejected in al-Jāḥiẓ's *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn.* Al-Jāḥiẓ (who did not cite the hadith directly, but addressed those who made the claim that some Arabs were Thamūd's descendants) stressed that such lineages plainly contradict the two clear statements in the Qurʾān that God destroyed Thamūd and spared no one.[346] Al-Jāḥiẓ concluded: "I am amazed that anyone who considers the Qurʾān to be the Truth would allege

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[344] Bray (2003) 223.

[345] Bray (2003) 226.

[346] Q:53:51,69:8; al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:187-188. Al-Jāḥiẓ's negative appraisal of the Thamūd/Thaqīf story is not noted in J. Stetkevych (1996), however, responses such as his and al-Jumaḥī's detailed below reveal the difficulty in assuming the 'Muslim tradition' smoothly articulated a monolithic 'Arabic myth' from the past.

that some tribes of Arabs are survivors of Thamūd ... I seek refuge in God from that!"[347]

In more comprehensive fashion, the poetry anthologist Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d.231/845-6) deconstructed the claims of Thamūd and ʿĀd's ancient Arabness reported in Ibn Isḥāq's Prophetic biography which, in the surviving sections preserved in Ibn Hishām's abridgement, contains a lengthy section on ancient Yemenis and their relationship with prophecy. Ibn Sallām commences like al-Jāḥiẓ, citing no less than five Qurʾānic verses that emphasise the total destruction of ʿĀd, Thamūd and other ancient peoples.[348] Ibn Sallām follows this with two separate anecdotes describing Ishmael as the first Arab and first Arab speaker, and a third anecdote arguing Ishmael is the ancestor of all Arabs other than Ḥimyar and some of Jurhum.[349] Ibn Sallām, revealing his acceptance of what was in his day the more traditional notion of Maʿaddite Arab origins, continues the deconstruction in a fascinatingly revealing direction, arguing that even the Arabic allegedly spoken by Ishmael was "not the Arabic of the age of the Prophet Muḥammad, it was a different Arabic, and not our language",[350] and declaring that no pre-Islamic poet (other than one verse of Labīd) mentions any ancestor beyond Maʿadd. He argues that verses speaking of such ancient genealogies are probably spurious, and expresses his utter disbelief that anyone could adduce Arabic poetry from the time of ʿĀd or Thamūd.[351] Not yet finished, Ibn Sallām reiterates that Maʿadd is the oldest ascertainable ancestor and "the tongue of Ḥimyar and the furthest Yemen is not the same as our Arabic" (note how he pointedly refrains from calling the Yemeni tongues 'Arabic').

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[347] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:188.

[348] Al-Jumaḥī *Ṭabaqāt* 1:8-9.

[349] Al-Jumaḥī *Ṭabaqāt* 1:9.

[350] Al-Jumaḥī *Ṭabaqāt* 1:9-10.

[351] Al-Jumaḥī *Ṭabaqāt* 1:10-11.

He finally concludes that any discussion of ʿĀd's Arabness or speaking Arabic is preposterous.[352]

To understand why some early Muslims would so blatantly forge a version of genealogical history that was unbelievable to their peers, one should return to Shryock's observations that genealogical models may appear empirically incorrect to outsiders who seek to make sense of them, but to insiders who created the narratives, they are perfectly understandable products of contemporary power politics.[353] The explosive power relations in early Islamic Iraq provided ample opportunity for repackaging memories of the past for present political gains and generated anecdotes which would confuse later scholars seeking to reconstruct Arabness. Regarding the Ibn Wahb's hadith's two exceptions of Arab 'Ishmaelite' genealogy, Thaqīf and Ḥimyar, those two groups were major political factions in Umayyad Iraq. The Ḥimyar tribe constituted a significant part of the Iraqi population that had settled in al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa after the Islamic Conquests;[354] Thaqīf, on the other hand, were the governors of Iraq, allies to the Umayyads and often very unpopular amongst the Iraqi populace.[355] Read in the context of late first/seventh and early second/eighth century Iraqi politics, the hadith is a manifest political statement suiting the purpose of a disenchanted Iraqi: the 'bad' governors, Thaqīf, are cast as descendants of the evil Thamūd whom the Qurʾān repeatedly describes as being punished by God, while the 'good' Iraqi population, descendants of the Ḥimyar tribe, are the descendants of Tubbaʿ, a character more

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[352] Al-Jumaḥī Ṭabaqāt 1:13.

[353] Shryock (1997) 30-34.

[354] Madʿaj (1988) 86-87, 90.

[355] Donner (1981) discusses the tribal organisation and power structures in which the Thaqīf tribe dominated Yemenis; the persecutions of the Thaqafī governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf in Iraq are well known.

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cryptically mentioned in the Qurʾān as a possible ancient believer in Islam.[356] The pointed genealogies are then given an authoritative form via ascription to the Prophet Muḥammad and Iraqi politics can be conceptualised as a war of good *vs.* evil.[357] A century later, when Thaqīf no longer ruled Iraq and Ḥimyar was no longer oppressed, Iraqi poetry anthologists and scholars would understandably react with dismay and confusion when encountering these references which had, by their time, totally lost all operative context.

The multiple strands of Arab origins posited via genealogy thus attest to an essential fluidity of the Arabness idea in early Islam. Far from a clear 'orthodox' concept of who the Arabs were, Arab origins were indefinite, and Muslims could pluck characters from the Qurʾān and weave them into novel genealogies. Over the passage of time, the resultant anecdotes and hadith did not always harmonise with new narratives of Arab history, and hence they could be so strongly censured as erroneous interpretations and blatant misuses of history.

It is instructive, however, that the strong objections to the ancient Qaḥṭānī Arabness of the Yemenis cease after the mid-third/ninth century. Analysis of later writings reveals that the narrative would survive, the biting critiques would be forgotten, and the Yemenis would firmly plant themselves into Arab history, obliterating the Maʿadd and Ishmaelite hadith so dominant in early third/ninth century sources. The integration of Yemenis into the Arab fold is itself an enormous study, but a survey of later third/ninth century writings on Arab genealogy shows the gradual scholarly acquiescence to the Qaḥṭān model. Here I shall trace the

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[356] Note that Ibn Wahb's *al-Jāmiʿ* also relates a hadith with the same *isnād* as the Thaqīf/Ḥimyar hadith in the same section where Muḥammad orders his community to not to curse Tubbaʿ "because he was a Muslim" (1). Ibn Wahb thereby resolves the Qurʾānic ambiguity and prompts the praise of Ḥimyar when the subsequent hadith reveals them to be Tubbaʿ's descendants.

[357] This aspect, though not considered in J. Stetkevych (1996), seems an important context in which mythology from pre-Islamic Arabia ought to be read.

process, but I must leave questions of why the model became dominant for future research.

Al-Balādhurī's (d.c.279/892) *Ansāb al-ashrāf* narrates a version of the Ibn Wahb hadith, but pointedly removes reference to Thamūd as the ancestors of Thaqīf – perhaps a response to earlier criticism. Al-Balādhurī's version is further modified to read that the tribes al-Salaf, Thaqīf, al-Awzāʿ and Ḥaḍramawt were the only Arabs not descended from Ishmael,[358] but by the late third/ninth century, notions of Arab origins were shifting ever backwards beyond Ishmael, and al-Balādhurī narrates this hadith as a minority report, furnishing other anecdotes to prove that ever more Arabs pre-dated Ishmael, tracing their roots through Qaḥṭān and Yemen.[359]

Taking the various hadith and the early texts about Arab origins together, Arab history during the mid-third/ninth century possessed two contradictory narratives: Arabs were either (i) intimately tied to the Abrahamic prophetic family; or (ii) their origins were much more ancient and inclusive of a broader range of Peninsular peoples. Later third/ninth century histories embrace both models simultaneously, narrating Prophetic hadith and other anecdotes to support both camps and giving only tentative, if any, indication of what they believed to be the correct version. Al-Yaʿqūbī (d.275/888 or 292/905) leaves the issue unresolved,[360] al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-ashrāf* seems to prefer the Yemeni/Pan-Arabian notion of Arabness, but leaves some room for doubt,[361] and Ibn Qutayba's (d.276/889) *Maʿārif* is

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[358] Al-Balādhurī *Ansāb* 1:6.

[359] Al-Balādhurī *Ansāb* 1:5-7.

[360] Al-Yaʿqūbī describes ʿĀd and Thamūd without mentioning their Arabness (*Tārīkh* 1:20-22), and his chapter on the Arabian Arab ancestors of Muḥammad begins with Abraham and Ishmael (in accordance with the familiar model from earlier in the century (1:221). But when recounting the history of Yemen, al-Yaʿqūbī notes that the Prophet Hūd of the ʿĀd tribe was himself (possibly, according to al-Yaʿqūbī's language) the ancestor of the Yemeni Arabs (1:195).

[361] Al-Balādhurī discusses the 'Ancient Arabs' – *al-ʿarab al-ʿariba* when listing the descendants of Noah and includes ʿĀd and Thamūd, Jurhum and Yaqṭān (whom he later explains is the Yemeni Qaḥṭān) (*Ansāb* 1:5-6). Conversely, he also narrates opinions from late second/eighth century genealogists

also ambivalent, though tends ever more towards accepting the Yemeni Arabness model.[362] We can speculate that later third/ninth century readership was aware of the conflicting opinions about Arab origins and that both the Ishmaelite and Yemeni/Pan-Arabian models had sufficient scholarly, and perhaps popular support to keep both alive in our sources, but instability, by nature, tends to resolution, and the path to what, in hindsight, would become the 'traditional' Muslim narrative of Arab origins can be discerned as asserting itself with increasing confidence in the last half of the third/ninth century. At the dawn of the fourth/tenth century, al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* introduces new-found certainty at last, declaring forthright (and, pointedly, without *isnād*) that ʿĀd and Thamūd "were Arabs of *al-ʿarab al-ʿāriba* (the ancient Arabs)".[363] Al-Ṭabarī does not commonly add his own editorial comments to his historical narrative as he prefers narrating history via anecdotes attributed to earlier sources. The short comment thus appears directed to curtailing doubt which, given the unclear status of Arabness over the past century of texts, is not surprising. Al-Ṭabarī declares the debate ended: ʿĀd and Thamūd are Arabs via an ancient genealogy, and, in giving no indication of contrary opinions (as previous authors had done), al-Ṭabarī leaves little room to re-open the debate. We

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(Muḥammad ibn Sāʾib al-Kalbī and al-Sharqī) that conclude: "Ishmael is the father of all Arabs on the Earth" (1:6-7), but he relieves the confused reader by offering the (now familiar, but unprecedented at his time) observation that Ishmael was the first Arabic speaking son of Abraham – *i.e.* Ishmael's scion constitute a secondary, later group of Arabic speakers (1:7). Emphasising the Arabness of the ancient Arabs, al-Balādhurī also notes short *akhbār* about ʿĀd, Thamūd, Jadīs and Jurhum's activities in Arabia before Ishmael and establishes the Prophet Hūd as ancestor of the Yemenis (1:7-9).

[362] Julia Bray (2003) 221 suggested that *al-Maʿārif* offers a sometimes contradictory menu of details about Arab tribes, and it does leave astute readers with difficult questions regarding Arab origins. But it states clearly that Yaʿrub ibn Qaḥṭān was the first Arabic speaker (*al-Maʿārif* 626) who lived five generations before Ishmael (26-27). He is silent on ʿĀd and Thamūd's Arabness, making them only distant relatives of Qaḥṭān's Arab family and his model dates them one or two generations before Yaʿrub and the first Arabic speakers (28-29), making it unclear how Hūd and Ṣāliḥ can be counted as 'Arab Prophets', though he expressly identifies them as such elsewhere in *al-Maʿārif* (56).

[363] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:216, see also 1:204.

are to accept them as Arabs and proceed accordingly – much as Ibn al-Jawzī did in his *al-Muntaẓam.*

It is noteworthy that al-Ṭabarī is also the first Qurʾān commentator to specifically interpret Qurʾān 5:128's statement about "A Messenger has come to you from among yourselves" as a reference to Muḥammad's mission to the Arab people, unlike the second/eighth century Muqātil's restriction of "yourselves" to Muḥammad's contemporary Meccans.[364] As later historians would follow al-Ṭabarī's model of Arab origins, exegetes would following al-Ṭabarī's interpretation of the verse,[365] indicating that the ethnic Arab context of the Qurʾān had itself been affirmed during the third/ninth century in tandem with the expansion of the ambit of historical Arabness and the systematisation of 'Arab lineage'. And so, the third/ninth century emerges as a crucially important period for the development of canonical ideas of Arabness in the 'Muslim tradition' whereby Arab unity and Arab history were projected backwards to almost the time of Noah.[366]

2.4 Arab genealogies: conclusions

Review of the competing third/ninth century conceptions of Arab lineage/history reveals first that Ibn al-Kalbī, though now seen as the father of Arab genealogy, did not offer a wholly cohesive literary model of Arabness. He may have spearheaded the recording of Arab *nasab*, but the next century of texts reveals the difficulties Iraqi writers found in codifying 200 years-worth of oral, tribal genealogy. Much as Shryock observed in late twentieth century Jordan, it took Iraqi genealogical 'outsiders' one hundred years to create an acceptable and durable

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[364] See page 78.

[365] See al-Qurṭubī *al-Jāmiʿ* 8:191; al-Zamakhsharī *al-Kashshāf* 2:314; al-Bayḍāwī *Tafsīr* 1:426.

[366] It is noteworthy that the same backwards progression of Mecca's history occurred during the same period, whereby early third/ninth century narratives depicting Abraham/Ishmael as the first builders of Mecca (and progenitors of the Arab people) were replaced by the fourth/tenth century with narratives of Mecca's founding by Adam at the beginning of history and more ancient Arabness. I detail this transformation of Arabic narratives in Webb 2013b.

written history of the Arabian Arab people. Second, the genealogical uncertainty adds context to the early dictionary definitions of 'Arab' examined at the outset of this chapter and explains why second/eighth century writers refrained from defining Arabness around what would appear today as the most obvious basis – genealogy. In the absence of a cohesive pan-Arab genealogical system, the Arabian tribes could not be called an Arab *jīl* in the second/eighth century, but when the genealogists had at last codified Arabness around a unified family tree, philologists and other writers gained new certainty to speak of the Arab race, as evidenced from al-Azharī's *Tahdhīb* and al-Jawharī's *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*.

The constructedness of Arab genealogy poses a vital question: why, even two hundred years after the Muslim conquests, did scholars still have such difficulty in defining the most basic aspects of Arab genealogy? Do their struggles point to the fact that they had to create an Arab ethnos to unify the formerly disparate Arabian tribes into one "*jīl*"? Accordingly, one wonders whether an Arab ethnos ever existed in pre-Islamic Arabia and whether the rise of Islam was in fact the catalyst for its formation. This could render the Arabic writings on *Jāhiliyya* as a complex array of discourses that created an Arab history and a conception of Arab-Muslim identity. Exploring these questions occupies the next two chapters.

Chapter 3: Pre-Islamic Arabness

The contested genealogies and reconstructions of Arab history in early Muslim-era writing accord with Bashear's thesis of the constructedness of the ideas of Arabness, but my analysis of extant texts from the early classical period revealed that the questions surrounding Arabness did not concern Bedouin-ness and Islam, but rather debated the basis upon which Arabs could be classified as a distinct group of people in the first place. Contrary to Bashear's theory that a pre-formed Arabian Arabness was merged with Islam, it seems, chronologically, that the advent of Islam predated and perhaps catalysed the invention of Arabness. For answers, I turn to the pre-Islamic record, for if it lacks indication of a cohesive Arab ethnos, we could propose that the early Muslim community indeed built an Arab identity *de novo*. This argument returns towards Müller's 1896 hypothesis, and since it was rejected via analysis of the earliest Arabic texts – pre-Islamic poetry and the Qurʾān – I propose that those sources must be re-examined to re-evaluate what they tell us about the Arabness idea at the dawn of Islam.

3.1 Arabs and the epigraphic record of pre-Islamic Arabia

Current histories of the Arabs often begin almost 1,500 years before Islam. An inscription of the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III dated 853 BCE contains a reference to "Arba-ā", a people from the deserts southwest of Damascus[367] which seems to be the earliest extant citation of a people whose name resembles 'Arab', and ostensibly indicates that the Arab ethnos predates Islam by almost 1,500 years. Modern historians, however, debate whether those Arba-ā have any relation to Muḥammad's Arabs, [368] but beyond the Shalmaneser Stele, later Assyrian

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[367] Shalmaneser *Monolith* II:90-97; Grayson (1996) 23.

[368] For many scholars of diverse fields, Shalmanesser's stele ushers the Arabs, or at least "proto-Arabs" into recorded history (Djaït (1986) 181-183; ʿAlī (1968-1973) 1:574-576), but Nöldeke (1899) 272 expressed doubts. Ephʾal (1982) 7-9 considers this inscription the beginning of a record of a broad

inscriptions and a wealth of Greek texts from the fourth century BCE to the first century CE also depict peoples with names resembling 'Arab' in the Arabian Peninsula[369] and seemingly prove that Arabia's deserts were full of Arabs at least many centuries before Islam.

All the above sources, however, were written by peoples living outside Arabia, and when modern archaeologists unearthed tens of thousands of pre-Islamic inscriptions from the Peninsula itself, dated to between the eighth century BCE and sixth century CE,[370] they found, surprisingly, no references to 'Arabia' as a place-name or homeland,[371] and only six cryptic references to 'Arabs' as a people.[372] Of those six, two were found in Yemen, dating from between the seventh and sixth centuries BCE,[373] and then the term 'disappeared' for centuries, not reappearing again until the second century CE in Yemen[374] and the fourth century CE in Syria.[375] To date, the sum of the Arabian epigraphic record reveals a disconcerting silence: pre-Islamic Arabians did not seem to call themselves Arabs, rather they used

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'Arab history', but refrained from claiming a direct line of descent between these Arba-ā and modern Arabs, a view shared by Rodinson (1981) 13-14. In the past decade, Retsö (2003) 126-127 and Hoyland (2001) 230 inferred a more direct continuity between the Arba-ā and today's Arab ethnos, though Robin (2010) 85 and Dousse (2012) 44 argue those Arba-ā were merely a nomadic group unrelated to today's Arabs.

[369] Assyrian wall reliefs from the seventh century BCE offer more images of tent-dwelling, lightly-armed and simply-clothed "Arabaa" and "Aribi" peoples in the deserts southeast of Iraq warring on camelback (British Museum reliefs 124926 and 124927; see also the eighth century BCE relief 118901). For the Greek period, see Macdonald's exhaustive summary (2009a).

[370] The commonly accepted date of the earliest inscription is about 750 BCE (Robin (2010) 81).

[371] Macdonald (2009b) 311; Robin (2010) 85.

[372] Robin (2010) 85 also includes Nabataean inscriptions citing 'Arab', but these are rejected by Macdonald as administrative labels referring to the Roman Province of 'Arabia', not terms of ethnic awareness (Macdonald (2009b) 306-307). Retsö offers a nuanced, but ultimately open-ended discussion of Arabness and the Nabataeans (2012) 77-79.

[373] The inscription of Karibʾil Watar RES 3945, the second inscription is from Jawf which Robin (1991) 72 dates to the sixth century BCE.

[374] Inscription CIH 79. Mention of 'Arab' again is absent in Yemen for half a millennium, until the sixth century CE inscription Ja 560. See Retsö (2003) 552-566.

[375] The Namāra inscription, discussed below.

various other names to identify themselves,[376] and, ironically, some of the inscriptions that mention Arab cognates may have been references to foreigners![377] Consider, for example, the occasional citation of ˀʿrb (*aʿrāb*) in Yemen between the second and sixth centuries CE[378] where, according to modern Sabaic dictionaries, the word connotes "tribesmen", "hill-dwellers", [379] or "Bedouin"/"Bedouin mercenaries."[380] In each case, the ˀʿrb are outsiders in the eyes of the inscriptions' writers who identified themselves not as 'Arabs', but with terms such as Sabaˀ and Ḥimyar.[381] Faced with the enigmatic references to 'Arabs' in non-Arabian literature of the ancient Near East and the scant trace of 'Arab' in the epigraphic records of the Arabian Peninsula, the modern researcher can empathise with Michael Macdonald's observation that "the term 'Arab' has proved one of the most difficult to define of any in the ancient Near East",[382] and agree that we should be rather cautious when inferring the existence of a pre-Islamic 'Arab' community.

Given the problematic epigraphic evidence, modern scholars rely on Nöldeke's 1899 essay on "Arabia, Arabians" in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* for reassurance that Arabs did indeed inhabit the Arabian deserts at least several centuries before Islam. Nöldeke cites six lines of pre-Islamic poetry where the word

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[376] Such names are particularly well attested in records from Yemen and the eastern Gulf littoral (Hoyland (2001)).

[377] With the exception of the three inscriptions from the fourth to fifth centuries found in Syria (Namāra) and Yemen (Ja560).

[378] See Ja 561 bis, CIH 353, Ry 502, RES 4658, Nami 72, Ja 635 and Ja 665. For analysis of these inscriptions, see Retsö (2003) 536-566 and Robin (1991).

[379] Biella (2004) 383.

[380] Beeston *et al* (1982) 19.

[381] The fact that pre-Islamic Yemenis considered themselves separate from these 'psuedo-Arab' *aʿrāb* was noted in Rodinson (1981) 14, although he did not consider the ramifications for this on the Arab ethnos, and concluded that the Yemenis still acknowledged "a distant kinship with these savage Arabs" (14-15). Rodinson also did not explore the lexical differences between ʿarab and aʿrāb raised by these inscriptions. Current scholarship more firmly distinguishes Yemenis from these 'Arabs' (Hoyland (2001) 9).

[382] Macdonald (2009b) 304.

'Arab' appears as an identifier of a people,[383] and subsequent scholars tended to accept that poetry 'proves' that the word 'Arab' was known and that pre-Islamic poets were aware that they were 'Arabs'.[384] Nöldeke's findings have seldom been questioned, but the strikingly limited references to 'Arab' across the myriad lines of pre-Islamic poetry demands scrutiny to determine whether pre-Islamic poetry contains alternative, more clearly articulated notions of communal identity.

3.2 Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry as a source of historical enquiry

Using Arabic poetry in historical reconstruction must first negotiate a significant problem of evidential admissibility. At the outset of the twentieth century, both D.S. Margoliouth and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn questioned the authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry and ventured a radical thesis that the pre-Islamic poetic corpus (which was exclusively preserved in Muslim-era anthologies) was mostly concocted by Muslims in the second/eighth century, and bears no relation to the actual conditions of pre-Islamic Arabia.[385] Some attempts were made to refute those claims using theories of orality from the study of contemporary Yugoslav and archaic Greek poetry,[386] but these studies were not entirely convincing, and today an uneasy peace reigns amongst scholars of Arabic poetry. Some strenuously argue for the poetry's authenticity as a true relic of early Arabic history and thought,[387] though most shy away from confronting the issue of fabrication and discuss the poetry without too loudly proclaiming its genuineness.[388] Concerns do remain, however,

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[383] Nöldeke (1899) 272-275.

[384] Rodinson (1981) 15; von Grunebaum (1963) 20-21.

[385] Margoliouth (1925) and Ḥusayn (1926).

[386] Monroe (1972) who adopts Parry and Lord hypothesis of oral performance of poetry (7-13). See also Zwettler (1978).

[387] Agha (2011) 8 describes what he believes is a scholarly retreat from the "vigorous" doubts about pre-Islamic poetry's authenticity argued in the twentieth century. Such arguments were made in Arafat (1966), (1970).

[388] Research based on a tacit assumption of the poetry's basic authenticity is best exemplified by Susanne Stetkevych (1993), Montgomery (1997) and (2006), and Farrin (2011).

that the poetry as it has been preserved bears the marks of Muslim-era agendas that only unfaithfully 'remembered' pre-Islamic verses,[389] and so the spectre of fabrication lingers, and the extent to which the surviving poetry provides an accurate portrayal of pre-Islamic society is unclear.

I return to the Muslim colouring of pre-Islamic poetry in Chapter 6, and my findings urge more caution before we accept that any given poem faithfully reflects its original poet's intentions in pre-Islamic Arabia. I do not believe that this is so radical: classical Muslim scholars themselves had misgivings regarding the authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry,[390] and the question of poetry's authenticity may be somewhat analogous to situation of hadith. As discussed above, Wael Hallaq considered the intense modern debates about hadith authenticity a "pseudo problem" since classical traditionists themselves never claimed that the hadith were entirely genuine in the first place.[391] Arabic poetry is not dissimilar: classical anthologists knew of forgeries, but they often overlooked them,[392] and used poetry as illustrations for their reconstructions of pre-Islamic Arabia, the Arabic language, and also for purely aesthetic or entertainment purposes. Accordingly, they remembered 'authentic' verses that suited their taste and also 'augmented' the corpus with some additions and re-attributions of poetry as well as creating prose

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[389] Montgomery (1997) 8-9. Both Jones (1999) 58 and Stetkevych (1993) 122 allude to the impact of the "Abbasid guise" in shaping the preserved form of pre-Islamic poetry, but both leave it unproblematized, analysing the poetry as if it is largely 'authentic' pre-Islamic relic.

[390] Al-Jumaḥī (Ṭabaqāt 7-8) and Ibn Hishām's (Sīra 1:4) critiques of Muslim-era poetry fabrications are well known examples of early classical circumspection and the emergence of a 'specialist' cadre of scholars who argued for their own usefulness in 'policing' the recording of pre-Islamic poetry. Much poetry was excised from later classical narratives of history, perhaps in part due to suspicions of its un-reliability (see Webb (2013a)).

[391] Hallaq (1999) 75. See page 96.

[392] As evidenced by the fluidity of verse order and different versions of verses commonly encountered in classical anthologies. For example, Ibn al-Anbārī commentary on al-Muʿallaqāt contains numerous examples, and Montgomery's 1997 Vagaries of the Qaṣīdah demonstrates the varied recensions of poems as remembered over time and in different sources.

anecdotes to explain the context of some pre-Islamic poems. I investigate this in detail in Chapter 6.2, but since this chapter proposes to explore Arabness and identity via pre-Islamic poetry, the question remains as to how this potentially fraught body of material can be used.

Though relatively infrequently, modern historians do use Arabic poetry (including the pre-Islamic) as a historical source. The first prominent scholar to do so was Nöldeke himself who, contrary to his contemporaries, Ḥusayn and Margoliouth, accepted 'depoliticised' pre-Islamic poems as authentic relicts of the pre-Islamic past.[393] Irfan Shahid and Agha continue Nöldeke's method,[394] though because my misgivings are greater, I prefer a more cautious approach. Even non-politicised poetry could have been fabricated or coloured by Muslim narrators intent on recording what they believed was the *Jāhiliyya* ethos or aesthetic, so the extant corpus of pre-Islamic verse likely contains a mixture of fabrication and genuine lines of poetry which, on an individual basis may be difficult to conclusively distinguish. For historical analysis, we can take recourse to statistical probabilities: while almost any given line any individual verse could possibly be a 'fake', trends that appear across a wide cross-section of the entire poetic corpus likely do reflect sentiments from the pre-Islamic period. It is improbable that *all* verses bearing a similar message were fabricated. By searching for the name 'Arab' across a wide sample of pre-Islamic poetry to determine how poets expressed

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[393] Nöldeke (2009) 63 urges caution when interpreting pre-Islamic poetry, but argues that poems without obvious connection to Islamic-era political debates are more likely to be unaltered relics from pre-Islam, and he uses such verses extensively (63-80).

[394] Agha (2011) 8. Shahid's *Byzantium and the Arabs* series expresses its debt to Nöldeke's method of citing poetry for historical reconstruction, though his primary reliance on Muslim-era recordings of pre-Islamic poetry to reconstruct pre-Islamic history has been sharply critiqued (Fisher (2011b) 248). Walīd 'Arafat argued for the authenticity of Anṣārī poetry and especially that of the long-doubted oeuvre of Ḥassān ibn Thābit (1966), (1970). Beeston and Conrad (1993) 191 called for further analysis of early Islamic-era poetry, and I supported this argument, though stressing that poetry should not be used purely empirically (Webb (2013a)).

collective identity, therefore, I aim to demonstrate poetry's utility in better explaining the absence of the term 'Arab' in pre-Islamic Arabian epigraphy.

My method borrows from Robert Hoyland's recent employment of Arabic genealogical texts to examine pre-Islamic history.[395] Hoyland accepted that Muslim era genealogies of pre-Islamic tribes, like the Muslim collections of pre-Islamic poetry, are not entirely reliable and contain some authentic material mixed with Muslim-era creative reinterpretation, but by reading genealogical data against more securely datable inscriptions from the pre-Islamic Near East, Hoyland was able to find names in the Muslim-era texts corroborated in the pre-Islamic epigraphic evidence, and so salvaged some data from the Arabic texts to construct his theory of Arab ethnic development. I shall employ poetry similarly, looking for names from poetry collections that are corroborated in unequivocally pre-Islamic sources. This method allows us to explain the absence of 'Arab' in poetry with reference to the absence of 'Arab' in epigraphy, and points to a new way to understand collective identity in pre-Islamic Arabia.

3.3 The 'Arab' in pre-Islamic poetry

Nöldeke's evidence that the pre-Islamic Arabians knew of themselves as a distinct community of 'Arabs' relied on two verses from the poetry of Imruʾ al-Qays, two verses from the vast collection of pre-Islamic poems in the fourth/tenth century *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, a verse attributed to Ḥassān ibn Thābit (a Muslim poet at the time of Muḥammad), and a line in the pre-Islamic history section of the fourth/tenth century al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*.[396] Nöldeke's citation of the poems out of their narrative contexts could itself be critiqued, but more substantially, six lone verses in the vast corpus of extant pre-Islamic poetry is a

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[395] Hoyland (2009).

[396] The same verse is cited in Abū ʿUbayda's (d.210/825) earlier *al-Naqāʾiḍ* (2:645). Bevan published his edition of *al-Naqāʾiḍ* in 1905, six years after Nöldeke's essay on Arabs.

startlingly small sample that uncannily resembles the virtual absence of reference to 'Arab' in pre-Islamic epigraphy. Moreover, Nöldeke's findings require further reduction. The modern scholarly edition of Imruʾ al-Qays' poetry *Dīwān* edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm in 1958, does not contain the two verses Nöldeke listed.[397] And since Ḥassān ibn Thābit was a Muslim poet, albeit at the dawn of Islam, his verse is also not strictly 'pre-Islamic'. We are left then with three verses, attributed to obscure poets recorded in later Muslim-era compendiums as the lone evidence for the presence of a self-aware pre-Islamic Arab ethnos. I shall not argue for or against the authenticity of these verses here – as I stated above, any individual verse of poetry bears a probability of fabrication and objective determinations are difficult – instead I question why pre-Islamic Arabic poets so refrained from calling themselves 'Arabs'. Did they refer to their community by another name?

Arguing in support of Nöldeke, von Grunebaum accepted the sparse reference to 'Arab' in pre-Islamic poetry,[398] but parried it by arguing that the Arabs were a *Kulturnation*, a community lacking political unity but cognisant of shared culture. Von Grunebaum explained that the Arab *Kulturnation* was a "community more securely felt than named"[399] and so concluded that the pre-Islamic Arabs did not need to leave an express record of their self-identity. Displaying remarkable certainty about pre-Islamic Arabian etiquette, von Grunebaum explained that "[y]ou would address yourself to the Arabs or more precisely employ 'the Arabs' as the point of reference or the demarcation of the sphere of human and political relevance, but you would not identify yourself as an Arab".[400] Von Grunebaum

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[397] Von Grunebaum also deemed the attribution of those lines of poetry to Imruʾ al-Qays as "spurious" ((1963) 20,n7).
[398] Von Grunebaum (1963) 20-21.
[399] Von Grunebaum (1963) 5-7.
[400] Von Grunebaum (1963) 20.

demonstrated this 'rule' via citations of Islamic-era prose about pre-Islamic Arabs, yet the authenticity of prose anecdotes is even more fraught than the poetry, and von Grunebaum raised no questions of their reliability.

Von Grunebaum and Nöldeke's arguments also conflict with pre-Islamic textual records about Arabia. Since Herodotus, Greek writers adopted the Achaemenid Persian word *Arabaya* (itself almost certainly borrowed from the Assyrian *Arba-ā* and *Aribi* noted above) to describe the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, but the absence of reference to 'Arab'-cognates in Peninsular epigraphy suggests that the long survival of the word 'Arab' to connote the inhabitants of the Peninsula was an externally imposed label and not a term of self-designation.[401] This hypothesis appears provable from analysis of Roman and Byzantine texts, for the Romans, copying the Greeks, referred to Arabians as 'Arabs' only until the Roman conquest of the Nabataean kingdom in 106 CE – after that, Latin texts stop calling Peninsular people 'Arabs', and start using "*Saraceni*". The more the Romans interacted with Arabians, therefore, the less they called them Arabs, and the word 'Arab' in the Roman consciousness since the first century CE became an archaic term redolent of an ancient desert ideal, and not an identifier for contemporary Arabian populations.[402] For centuries before Islam, therefore, 'Arab' was never used to identify contemporary Arabians, and coupled with the virtual absence of 'Arab' in

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[401] Macdonald (2009b) 305 makes a similar argument.

[402] A case in point is the citation of 'Arabs' as a group of people in the fourth century CE *Res Gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus who uses the term "*Saraceni*" when describing real people in Arabia, whereas "Arabs" are only cited when he quotes earlier authors (Books 24-25). As Retsö noted, Ammianus' 'Arabs' "only lived on as a traditional ornament which could give a modern text a more antique flavour" (Retsö (2003) 520). For details of this nomenclature change, see Retsö (2003) 505-521 and Macdonald (2009d).

both Arabian epigraphy and pre-Islamic poetry leads to a seemingly unavoidable conclusion that 'Arab' was simply not a term pre-Islamic Arabians used.[403]

Lastly, neither Nöldeke nor von Grunebaum inquired as to whether pre-Islamic poetry can actually tell us how poets spoke about themselves. Both scholars sought to prove the ancient existence of Arabs to defend the 'race' against radical claims of its Islamic-era creation, so they were pre-disposed to find 'Arabs'; but I argue that this prevented them from noticing an important, yet hitherto mostly overlooked name of collective identity attested in both poetry and more securely datable pre-Islamic records.

3.4 Maᶜadd and pre-Islamic poetry

Both famous pre-Islamic poets whom classical-era scholars accorded stand-alone anthologies, and minor poets for whom only a few poems survive in larger anthologies such as Abū Tammām's *al-Ḥamāsa*, and other works which narrate pre-Islamic poems such as *Kitāb al-Aghānī* make consistent reference to the name "Maᶜadd". As explored in Chapter 2.3(c), the earliest Muslim genealogical texts identify Maᶜadd as the ultimate Arab ancestor, and poetry ascribed to the pre-Islamic era similarly depicts Maᶜadd as a term synonymous with the greatest collective of which poets were aware.

Modern Orientalists noted Maᶜadd's importance in early Arabic histories: both Goldziher and von Grunebaum observed that 'Maᶜadd' seems to connote a collective group wider than merely an idea of strictly 'Northern Arabs',[404] but since both Goldziher and von Grunebaum were concerned to establish pre-Islamic Arab

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[403] Robin (2012) 48 calls the second and third century CE disappearance of 'Arab' as an ethnicon "odd", but he assumes, without substantial evidence, that Arabians must have "began to call themselves Arabs" at this time. Elsewhere, Robin (2010) 85 argues that "shared language and culture" forged pan-Arab unity, though this does not logically explain the disappearance of the ethnicon 'Arab' at the time when those Greeks and Romans who wrote about Arabia finally became well acquainted with it. Robin illustrates the *a priori* approach of assuming pre-Islamic Arabness.
[404] Goldziher (1889-1890) 1:88-89, von Grunebaum (1963) 20.

unity and Arab *Kulturnation*, they did not propose that Maʿadd could in fact have been the collective noun by which many pre-Islamic poets identified themselves instead of 'Arab'. Von Grunebaum only considered one verse in which Maʿadd appears, and Goldziher cited a line from the poet Labīd where the poet lists Maʿadd together with the super-tribal groups of Kinda and Ṭayyiʾ, concluding that these three groups together constituted all pre-Islamic 'Arabs'.[405] Note, however, that Labīd's poem does not mention the word 'Arab', and in two other poems Labīd mentions Maʿadd alone to connote 'all people', without reference to Kinda or Ṭayyiʾ.[406] Quite how these super-tribal groups interacted in the pre-Islamic Arabian imagination is complicated, but a closer a review of the frequency and manner of Maʿadd's appearance in pre-Islamic poetry (since neither Ṭayyiʾ nor Kinda are similarly depicted) suggests Maʿadd was a more important collective concept than either Goldziher or von Grunebaum conceded.

The poet Imruʾ al-Qays, in praising his father, a 'Southern Arab' king from the land of Kinda near Yemen, referred to him as:

He, the best of Maʿadd, most virtuous and generous[407]

In another poem, Imruʾ al-Qays praises a different king, this time the 'Northern Arab' Saʿd ibn Ḍabāb al-Iyādī with the same formula: "the best of Maʿadd" (*khayr Maʿadd*).[408] Given the later Islamic-era interpretation that Maʿadd refers only to 'Northern Arabs', this dual citation confused later commentators who made an odd grammatical assumption to change the meaning of the first verse above so that Maʿadd would not be an adjective of Imruʾ al-Qays' father.[409] Since we now assume

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[405] Goldziher (1889-1890) 1:89. One could also add a similar formula, naming Maʿadd, Kinda and Ṭayyʾ together from the *Dīwān* of Imruʾ al-Qays (198).

[406] Labīd *Dīwān* 24,257. In the latter line, Labīd praises a king's authority in an exaggerated eulogy as having all "*Mulk Maʿadd*" – the sovereignty over Maʿadd.

[407] Imruʾ al-Qays *Dīwān* 134.

[408] Imruʾ al-Qays *Dīwān* 207.

[409] Imruʾ al-Qays *Dīwān* 134,n4.

that no 'Southern Arab' would claim descent from Maʿadd, this interpretation seems necessary, but the most straightforward reading of the verse renders Imruʾ al-Qays' father as himself the "best of Maʿadd",[410] so on the clearest interpretation of the verse, either the poet got his father's ancestry wrong, a later scribe made a mistake, or Maʿadd did have wider connotations than we attribute it today. Further survey reveals that the phrase "best of Maʿadd" was not constrained to specific identification of ancestors, but was a common epithet of praise that suggests the pre-Islamic poets and their patrons, though separated three centuries later into 'Northern' and 'Southern' camps, were cognisant of a shared affiliation with Maʿadd.

Zuhayr ibn Janāb al-Kalbī whom Islamic-era narrators considered one of the earliest known poets cites Maʿadd similarly. Zuhayr was from the group Quḍāʿa, a large collective whose lineage Muslim-era genealogists disputed between 'Northern' and 'Southern' camps.[411] Quḍāʿa's lineage was likely confused by tribal infighting during the Umayyad era when a 'Northern'/'Southern' split became politically meaningful, and the issue was never resolved. A modern scholar has argued that Quḍāʿa was 'originally Northern',[412] and one of the facts marshalled for this claim is a poem of Zuhayr in which he mentions Maʿadd in the context of the story of a tribe, the Banū Nahd:[413]

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[410] A reading von Grunebaum also preferred ((1963) 20).

[411] Kister and Plessner (1976) 56-58 list the largely unresolvable debates over Quḍāʿa genealogy.

[412] Bayṭār (1999) 9. The classical genealogists al-Zubayrī (d.236/850-851) made the same point, relying on extant verses attributed to Quḍāʿa poets to 'prove' their 'Northern' lineage (*Nasab* 5).

[413] Only one verse of the poem survives and its meaning is unclear, hinging on the interpretation of the word "*fizr*". I have followed the interpretation given by the Islamic-era genealogist/historian al-Balādhurī (*Ansāb al-ashrāf* 1:18-19): Fizr's goats are a metaphor for anything that can never be gathered (see also the explanation in al-Madāʿinī *Majmaʾ* 3:130).

> I have not seen any tribe of Maʿadd scatter other than Banū Nahd
>
> Quite like the scattering of al-Fizr's goats.[414]

Zuhayr's verse seems to single out the Banū Nahd from a larger collective, or perhaps the largest collective of which Zuhayr could conceive. Because Zuhayr cited Maʿadd here, modern readers assume that his Quḍāʿa must have been 'Northern', but this anachronistically interprets an Islamic-era tribal division into the reading of the pre-Islamic poem. Under an alternative reading of the verse, Zuhayr may have cited Maʿadd as it signified to him the largest collective, a super-tribal identity of Zuhayr's people and not merely the 'Northern Arabs'. Of course, Zuhayr's poem could be a later fabrication to prove that Quḍāʿa was a 'Northern Arab' tribe, but analysis of further citations of Maʿadd in pre-Islamic poetry that are less politically sensitive (i.e. bearing no obvious relation to tribal affiliations) suggests that the wider metaphor as 'all people' was widespread, and that Maʿadd in pre-Islamic poems should not be read through the prism of later Islamic genealogy but instead be read as a central reference of collective identity.

Consider, for example, verses of a famous pre-Islamic poet, al-Aʿshā where he cites Maʿadd to epitomise a collective gathering of 'all people':

> We came upon men, who, when the racehorses of Maʿadd are gathered
>
> Are most respected and awed[415]

Here, al-Aʿshā seeks to praise one tribe by suggesting that if all the cavalrymen of the people gathered, one tribe (whom he praises) would stand a cut above. Maʿadd is similarly cited in another verse of al-Aʿshā where he praises his own tribe saying:

> If all of Maʿadd had mustered with us at Dhū Qār,
>
> Glory would not have eluded them.[416]

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[414] Zuhayr ibn Janāb *Dīwān* 69.

[415] Al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 135.

[416] Al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 361.

Here, he uses Maʿadd as a byword for the largest group amongst whom the story of al-Aʿshā's tribe's exploits could be expected to extend. Should we not expect al-Aʿshā to select a name which signifies the largest conceivable community?

In a poem praising the tribal leader al-Nuʿmān ibn Wāʾil al-Kalbī, the well-known poet al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī invokes Maʿadd in his *summa* of al-Nuʿmān's distinction:

> You outstrip the nobles in nobility
>
> Like a stallion outstrips hunting dogs in the chase
>
> Your surpass all Maʿadd as a patron sought and enemy feared
>
> From the abundance of praise, you are its first recipient.[417]

Shifting the search to minor poets whose poems were recorded in only small fragments in Abū Tammām's *al-Ḥamāsa*, we read that Ḥujr ibn Khālid mentions Maʿadd, again in a tribal self-praise, and again as an allegory to what seems, in the poet's conception, to be the largest conceivable collective group:

> Our subalterns, they could be leaders of any other tribe;
>
> And our leaders: they could head an army of Maʿadd, no doubt.[418]

Abān ibn ʿAbda ibn al-ʿAyyār boasts of his own tribe's self sufficiency, claiming:

> Leave us; we could fight all of Maʿadd alone![419]

Abū Tammām's *al-Ḥamāsa* contains three further metaphorical citations of Maʿadd akin to 'all the people'.[420] Analogous citations occur across other classical collections, for instance in the recently reconstructed anthology of the tribe al-Asad's pre-Islamic poetry compiled by Muḥammad ʿAlī Diqqa. There we find five citations, such as the verse of the poet Jumayḥ who, in the vein of Tiresias, exclaims

> I have met all that Maʿadd – in its entirety – has seen;

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[417] Al-Nābigha *Dīwān* 140.

[418] Al-Marzūqī *Sharḥ* 2:513.

[419] Al-Marzūqī *Sharḥ* 2:634.

[420] Al-Marzūqī *Sharḥ* 1:293, 1:353, 2:974.

And [now] I have lost the joys of youth and vigour.[421]

And in poems of dispraise, Maʿadd can also be found, for instance Muḥammad's poet Ḥassān ibn Thābit sought to disparage a rival contending that

[Your tribe] is a symbol of disgrace, all of Maʿadd knows it.[422]

Throughout classical anthologies, Maʿadd's name almost always appears alone, indicative of the totality of a community, an entity greater than other tribal groupings.[423] It is noteworthy also that in none of the poems considered above does the word 'Arab' appear. A reader, unaware that the corpus of poetry would later come to be called 'pre-Islamic *Arabic* poetry' could perhaps be excused for considering that the poets belonged to the people of Maʿadd, a super-tribal communal identity. As noted above, we have only encountered three pre-Islamic verses mentioning Arabs pursuant to Nöldeke's survey, whereas Maʿadd is found across the anthologies.

The indication that northern Arabians in the century or two before Islam conceptualised their community as "Maʿadd" is also corroborated in contemporary texts written outside of Arabia: in the sixth century, Procopius also made a similar judgement, calling the Arabians (*Saraceni*) living beyond Byzantine control during the reign of the Emperor Justinian "Maaddites".[424] Procopius was an observer contemporary with the period in which most modern scholars (and even early Islamic-era writers)[425] believe extant pre-Islamic poetry began to be composed.

Maʿadd also appears in a fascinating and controversial inscription found at Namāra in southern Syria dating to 328 CE. The inscription has proven difficult to

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[421] Diqqa *Dīwān* 2:23. See also 2:25, 245, 437, 501.

[422] Ḥassān ibn Thābit *Dīwān* 1:167.

[423] With some exceptions, noted above: Labīd *Dīwān* 55, Imruʾ al-Qays *Dīwān* 198, and a similar citation of Maʿadd and Kinda as two large groups together in the Banū al-Asad collection (Diqqa 2:501).

[424] Procopius *Wars* I:14-17,19.

[425] Al-Jāḥiẓ posits the earliest surviving pre-Islamic Arabic poetry of which he was aware dates between 150-200 years before Muḥammad (*al-Ḥayawān* 1:53).

interpret, it was written in the Arabic language but in the Nabataean script and there are various translations.[426] It is a funerary monument of a king named Imruʾ al-Qays who refers to himself in line one of the inscription as "King of the Arabs" (*malik al-ʿArab*). This, however, is only one of the King's titles and he also refers to himself as the "King of Maʿadd" (*malik Maʿadd*).[427] The reference to 'Arabs' has spawned the greatest attention, and the most recent analysis tends away from reading the inscription's "Arabs" as connoting the same pan-Arabian Arab ethnos of the Muslim era.[428] Retsö also notes the "King of the Arabs" was a common epithet in Roman era terminology and he rejects the notion that the inscription represents the appearance of a new 'Arab identity': for Retsö, it is the old, traditional title for the religious/warrior group which he conceived to be a narrow pre-Islamic Arab identity.[429] The disappearance of reference to 'Arabs' in Latin and Greek records from the fourth century CE onwards noted above, and the absence of self-references to 'Arabs' in any other inscriptions before Islam suggests that the Namāra inscription's "King of the Arabs" is indeed old-form titulature and does not herald the emergence of a new identity.

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[426] Bellamy's 1985 interpretation is measured, but scholarly debate remains over some readings of the text, summarized by Retsö (2003) 467-473.

[427] Bellamy (1985) 35, 46. Bellamy prefers reading the inscription "he subdued Maʿadd" (*malaka Maʿadd*). See Retsö (2003) 468-469 for the array of interpretations. Note a variation on the phrase "m-l-k m-ʿ-dd" appears in Labīd's *Dīwān* 257 as "*mulk Maʿadd*" (sovereignty over Maʿadd).

[428] Shahid interprets the inscription to mean the king claims sovereignty over the Arab ethnos and he equates Imruʿ al-Qays with the "Lakhmid king of al-Ḥīra" (1984) 32. Shahid's interpretations, however, must be read cautiously since he espouses a largely unproblematized interpretation of pre-Islamic Arabness which paints a cohesive Arab unity across most of ancient Arabia. It seems inspired by pan-Arab nationalist discourses (especially evident in Shahid (1970) 3,6,18-25), and his particular interpretation of the Namāra inscription relies on a problematic labelling of Ḥatra and Palmyra as 'Arab towns', an elevation of al-Ḥīra to the centre of the Arab political world in the third/ninth century, and a convoluted explanation for why a Lakhmid king would be buried in the Syrian Namāra (1984) 35-36. Hoyland (2009) is more cautious and urges a distinction be drawn between the fourth century inscription's reference to 'Arabs' and modern notions of pan-Arabian Arabness.

[429] Retsö (2003) 471,485.

Less noted in scholarship about the Namāra inscription is its mention of Maʿadd. Whether or not the "King of the Arabs" is merely a symbolic title, or a reference to sovereignty in the Roman province of *Arabia* (modern Jordan and southern Syria), the title "King of Maʿadd" must connote a separate sovereignty which Imruʾ al-Qays counted amongst his titles as something distinct from "Arab king". Given the prevalence of Maʿadd in pre-Islamic poetry from northern Arabia and Procopius' identification of northern Arabians as Maʿaddites, the sovereignty over Maʿadd expressed in the Namāra inscription may refer specifically to the land/people to the south of the Roman *Provincia Arabia*, i.e. the deserts of northern Saudi Arabia.

Procopius' identification of Maʿaddites and the status of Maʿadd in the Namāra inscription were noted in Zwettler's paper on the meaning of Maʿadd in pre-Islamic inscriptions which led him to conclude that Maʿadd was an ethnonym for militarised, camel-herding Bedouin communities of northern Arabia in the centuries before Islam.[430] Zwettler's findings and my interpretation of Maʿadd as a term of collective identity in pre-Islamic poetry reveal that Islam rose in the land of Maʿadd, and the 'Arabs' emerged as an ethnos from Maʿadd (as the earliest Muslim genealogies also propose). So Müller's instincts were right after all: 'Arab' did not connote an ethnos in pre-Islamic Arabia, and this has important ramifications for understanding identity in pre-Islamic poetry and for reconstructing the context in which Muslim-era authors developed their idea of the 'Arab'.

Scholars have long accepted that pre-Islamic poetry was primarily concerned with tribal praise and the collective "we" into which most poets surrendered their own identity. Such deep-rooted 'tribalism' is an undeniable hallmark of pre-Islamic poetry, but the many references to Maʿadd indicate that

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[430] Zwettler (2000) 280-286. Zwettler did not dwell on Islamic-era Maʿadd identity (285).

pre-Islamic poets were also aware of a greater collective that united at least a large number of disparate groups. The status of Maʿadd adduced above adds an additional layer of self-identification in pre-Islamic poetry and must curtail the explanatory power of von Grunebaum's notion of an Arab pre-Islamic *Kulturnation*. The inference that pre-Islamic Arabians were cognizant of a shared Arab culture is an unnecessary retrojection of Arabness designed to explain the pan-peninsular cultural unity that is only needed if we accept the Muslim-era claims about Arab origins. But the evidence from the pre-Islamic Peninsula and Muslim-era texts reveals that Arabness was constructed, contested and grafted on memories of pre-Islamic Arabia. There was no well-established model of Arabness for them to cite – Arabness was something newer, its parameters were more fluid, and the early Abbasid writings about Arabness creatively suit Muslim discourses. Instead of theorising about pre-Islamic Arabia under the anachronistic influence of Abbasid agendas, closer scrutiny of the Abbasid narratives themselves is needed to explain why they arose and why they portray Arabness in the way they do. First, Arabness had to become a term of self-identification and Muslim cultural producers had to Arabise Arabia, converting the memories of 'Maʿaddites' into 'Arabs'. I now explore that process and the genesis of the Muslim Arabness idea.

3.5 The rise of 'Arab' poetry

Poetry helps uncover the rise of 'Arab' consciousness. In stark contrast to pre-Islamic poetry's Arab-less-ness, the word 'Arab' makes its appearance in poetry ascribed to the first generations of the Muslim-era and becomes common in Umayyad verse. At the dawn of Islam, Ḥassān ibn Thābit, the supposed official-poet of the Medinan Muslim community refers to the "tribe of the Arabs" (*ḥayy min al-ʿarab*) to identify a group from a larger collective.[431] Two verses ascribed to Abū

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[431] Ḥassān *Dīwān* 1:135. See also 1:370,443.

Dahbal al-Jumaḥī, a Muslim poet born around the time of Muḥammad, refer to 'all people' via the expression "both ʿarab and ʿajam", one of which reads

Abū al-Fīl's virtues are innumerable

They have spread, well known amongst the ʿarab and ʿajam.[432]

The 'Arab/non-Arab' formula to connote all humanity is repeated once in the *Dīwān* of the Umayyad poet al-Farazdaq:

Your claim to not know him is baseless:

Both Arabs and non-Arabs know what you deny.[433]

And his peer, Jarīr, twice invokes a collective notion of 'Arabs' to lampoon al-Farazdaq:

Al-Farazdaq has no glory to protect him

Except, perhaps, his cousins, who carry wooden staffs,

Be gone cousins! You should settle in al-Ahwāz

And the river Tīrā; no Arabs know you![434]

Al-Farazdaq and Jarīr's contemporary al-Rāʿī al-Numayrī cites the Arab collective in praise of his own tribe:

Numayr is the burning ember of the Arabs

Burning all the brighter when war flares.[435]

And the Umayyad Caliph and poet al-Walīd ibn Yazīd cites 'Arab' to describe the lineage of one of his love interests:

I wish for Sulaymā, my cousin

From the noble Arabs.[436]

The Arabian domiciled Umayyad-era poet Dhū al-Rumma, whose poetry lacks the overt politicking of some of the Iraqi and Syrian Umayyads, cites Arabs four times,

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[432] Abū Dahbal *Dīwān* 78. See also 94.

[433] Al-Farazdaq *Dīwān* 2:353.

[434] Jarīr *Dīwān* 1:441. See also 1:437.

[435] Al-Rāʿī *Dīwān* 18.

[436] Al-Walīd *Dīwān* 14.

referring to the "languages of the Arabs", the "absent Arab girls", and "the Arab noblewomen".[437]

The extant early Islamic and Umayyad poetry was preserved only from the late second/eighth century, so it is almost as difficult to empirically study Umayyad poetry as it is pre-Islamic, but it is intriguing that the word 'Arab', absent from almost all poetry ascribed to pre-Islamic Arabia, should make its appearance in poetic memories from the dawn of Islam as a widely cited expression of the collective, as Maʿadd had been used during pre-Islam. Müller's thesis of the Muslim 'invention' of Arabs again seems right, but the evidence does not permit Müller's completely clear-cut dichotomy. Maʿaddite identity was not extinguished with Islam: most of the above poets also mention 'Maʿadd' as a term of the ultimate collective identity more frequently than 'Arab',[438] for instance, Jarīr chides al-Farazdaq:

Al-Farazdaq is disgraced throughout Maʿadd.[439]

And even the Umayyad 'Arab Caliphs' reportedly employed Maʿaddite nomenclature to describe themselves. Goldziher reports an anecdote in which the Caliph Hishām is addressed as "the Lord of Maʿadd and non-Maʿadd" (*rabb Maʿadd wa siwā Maʿadd*),[440] and al-Walīd ibn Yazīd's *Dīwān* contains one reference to his entourage as "elite of Maʿadd" (*ʿulyā Maʿadd*).[441] Maʿadd's persistence alongside increasing citation of 'Arab' paints the first 125 years of Islam as a period of transition where the Maʿaddite ethnicon eventually gave way to Arabness. Interestingly, of Umayyad poets, the Arabian Dhū al-Rumma is the only one I have encountered who refers to

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[437] Dhū al-Rumma *Dīwān* 1:418,2:979,3:1553. See also 2:1164.

[438] Jarīr cites Maʿadd in this fashion 12 times: *Dīwān* 1:180,202,224,246,366,461,470,472,474; 2:606,818,888 and al-Rāʿī three times *Dīwān* 117,274,287.

[439] Jarīr *Dīwān* 2:818

[440] Goldziher (1889-1890) 1:88.

[441] Al-Walīd *Dīwān* 81.

'Arab' more pervasively than Maʿadd – the three references to Maʿadd in his *Dīwān* are all contained in one poem,[442] the unusual concentration of 'Maʿadd' seems out of place in his oeuvre. It may be spurious, and perhaps evidences that the militarised communities of Maʿadd left Arabia for Syria, Iraq and beyond during the Conquests, and the notion of Maʿadd lost its significance for an Arabian poet one century after the Conquests. As considered in the next chapter, does Dhū al-Rumma indicate that we should conceptualise the Conquests as Maʿaddite instead of Arab?

The above findings dovetail with the genealogical discussions in Chapter 2. The poetic invocation of Maʿadd as the byword for the Muslim elite mirrors the late second/eighth century Ibn al-Kalbī's genealogical model that posits Maʿadd at the top of the elite's family tree. It would thus seem that the ruling group of Maʿadd Muslims sought initially to convert their Maʿaddite lineage into 'Arab genealogy', but the disappearance of the Maʿadd model by the third/ninth century betrays a subsequent effort to expunge Maʿadd in Arab genealogy and reorient Arabness around different ancestors - ʿAdnān (the alleged father of Maʿadd) and Qaḥṭān (progenitor of the Yemenis). Like the other manipulations of Arab genealogy, the elimination of Maʿadd did not go unnoticed: the poetry critic Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī added to his misgivings about the Qaḥṭānī Arab heritage (explored in the last chapter) with an expression of his surprise at the identification of ʿAdnān as the ancestor of the Northern Arabs. Ibn Sallām reports that ʿAdnān is only once mentioned in a pre-Islamic verse (of which he doubts the authenticity in any event), and that the 'proper' ancestor figure should be Maʿadd.[443] From my search of Umayyad poetry, ʿAdnān only once appears in the *Dīwān* of Dhū al-Rumma,[444] but is

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[442] Dhū al-Rumma *Dīwān* 2:644,653,655.

[443] Al-Jumaḥī *Ṭabaqāt* 1:10.

[444] It is contained in the curious poem noted above which also mentions Maʿadd three times (Dhū al-Rumma *Dīwān* 2:653).

otherwise absent, even in all the politicised poetry of Umayyads (*i.e.* ꜥAdnān branch) *vs.* Yamānī (Qaḥṭān branch) opposition.[445] Note also that Ibn al-Kalbī's two extant genealogies of northern Arabs begin with Maꜥadd, and the ꜥAdnān/Qaḥṭān terminology thus seems to post-date to the Umayyads.

The shifts suggest that an early co-opting of Arabness by Maꜥaddites was contested, and over two centuries and several regime changes, Maꜥadd lost its monopoly over Arabness and was eventually entirely replaced by 'Arab' to connote the members of the first Muslim community. The transition from the pre-Islamic Maꜥadd to the third/ninth century depictions of Arabia as homogeneously 'Arab' was, therefore, a major reconstruction of pre-Islamic history that re-wrote the ethnic and cultural map of the Late Antique Near East as well as the conception of the political situation from which Islam emerged and the Caliphate established. Opposite to the familiar narrative in which the formative centuries of Islam mark the transition of Arab *Kulturnation* to *Staatsnation*, this investigation reveals that the retrospective construction of Arab identity was a momentous legacy of the Umayyad and early Abbasid Caliphates, second only to (and perhaps a central part of) their codification of Islam's message. Key parameters of the transition are revealed in analysis of representations of the Battle of Dhū Qār.

3.6 Transition from 'Maꜥadd' to 'Arab': case study of Dhū Qār

Dhū Qār, a site on Arabia's border with Iraq, is narrated in Muslim sources as a clash between the Sasanian Empire and a group of 'Arab tribes' from 'Bakr ibn Wāʾil' in the early seventh century CE. Modern scholars often comment that the "Muslim tradition" represents the pre-Islamic battle as a precursor of the Muslim conquest of Iraq, the first 'Arab' victory in a supposed prolonged struggle against the Persians that foreshadowed the 'Arab' annihilation of the Persian Empire about

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[445] Note, particularly, that when Jarīr discusses inter-Arab strife, he refers to "Maꜥadd" (not ꜥAdnān) *vs.* "Yaman" (*Dīwān* 2:606).

twenty years later.[446] Some classical Muslim historians did situate Dhū Qār within a
'conquest narrative' of 'Arab *vs.* Persian' that culminates in Islam's 'Arab conquest'
of Iraq. In such a vein, the battle is even dated as nearly contemporary with
Muḥammad's victory over the pagan Meccans at Badr, elevating Dhū Qār to a
pendant-piece of Islam's most famous military victory.[447]

The notion of a monolithic 'Muslim Tradition', however, risks generalisation,
and the narratives of Dhū Qār are no exception. The dating of the battle
contemporaneous with Badr is a fourth/tenth century reconstruction; earlier texts
are less specific.[448] Furthermore, if a cohesive 'Arab' ethnos did not exist before
Islam, there is also a serious disjunction between the actual battle and its memory
as expressed in later narratives. Modern re-examinations of Dhū Qār support the
suspicion that the battle lacked the later imputed ethnic significance: the opponents
of the Sasanians are said to be 'Arab Bakr ibn Wāʾil tribesmen', but not all of the sub-
tribes that Muslim genealogists would later classify as 'Bakr' participated in the
battle (the combatants were from the group of Shaybān and some units from Qays),
and Fred Donner's survey of accounts of the Islamic conquests suggests that Bakr
ibn Wāʾil did not constitute a unified political collective in the early seventh
century CE, and the notions of Bakr's pre-Islamic tribal unity and *ʿaṣabiyya* solidarity

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[446] Landau-Tasseron (1996) 7:575: "The battle of [Dh]ū Qār thus appears to have had ideological and
symbolic meaning for the Arabs far beyond its military and political significance". See also Morony
(1984) 152-53,220) and Heath (2011) 48,50-52.

[447] Al-Iṣfahānī (d.356/967) dates the battle after Badr by "a few months" (*al-Aghānī* 24:72).

[448] Abū ʿUbayda's (d.210/825) *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, perhaps the earliest extant reference to date Dhū Qār, does
not connect it with Badr; he dates the battle more loosely to the period of Muḥammad's prophecy
(but not necessarily after the *hijra*) (2:640). Neither al-Yaʿqūbī (d.c.284-292/897-905) nor al-Ṭabarī
(d.310/922) date the battle, but al-Yaʿqūbī notes it was "the first victory of the Arabs over the
Persians" (*Tārīkh* 1:215,225) and al-Ṭabarī precedes the battle narrative with a telling section
detailing signs of the Arabs' impending destruction of the Persian Empire (*Tārīkh* 2:188-193). The
fourth/tenth century al-Masʿūdī (d.346/956) notes disagreement over the battle's date, but connects
it to momentous dates of the Prophet's career – either 40 years after his birth, shortly after the Hijra
or 4 months after the battle of Badr (*Murūj* §648).

must be a fiction of Muslim historiography.[449] In the context of Dhū Qār, it is therefore unlikely that the Shaybān and Qays warriors believed they represented the collective interests of the *tribe* Bakr, let alone the supposed *nation* of 'Maʿadd' and certainly not the then non-existent 'Arabs'. And moreover, the Sasanians were aided by Lakhmī (and perhaps even Taghlibī) units – groups later classified as 'Arabs' in Muslim genealogies. To construct an Arab *vs.* Persian image of Dhū Qār, third/ninth century Muslim historians downplayed Arab presence on the Sasanian side to stress the 'Persian' ethnicity of the enemies of the 'Arabs',[450] and Shaybān and Qays were rebranded as 'Arabs' and representatives of the Arab cause. A diachronic survey of poetry about Dhū Qār reveals these transformations in action as succeeding generations of poets summoned evolving memories of the battle. Over the centuries they reconstructed pre-Islamic history to create an Arab identity by rewriting Dhū Qār in tandem with negotiating Maʿaddite identity.

3.6(a) Dhū Qār in pre-Islamic Poetry: al-Aʿshā

The Qaysī combatants at Dhū Qār counted the famous pre-Islamic poet al-Aʿshā Maymūn ibn Qays as one of their kinsmen, and al-Aʿshā is known to have composed several poems extolling the victory. Whilst the historical al-Aʿshā was a contemporary witness, the literary memory of al-Aʿshā survives only in Muslim era collections, and, like any early poetry, the remembered verses may not be wholly authentic. Over the 150-year gap between Dhū Qār and the first recording of al-Aʿshā's poetry, fabrication indeed occurred. For example, one poem about Dhū Qār in the modern edition of al-Aʿshā's *Dīwān* contains unusual vocabulary only

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[449] Donner (1980).

[450] Al-Yaʿqūbī admits the Persian army had some Arabs and notes that Iyās ibn Qabīṣa al-Ṭāʾī and "other brothers of Maʿadd and Qaḥṭān" fought with Kisrā (*Tārīkh* 1:225). Al-Ṭabarī also notes Arab fighters with Kisrā, but does not name them and he expressly changes Iyās' role, giving them Arab sympathies (*Tārīkh* 2:208-209).

common in Yemen,[451] and the poem's citation in early Arabic literature is itself problematic. Ibn Isḥāq's biography of the Prophet narrates five lines of this poem in an entirely different context, ascribing them to the Yemeni warrior Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan as part of the story of the Sasanian conquest of Yemen, and Ibn Hishām's edit of Ibn Isḥāq's text comments on the poem, noting that one contemporary scholar ascribed a line of the poem to al-Aʿshā (and not the Yemeni Sayf), but he rejects this and affirms the whole poem's ascription to Sayf.[452] Yet another early poetry collector, Abū ʿUbayda (d.210/825) claimed the poem was written by either Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan or another Yemeni poet (ʿAbd al-Kallāl), and only one early narrator, Abū ʿAmr Isḥāq al-Shaybānī (d.206/821), ascribed the whole poem to al-Aʿshā.[453] The dubious status of this particular poem, however, does not mean that al-Aʿshā's *Dīwān* is entirely unserviceable in this study.

The confusion surrounding the above poem's ascription in fact helps appraise al-Aʿshā's poetry and Dhū Qār. The fact that poetry describing 'Arab' wars against Persians could later be ascribed to al-Aʿshā indicates that whilst some poems may have been concocted and inserted into his oeuvre, there must also be a kernel of familiar association of al-Aʿshā with Dhū Qār that prompted the fabrication in the first place. Al-Aʿshā was also one of the most famous pre-Islamic poets whose verses attracted the attention of the earliest generation of Muslim poetry anthologists,[454] the poet's fame and relatively early recording of his verse suggest some genuine poems of the historical al-ʿAshā may have survived, and, on the topic of Dhū Qār,

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[451] Al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 349-353. The poem refers to the Persian commander Hāmarz as a *qayl* (lns.12,19) – a term for 'local leader' only encountered in Yemeni texts.

[452] Ibn Hishām *Sīra* 1:65.

[453] Al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 348.

[454] Al-Nadīm notes that the second/eighth and early third/ninth century anthologisers Abū ʿAmr, al-Aṣmaʿī, Ibn al-Sikkīt, al-Ṭūsī and Thaʿlab each recorded al-Aʿshā's *Dīwān*, as did al-Sukkarī in the later third/ninth century (*al-Fihrist* 178). From al-Nadīm's list, al-Aʿshā is just behind Imruʾ al-Qays and Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulma in terms of early scholarly attention.

there are three poems in his *Dīwān* which, unlike the first poem considered above, are widely and consistently cited in classical literature without debate as to their ascription.[455] They also describe the battle in terms which do not accord with the manner in which later Muslim narrators represent Dhū Qār. On account of their consistent form and their variance with the later prose narratives of the battle, they do seem to be early relics that can offer insight into Dhū Qār's early significance.

The poems are noteworthy foremost for their lack of emphasis on 'Persian' ethnicity: the words ʿajam and furs are absent and the poems tend away from projecting the battle in ethnic terms.[456] In one line al-Aʿshā refers to 'Kisrā' (the Sasanian monarch) as the opponent of his kinsmen:

> Who will inform Kisrā when my
>
> Dismaying messages come in:
>
> 'I say we will not surrender our boys
>
> As hostages to corrupt as he has done before.'[457]

But the Sasanian monarch is a distant figure: al-Aʿshā elsewhere mentions the Persian commander Hāmarz as the chief opponent,[458] and nowhere does he give an indication that the Sasanian Empire was threatened by this battle, that Kisrā was the intended target of the 'Arabs', that the Persian 'race' was an inferior foe, or that the Persians were destined to lose by virtue of their ethnicity.

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[455] Al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 233-235,277-283,309-311. See their partial narration in Abū ʿUbayda *Naqāʾiḍ* 2:644-645; al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 2:211-212.

[456] It must be noted that in another poem, where al-Aʿshā boasts of his own tribe's might, he cites the battle of Dhū Qār to awe other Arabians, and there he notes that his people had defeated "a mighty army of the vainglorious king of the Aʿājim (non-Arabic speakers?) with pearls in their ears" (*Dīwān* 361). But this poem stops short of depicting the victory over the Persians as a shared glory of all 'Arabs' – al-Aʿshā actually cites the victory as an example of his own tribe's superiority over other Arabians whom he refers to as Maʿaddites.

[457] Al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 279.

[458] Al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 309-311.

Crucially, and in keeping with my findings from the rest of pre-Islamic poetry, al-Aʿshā makes no mention of 'Arab', nor does he imply the battle has any significance beyond an example of the bravery of the combatants involved. One line suggests al-Aʿshā conceptualised his kinsmen as "a furious wave of Wāʾil"[459] which could challenge Donner's notion that the tribal group Bakr ibn Wāʾil did not exist as a cohesive identity until after the Islamic conquests of Iraq, but the poems give no indication that al-Aʿshā conceptualised a political cohesion between each of the groups constituting Bakr ibn Wāʾil. Moreover, al-Aʿshā reserved praise solely for those who fought at the battle, in particular the Banū Dhuhl ibn Shaybān, a tribe to whom al-Aʿshā was tangentially related:

> May my camel and I be ransom for Banū Dhuhl ibn Shaybān
>
> On the day of battle; though it be meagre!
>
> At al-Ḥinw, Ḥinw Qurāqir,[460] they crashed blows
>
> Down upon al-Hāmarz's ranks until they fled.
>
> Blessed are the eyes of those who saw this band,
>
> As they beat down the enemy thrusting from the plain
>
> With shining white helmets under high flags.[461]

The style in which al-Aʿshā derides one of his own kinsmen, Qays ibn Masʿūd for siding with the enemy is also noteworthy. The poem refers to Qays' journey to the opponents (perhaps to curry favour with the Sasanian administration?),[462] but it does not depict Qays as a traitor who crossed ethnic boundaries, nor even a traitor at all, rather al-Aʿshā upbraids Qays as simply a fool for not trusting the might of Shaybān's warriors:

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[459] Al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 283.

[460] One of the names of the Battle of Dhū Qār. Abū ʿUbayda's *Naqāʾiḍ* 2:638 lists eight different names by which the battle was known.

[461] Al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 309.

[462] Al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 233.

If you had been satisfied with Shaybān,

You would have spacious tents, a thronging tribe, and massed cavalry,

...

But you foolishly left them, though you were their leader.

I hope I hear no more from you![463]

Akin to the other *Ayyām al-ʿarab* 'Battle Days' described in pre-Islamic poetry in which one tribe boasts of its victory over another, al-Aʿshā's Dhū Qār is depicted as a tribal victory devoid of strategic or ethnic significance beyond the narrow interests of the battle's actual combatants. Al-Aʿshā makes no reference to prolonged struggle with the 'nemesis' Kisrā, and the honour of victory is for the combatants alone: those who were not present, and certainly those from other tribal groups, are not entitled to share in the glory – Dhū Qār is a personal triumph for Shaybān. It is not even a symbol for the collective glory of Maʿadd, as revealed in another poem in al-Aʿshān's *Dīwān* where he invokes the greater collective 'Maʿadd' to frame his boast that Shaybān won more glory for themselves than any other tribe of Maʿadd had ever done:

If all of Maʿadd had mustered with us at Dhū Qār,

Glory would not have eluded them.[464]

3.6(b) Dhū Qār ibn Umayyad Period Poetry

One century later, during the Umayyad period, memory of the battle was summoned in poetry with strikingly different emphasis. Both Abū ʿUbayda[465] and the slightly later poet/anthologiser Abū Tammām[466] (d.231/845) record a poetic duel

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[463] Al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 233-234.

[464] Al-Aʿshā 361.

[465] Abū ʿUbayda *Naqāʾiḍ* 2:646.

[466] Abū Tammām (attrib) *Naqāʾiḍ* 135. Sezgin (1975) 2:320-321 doubts the attribution of *al-Naqāʾiḍ* to Abū Tammām, ascribing it instead to al-Aṣmaʿī.

between two of the Umayyad Era's most famous poetic rivals, Jarīr and al-Akhṭal in which al-Akhṭal chides Jarīr's kin:

> Did you assist Maʿadd on the ferocious day,
>
> Like we supported Maʿadd at Dhū Qār?

Whereas al-Aʿshā never extended Dhū Qār's glory beyond Wāʾil and expressly denied that his tribe needed any help in the battle from other Maʿaddites, al-Akhṭal converts Dhū Qār to the status of Maʿadd's signature collective victory. Gone are Shaybān's unique rights to claim the battle's glory – now Dhū Qār is presented as waged by a (mostly) united Maʿadd, and al-Akhṭal can accordingly chide Jarīr's Maʿaddite tribe for not participating with their brethren. Al-Akhṭal's literary transformation from tribal battle to collective saga is akin to Shakespeare's transformation of Henry V's St Crispin's Day escapade into a national triumph which any able-bodied Englishman should wish to have attended.

In the same vein, and in an extraordinary twist, Jarīr replied by inserting his own tribe Tamīm's memory in the lore of Dhū Qār:

> I am a Muḍarī at root.
>
> You cannot hope to vie with me and my prestige!
>
> We sent the horsemen to battle at Dhū Bahdā and Dhū Najab
>
> And we stood out on the morn of Dhū Qār.[467]

The reference puzzled the later commentator Abū Tammām who wondered how a Tamīmī tribesman could lay a claim to Dhū Qār, and he reasoned that there must have been a separate battle there between Tamīm and Bakr;[468] but Abū ʿUbayda reveals an anecdote which better explains Jarīr's poem. Abū ʿUbayda relates that according to one narrative, a number of Tamīm tribesmen were captured by Shaybān before the Battle of Dhū Qār, and, on the eve of battle, the Tamīmīs offered

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[467] Abū Tammām (attrib) *Naqāʾiḍ* 143.

[468] Abu Tammām (attrib) *Naqāʾiḍ* 143-144.

to fight for Shaybān in return for their freedom, and, according to Tamīmī partisans like Jarīr, they acquitted themselves manfully. The anecdote, and Jarīr's poem seem to evidence an Umayyad-era allure of Dhū Qār and the major re-working of its memory, elevating its reputation such that groups sought to insert themselves into its narrative in any way necessary, even by claiming that they arrived at the battle as prisoners!

Explaining the shift from Shaybānid battle into a seminal event of Maʿaddite heritage is straightforward. Al-Akhṭal and Jarīr wrote at a generation or two generation's remove from the Sasanian collapse, and both poets were employed by the descendants of its conquerors. As Umayyads looked back into the past, they could alight on Dhū Qār as the 'beginning of the end' of Sasanian dominance and elevate the battle's significance with hindsight beyond what its actual combatants could ever have imagined. In terms of Arabness, al-Akhṭal's poem that refers to Dhū Qār as the collective triumph of Maʿadd without any mention of 'Arab' also supports the hypothesis that Maʿaddite identity only gradually shifted towards 'Arab'. While history was evidently being reinterpreted during the Umayyad period, the pre-Islamic Arabians were not yet axiomatically united under the name 'Arab', and at least some felt that Maʿadd symbolised the collective victorious 'nation' at Dhū Qār.

Other Umayyad-era poems harkening the memory of Dhū Qār exhibit similar shifts towards emphasising grand Persian defeat without assertion of Arabness. Abū ʿUbayda records two poems attributed to very minor Muslim era poets from the ʿIjl tribe that reflect changes in the representation of the Sasanian monarch from al-Aʿshā's verses – the Umayyad poets refer to Kisrā as the *jabbār* (the despot), betraying influence of the Qurʾānic portrayal of Moses's Pharaoh to whom Kisrā was

linked in Muslim literature,[469] and another paints the victory as a crushing blow to Persian imperial might:

> We took their booty, our cavalry was grim,
>
> On the day we stripped all Kisrā's knights (*iswār*) of their armour.[470]

Al-Aʿshā made no reference to the whole might of Sasanian Iran, nor *iswār*, *asāwira* (Farsi *savārān*) cataphracts in his poetry, but in Muslim era literature these cavalrymen become a byword for the Sasanian nobility, and as the 'Persian' aspect of the battle ascends, and its significance as the beginning of the end of Persian Empire took root, it can be expected that such vocabulary would be employed to embed the stereotypical *topos* of conflict of Persian vs. Muslim / vainglorious Persian king *vs.* plucky Arabian (but not yet 'Arab') warriors into the memory of the pre-Islamic battle.

3.6(c) Dhū Qār in the Abbasid Period

Abbasid literature evidences the final shifts in the depiction of Dhū Qār into the seminal Arab victory for which it is famous today. Abū ʿUbayda achieves this with no less than a hadith from the Prophet in which Muḥammad is said to have heard of the battle and remarked "This is the first battle in which the Arabs have become the Persians' equal".[471] Abū ʿUbayda's hadith lacks *isnād*, but it would spread in the third/ninth century with some key additions as well as *isnād*: Ibn Saʿd (d.230/845) reports that Muḥammad said, "On this day the Arabs diminished Persian kingship",[472] and Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ (d.c.240/853-854) records a version in which Muḥammad says "Dhū Qār is the first battle in which the Arabs became equal to the Persians; they were granted victory through me".[473] This latter Prophet-assisted

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[469] Abū ʿUbayda *Naqāʾiḍ* 2:646.

[470] Abū ʿUbayda *Naqāʾiḍ* 2:646.

[471] Abū ʿUbayda *Naqāʾiḍ* 2:640.

[472] Ibn Sʿad *Ṭabaqāt* 7:54.

[473] Ibn Khayyāṭ *Ṭabaqāt* 43.

representation of Dhū Qār was included in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba*[474] and al-Bukhārī's *Tārīkh* (though, interestingly, and perhaps tellingly, not in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*),[475] and Arabic historians repeated the hadith thereafter.[476] The hadith reveals how the express Arabisation of the battle's memory appeared in tandem with prophetic history, and by the fourth/tenth century, this underpinning became even more express, for instance in a new and colourful anecdote (without *isnād*) al-Iṣfahānī narrates

> The battle was made manifest before Muḥammad's eyes while he was in Medina, and he raised his hands and prayed for victory for the tribe of Shaybān (or Rabīʿa). He continued making the prayer until he was shown the Persians' (*furs*) defeat.[477]

To support the new Abbasid-era Arabisation of Dhū Qār, Abū ʿUbayda and most narrators who followed him also insert a poem attributed to the otherwise unknown pre-Islamic poet Bukayr al-Aṣamm[478] which includes the verse

> They attacked the *Banū Aḥrār*[479] on that day
>
> With sword thrusts to their heads;
>
> Three hundred Arabs against a squadron[480]
>
> Two-thousand Persians (*aʿājim*) from *Banū Faddām*.[481]

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[474] Ibn Ḥanbal *Faḍāʾil* 2:1045-1046.

[475] Al-Bukhārī *Tārīkh* 2:63. He also reports the hadith without Muḥammad's promise of future victory *Tārīkh* 8:313. Ibn Ḥanbal likewise did not include the Dhū Qār hadith in his *Musnad*.

[476] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:215,225; al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 2:193 (in a second version of the battle narrative which he copied from Abū ʿUbayda, al-Ṭabarī relates the hadith without the Prophetic promise of victory 2:207). Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §648.

[477] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 24:76.

[478] I have found no mention of Bukayr al-Aṣamm in the third/ninth century poetry anthologies nor the biographical dictionaries of poets. Reference to him in *al-Aghānī* is restricted to the single poem about Dhū Qār.

[479] The 'free born', a sobriquet of the Persians and a reference to their stereotyped nobility.

[480] I read this verse to imply Arabs against Persians. This is the clear interpretation in the poem's narration in *al-Aghānī* 24:73 as the word 'Arab' is *marfūʿ*, though in al-Ṭabarī, the word is *manṣūb* and could thus be an object of the verb 'attack' in the previous line, implying that Arabs and Persians were on the same side. I find this a strained reading, however: the numbers, 300 Arabs against 2,000 Persians implies a heroic interpretation of a victory for the numerically inferior Arabs, much suited to the poem's thrust.

Ibn Qays found a battle

The fame of which spread among anyone going to Iraq or any Syrian.[482]

The verse is one of the six Nöldeke counted in his references to 'Arab' in pre-Islamic poetry, and while it is impossible to prove the verse's Abbasid-era fabrication, there are numerous 'red flags'. Bukayr is an entirely unknown figure, and an easy target for false ascriptions of poetry.[483] The references to the Persian sobriquet *Banū Faddām* and to Iraq and Syria (a specifically Islamic-era division of space) also strongly suggest Muslim-era fabrication, and hence the reference to 'Arab' in this poem, in distinction to the narrow tribal poetry of al-Aʿshā and al-Akhṭal's Maʿaddite reference seems yet another indication of the poem's invention in the Abbasid era to facilitate the Arabisation of the memory of Dhū Qār.

From tribal conflict against the Persian lieutenant Hāmarz to a Divinely guided Arab national victory, the gradual transformation of Dhū Qār takes us to the heart of early Islamic era myth making which reconfigured memories of the past not just to explain the rise of Islam, but also to create an antiquity for Arab identity. Islamic myth-making seems to be part of 'making Arabs', amalgamating the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula into one ethnos and changing the name of old collectives like Maʿadd to 'Arab'. Abbasid eyes saw the pre-Islamic history of Arabia (like we do) as the story of ancient Arabs, but those ancient Arabians clearly did not imagine the same sense of ethnic unity nor even used the term Arab to identify themselves.

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[481] *Faddām* allegedly refers to the veils (singular *fidām*) Persian Zoroastrian wine-servers would wear when pouring wine (al-Khalīl *al-ʿAyn* 8:54), and it became a (rare) sobriquet for 'Persian'.

[482] Abū ʿUbayda *Naqāʾiḍ* 2:645. Repeated with slight variation in al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 2:211 and al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 24:73.

[483] False ascriptions are better attested in classical literature when they concern famous poets, but this is perhaps not surprising: a famous poet's oeuvre would be well-known, so false ascriptions would readily catch the attention of commentators and transmitters and be recorded in classical commentaries. Ananchronistic ascriptions to unknown poets would be harder to detect both then and now.

The comprehensive Arabisation of Dhū Qār in Muslim narratives and the reconfiguration of the battle narrative suggest that Arabisation was closely related to Islamicisation. This nexus may help explain the logical next question of why Muslims in the Abbasid period decided to re-name so many people 'Arabs'. I noted above that names resembling 'Arab' are traceable to Assyrian times as labels outsiders applied to Peninsular people, but for centuries before Islam, the word 'Arab' fell entirely out of use and there was clearly no 'Arab' ethno-cultural unity in the pre-Islamic Peninsula. Given the sudden and pervasive appearance of 'Arab' as a term of self-reference during the Islamic period, the reconstruction of historical Arabness should start with the Qurʾān.

3.7 The Qurʾān and Arabness

Compared with the other scriptures of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Qurʾān is unique for its spatial emphasis on the land now known as the Arabian Peninsula. The Qurʾān is perhaps the earliest extant text, sacred or profane, to accord the Peninsula a central role in world history since it promotes the region's status in the story of monotheism via its veneration of Mecca (and not Jerusalem) as the centre of monotheistic worship and emphasises the Peninsular peoples of ʿĀd and Thamūd in prophetic history. To conclude from this that the Qurʾān was a book revealed to Arabs as most modern commentators (excluding Bashear) have done, however, melds space and race, 'Arabian' and 'Arab'. The stories of ʿĀd and Thamūd reveal the Qurʾān's Peninsular focus, but the Qurʾān does not connect their Arabian domicile with Arabness. It cites words of the ʿ-R-B root, but never in the context of those ancient Arabian people, and as discussed in Chapter 2, ʿĀd and Thamūd's position within an Arab genealogy was only accepted in the later third/ninth century.

Similarly, in respect of the Peninsular sanctum at Mecca,[484] which some Muslim-era literature calls *"bayt al-ʿarab"* the "[Sacred] House of the Arabs",[485] the Qurʾān lacks reference to its Arabness too. The Qurʾān fixes the horizon of Meccan history on Abraham and his son Ishmael,[486] and does not give Abraham an ethnic label, but instead adjectives him as *ḥanīf* (of 'upright religion'[487]/'true religion'[488]). The origins of the word *ḥanīf* are debated in modern scholarship,[489] but in half of its twelve Qurʾānic citations, the word describes the "religious community (*milla*) of Abraham",[490] even Abraham's "people/nation (*umma*)",[491] and it accompanies *muslim* in verse 3:67: "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a Muslim *ḥanīf*".[492] The Qurʾān's citation of *ḥanīf,* Abraham and Mecca has been noted as central to Muḥammad's legitimacy, allowing him to appear as Abraham's successor,[493] and Mecca is accordingly depicted as the sanctum of the *dīn ḥanīf* – Abraham's "pure

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[484] Some modern scholars have doubted whether Mecca actually was 'originally' an Arabian sanctum and whether words in the Qurʾān such as *Bayt* originally intended Mecca, and argue that later Muslim exegetes are responsible for those associations (Crone (1987), Hawting (2003) 3:79). Saḥḥāb (1992) and Heck (2003) make a case against Crone's thesis of non-Arabian Mecca, and in response to Hawting, I argue that the clusters of verses describing '*al-bayt*' have a lexical unity with words associated with Hajj and Mecca such as *ḥajj, maqām Ibrāhīm,* Bakka, Makka, *masjid al-ḥarām* and *bayt al-ḥarām* (Q2:124-8;3:95-7;5:97;7:34-5;22:25-9), hence even without recourse to later exegesis, application of the verses to interpret each other strongly suggests that pilgrimage to Mecca is intended.

[485] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Munammaq* 74.

[486] Q2:127. See Webb 2013(b) for analysis of the Qurʾān's Abrahamic portrayal of the pre-Muḥammadic Ḥajj.

[487] Rippen (1991) 159.

[488] Abd al-Haleem (2004) 41.

[489] See Rippen (1991) who opines the Qurʾān uses the word in differing contexts. Rubin (1990) considers its relationship to monotheistic ideas in pre-Islamic Arabia, and Beeston (1984) proposes a possible Sabaic origin based on pre-Islamic inscriptions from Yemen containing reference to the "High God". Rippen (1991) 165-166 considers the evidence for Beeston's interpretation "slight" and influenced by the "'prefigured coordinates' provided by the Islamic literary tradition", though the Qurʾān's association of *ḥanīf* with some form of monotheism is clear.

[490] Q2:135;3:95;4:125;6:161;16:123.

[491] Q16:120

[492] See also Q22:31;22:68.

[493] Waardenburg (1981)*.

religion", *i.e.* Islam. Akin to the Qurʾān's depiction of ʿĀd and Thamūd as chapters in the global history of monotheism and not Arab history, the Qurʾānic discourse renders Mecca the sanctum of all monotheists, not simply Arabs.

If the traditional dating of the Qurʾān's verses broadly reflects the order in which they were revealed, it is noteworthy that the references to Mecca's Abrahamic connections are contained in Medinan verses – *i.e.* contemporary with the period when Muḥammad's Muslim community was at war with the pagan Meccans. The fusing of Mecca with Abraham at that time has obvious practical significance in justifying Muḥammad's political conflict by projecting it as the struggle to restore Abraham's rituals in Mecca. There is accordingly little scope for the Qurʾān to portray Muḥammad as an 'Arab Prophet' leading the whole 'Arab people', since during most of the Medinan period, Muḥammad led only a small Ḥijāzī community and was at war with his neighbours. The Qurʾān's discourse is shaped to confer the priority right to Mecca on Muḥammad's *ḥanīf* community, challenging the legitimacy of Quraysh's control over Mecca, and so it has no reason to depict the town as a shared 'Arab sanctum'.

The absence of Arabness in Qurʾānic passages about Muḥammad, ʿĀd, Thamūd and Abraham is in harmony with verse 3:68 that describes the 'descendants' of Abraham: "those of mankind who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him, this Prophet and those who believe".[494] This renders believers as a religious community, not an ethnicity,[495] and so, unlike the Judaic Israel ordained for the Hebrews, the Qurʾān constructs no homeland for 'Arabs', nor

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[494] Pickthall's translation.

[495] Such sentiment accords with a literal interpretation of the famous verse 49:13: "People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware". This is also Bashear's thesis with which I agree, though I argue via different methods herein.

even mentions a people by that name. Taken on its own, the Qurʾān has very little, if anything, to say about ethnic Arabness.

The Qurʾān depiction of its believers supports my thesis of the non-existence of a pre-Islamic Arabian Arab ethnos with the requisite self-awareness of its Arabness for the Qurʾān to address. While this tallies with the absence of self-styled 'Arabs' in Arabian inscriptions, pre-Islamic poetry, and descriptions of Arabia by Late Antique Greek and Syriac writers who found no 'Arabs' but instead Σαρακηνοί (Lat. *Saraceni*) and *Tayyaye*, my thesis departs from traditional scholarship that maintains the Qurʾān must have been addressed to the Arab people. This derives from interpretations of the words *umma* and *ummī* in the Qurʾān which were explained by Muslim exegetes since the fourth/tenth century to mean 'the people', and, by extension, 'the Arab people'.[496] Modern scholars maintain that "*umma* particularly signified (or was even used synonymously with) the 'people of the Arabs'",[497] or the "Arab nation",[498] and that the presence of the word *umma* in the Qurʾān "contribute[s] essentially to the understanding of the history of Islam since it stresses ... the ethnic origin (Arab, Arabian [*sic*]) ... of the Prophet of Islam".[499]

Scholars accept that the Qurʾān never mentions Arabs by name, but because the Qurʾān calls itself an "Arabic Qurʾān" six times,[500] Tarif Khalidi suggests that "it is not entirely legitimate to conclude from the absence of ethnic designators the

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[496] Duri (1987) 29-30. Duri interprets the Qurʾān under the traditional paradigm of deep-rooted primordial Arabness to which he implies millennia of history (4). He repeats familiar stereotypes of the "salubrious desert environment" (17) and "magnanimous Arab spirit" (23), with Islam emanating from wave of "Arab consciousness in western Arabia" (18). See also Naṣṣār (1992); Calder (1990).

[497] Günther (2002) 10. Wensinck (1932) 6 renders the *umma* the people of "Arabia", betraying the territorial nationalism of his day that made space synonymous with people, hence 'Arabian' and 'Arab'.

[498] Duri (1987); Günther (2006) 400.

[499] Günther (2002) 16. See also Izutsu (1966), where Arab ethnicity is deemed central to understanding the Qurʾān's message.

[500] Q12:2;20:113;39:28;41:3;42:7;43:3. It cites "ʿarabī" five other times (Q16:103;26:195;41:44;13:37;46:12) in related contexts considered below.

absence of any concept of an Arab *ethnos*".[501] Khalidi, following Naṣṣār and Duri, conflates the Qurʾān's mention of an Arabic language with its references to *umma* to infer that "a quality of Arabness is attached to the concept of *umma*".[502] The Qurʾān's Arabness (which I detail presently), however, cannot so simply be connected to *umma*, and especially 'Arab people'. There are neither historical nor logical grounds that Muḥammad ever spoke to a cohesive 'Arab pan-Arabian people', considering the concentration of his military campaigns in al-Ḥijāz alone, and I have found no textual evidence that he appealed to a sense of shared *ethnos* to make peace with his opponents or to convert them. The Qurʾān's rigid separation of Muslims from the "aʿrāb" nomads in the deserts around Muḥammad's community crucially undermines the belief that the Qurʾān conceptualises a pan-Arabian Arab ethnos as constituting Islam's *umma*.[503] Moreover, reading the Qurʾān alone, we find that it never mentions the word *ummī* in association with *ʿarabī*: the terms appear in separate contexts, and are conceptually unconnected.

The modern insistence that *ummī* refers to 'Arab people' is yet another manifestation of the traditional paradigmatic meld of Arabia, Arab and *al-Jāhiliyya*. The belief that all Arabians must be Arabs and that the people of *al-Jāhiliyya* were pagan, illiterate people lacking holy scripture ostensibly fits some Qurʾānic citations of *ummī* where it refers to people lacking scripture,[504] and hence it is interpreted as *Jāhiliyya* pagandom and illiteracy.[505] But as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, *al-Jāhiliyya* did not axiomatically trigger such notions in earlier centuries, and this and the last chapter revealed the absence of a pre-Islamic Arab ethnos. The Qurʾān's *ummī* does

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[501] Khalidi (2001) 1:145, his emphasis.

[502] Khalidi (2001) 1:145.

[503] The status of *aʿrāb* is examined in Chapter 5.2.

[504] Q3:20;3:75;62:1-2.

[505] For the influence of the *Jāhiliyya* stereotype on the discussion of *umma* in the Qurʾān, see Günther (2002) 9-10.

not exclusively mean pagan/illiterate in any event,[506] and when reading the Qurʾān as a historical document about seventh century CE Arabia, we must avoid adopting anachronistic later Muslim interpretations.[507]

What then did the Qurʾān mean when it called itself an "Arabic Qurʾān" (ʿarabī)? Since the eleven occurrences of ʿarabī in the Qurʾān are limited to phrases where the Qurʾān speaks about itself, I find it difficult to impute any ethnic connotations. ʿArabī did later become an ethnicon, but the Qurʾān's ʿarabī is an adjective of revelation, not a people: "We have sent it down as an Arabic Qurʾān perchance that you may understand",[508] and elsewhere, the Qurʾān reveals that the its 'Arabic-ness' is linguistic:

> Truly, this Qurʾan has been sent down by the Lord of the Worlds: the Trustworthy
> Spirit brought it down to your heart, so that you could bring warning in a clear
> Arabic tongue.[509]

'ʿArabī' is an adjective for the Qurʾān's sacred idiom, a language which "contains no crookedness" (ʿiwaj),[510] and in another verse it describes the holy nature of God's judgment contained in the Qurʾān (ḥukm ʿarabī).[511] The Qurʾān's conception of Arabic

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[506] For example, Q2:78-79 refers to the Jews as ummī, odd if ummī means illiterate and lacking religious guidance since textual scripture is a quintessential aspect of Judaism. In the early fourth/tenth century al-Ṭabarī tells us Qurʾānic exegetes disagreed on the interpretation of this verse (1:527-537)), indicating that exegesis prior to the wider establishment of the Jāhiliyya stereotype was more equivocal than it would be later (for examples of later exegesis, see Günther (2002) 10-11).

[507] Duri's and Khalidi's 'Arabist' interpretations of the Qurʾān should be read as influenced by Arab nationalism. In Duri et al (1989), a detailed history of the Arabs and action plan for poltical pan-Arabism, Duri (35,38) repeated his arguments about the pre-Islamic unity of the Arab nation/umma and the Qurʾān's status in the construct ("jāʾ al-Islām bi mafhūm al-umma"), expressly marshalling the Qurʾān into twentieth century politicised discourses with a priori intention of proving Arabness' ancient Arabian roots.

[508] Q12:2 (my translation).

[509] Q26:191-195 (Abdel Haleem's translation).

[510] Q39:28. See also Q16:103;41:44;46:12.

[511] Q13:37.

is that of a language possessing miraculous clarity that conveys the Sacred Message, and prompts its listeners to comprehend and respond by embracing Islam.

The Qurʾān does relate (in an introduction to the story of Moses) that God's message is revealed in the language of the individual prophet's people,[512] thereby intimating that ʿarabī could be understood as the language of Muḥammad's 'Arab' people, But in verse 16:103, the Qurʾān complicates matters, explaining that

> We know very well that they say, 'It is a man who teaches him,' but the language of the person they allude to is aʿjamī [non-Arabic], while this revelation is clear Arabic [ʿarabī mubīn].

The verse implies that Muḥammad understands both the ʿarabī of the Qurʾān and the aʿjamī of the unnamed man, suggesting (and entirely in keeping with the other citations of ʿarabī in the Qurʾān), that ʿarabī is a special religious koine from God and not simply a terrestrial vernacular. In this respect, the meaning of verbs derived from the root ʿ-R-B such as aʿraba and ʿarraba, are instructive: they connote 'to clarify', 'to express' and to 'speak clearly' which correspond to the Qurʾān's usage of the adjective ʿarabī as indicative of the text's preeminent clarity.

3.8 The root ʿ-R-B beyond the Qurʾān:

Texts traceable to early Muslim-era (or even earlier) linguistic practise do contain other Arabic words formed from the root ʿ-R-B. These include the word ʿarūba, an archaic word for Friday,[513] and aʿrāb (Bedouin) mentioned in the Qurʾān, hadith and even pre-Islamic Semitic languages. The possibility that the Qurʾān's ʿarabī derives from the aʿrāb has doubtless influenced modern scholars towards

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[512] Q14:4.

[513] ʿArūba is defined as 'Friday' in the first Arabic dictionary, al-ʿAyn 2:128 and is widely attested as the "old word" for Friday amongst the Arabs of al-Jāhiliyya (al-Masʿūdī Murūj §1311; al-Wazīr al-Maghribī Adab 102; al-Zabīdī Tāj 2:218). The word is borrowed from Aramaic (Mahler "ʿArūba", EI¹ 1:463) or Syriac (Payne Smith (1903) 427); most classical Arabic writers were unaware of this and attempt to explain its semantic connection to the root ʿ-R-B (see al-Wazīr al-Maghribī Adab 2:218). Only al-Zabīdī suggests some doubt as to its 'Arabic purity', noting "it is as if the word is not Arabic" (Tāj 2:218).

assumptions that 'Arab' and 'Bedouin' are inextricably linked at their origin.[514] I consider that connection extremely tenuous for reasons further explored in Chapter 5.2(a), but another word on the ʿ-R-B root attested in very early Islamic-era contexts also requires discussion. It is *taʿarraba*, a verb which classical dictionaries translate as 'to go and live with/as a Bedouin'.[515] It has also been noted as possible proof of the Arab/Bedouin connection,[516] and, by extension, evidence that the Qurʾān's *ʿarabī* is linked to a language spoken by Bedouin. For three reasons, semantic, lexical and historical, I consider this an erroneous association which embeds unhelpful notions about Arabness. Let us first consider the linguistic issues.

Semantically, the Qurʾān's usage of *ʿarabī* as the special koine of God's Revelation is a polar opposite to the meanings associated with the verb *taʿarraba*. *Taʿarraba* is used in a negative sense: it describes individuals who shunned the Muslim community, who abandoned their *hijra* (emigration to Islam), and entered the desert.[517] The *hijra* is such a central component of early Islam that it is *non sequitur* to maintain that the act of turning away from the Muslim community could be related to the Qurʾānic *ʿarabī*'s association with the essence of Revelation.

Lexically, the verb *taʿarraba* and *ʿarabī* share the same triradical root, an affinity that begs for a conceptual linkage of the two words, but I question this mental reflex to which Arabists are accustomed. Classical Arabic philologists maintained that each triradical root has one, overarching 'mother-meaning', and Orientalists follow their model, assuming that Arabic is the core Semitic language

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[514] See Nöldeke (1899) 272-273, Pietruschka (2001) 214.

[515] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:167-168; see further discussion in Athamina (1987) 11.

[516] Athamina (1987) 5 connects this verb with essential Arab tribalism "[t]he concept of tribe was the only form of political awareness of the Arabs in Muhammad's time"; and argues the desert was "the only safe asylum" for Bedouin Arabs (1987) 6.

[517] *Taʿarrub*'s negative connotations have been noted: see Bosworth (1989) 359 and Marsham (2009) 97-98 who also interpret the word as an early-Islamic metaphor for deserting the Muslim army and associate it with with *irtadda* and *irfaḍḍa*, semantically powerful verbs connoting apostasy, *fitna* and the antithesis of Islam.

and that (almost) all of its words perfectly relate to its mathematical semantic rules.[518] But the model of roots' semantic unity is aspirational and not a strict reflection of reality: modern researchers reveal that Arabic is neither the 'most pure' Semitic language; like all other languages, Arabic developed as it was buffeted by neighbouring languages and cosmopolitan contact over the centuries.[519] Foreign words were imported into Arabic and sometimes verbs formed from them, so there are many quasi-homophones in Arabic, i.e. words that share one triradical root, but have divergent meanings. Consider the root K-T-B: most derived words connote 'writing', but *kitba* refers to horse equipment and *katība*, a military detachment. The root F-R-S is even more disparate: *faras* (horse), *furs* (Persians), *farīsa* (prey), *firāsa* (perspicacity); and each of these nouns relates to different forms of verbs: *farusa/farasa* (to ride a horse), *farasa* (to cut an animals throat), *tafarrasa* (to scrutinise/look intently) and *afrasa* (to leave one's animals as prey).

Of course, classical grammarians were not blind to loan words which they called *muʿarrab* (Arabised) and they cited them in dictionaries; al-Jawālīqī (d.540/1145-1146) even complied a list of such *muʿarrab* words so that "the etymologist [*mushtaqq*] can guard against judging a non-Arabic word Arabic", and "call a bird the son of a whale!"[520] Some classical writers also accepted that non-Arabic words entered the Qurʾān,[521] and al-Jawālīqī's text provides a lengthy list of usually obvious non-Arabic loan words encountered in the Qurʾān, early poetry and prose, as well as a short introduction on Arabic phonetic rules to help identify foreign vocabulary.[522] Al-Jawālīqī's opening statements about the tendency for

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[518] Versteegh (1997) 9-21.

[519] Versteegh (1997) 76-77 summarises alternative approaches to the history of the triradical system.

[520] Al-Jawālīqī *al-Muʿarrab* 51-52

[521] See al-Qurṭubī *al-Jāmiʿ* 1:49-50 and al-Jawālīqī *al-Muʿarrab* 52-53.

[522] Al-Jawālīqī *al-Muʿarrab* 59-60. Ibn Khālawayh's (d.370 /980-981) *Laysa fī kalām al-ʿarab* is a mine of lexical and phonetic oddities worth close scrutiny.

philologists to explain words via the triradical system, however, demonstrate the paradigm's power. Classical writers often sought logical extremes to forge semantic links,[523] and they sometimes erred. They argued, for instance, that one of the Qurʾān's sobriquets – *al-Furqān* – derives from the root *faraqa* (to split), and that the Qurʾān is so called because it separates right from wrong. Modern scholars have demonstrated, however, that *furqān* is more likely a borrowing from the Syriac *purqāna*, a liturgical term for 'salvation/redemption'.[524] Similarly, does the Arabic *taqniyya* (technical) derive from Dhī Tiqan, the alleged pre-Islamic Arabian "skilled archer", as the lexicons say,[525] or was it a loan word from the Greek τέχνη, unnoticed by classical writers? And we would surely be idle to force a link between *muhannad* (sword) and *hind* (100 camels) – *muhannad* derives from the Arabic name for India, and was converted into a participle-adjective 'Indian-made sword',[526] whilst *hind* has a separate history.

With so many exceptions to the unity of the trilateral root, why should we burden ourselves with subsuming each word formed from ʿ-R-B into one semantic family of Bedouin Arabness? In Old South Arabian, the ʿ-R-B root has five distinct meanings: 'the west', 'Bedouin' (*aʿrāb*), 'squared masonry', 'offer a sacrifice'/'to dedicate', and the preposition 'for'.[527] Each of these concepts must have arisen separately; why should ʿ-R-B in Arabic be different? It is clear that the Arabic *ʿarūba* for 'Friday' has no connection to Arabness since it is originally Aramaic and entered

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[523] Consider the root D-R-S, verbs from which meaning to study (*darasa*), to revise (*dārasa*), to crush food with the teeth (*darasa*), to menstruate (*darasa*), for cloth to be worn-out (*darasa*) and to disappear (*darasa/indarasa*). Ibn Manẓūr tries to explain the connection between studying and wearing out via the crushing of teeth (*Lisān* 6:79) – but should we be convinced?

[524] Madigan (2001) 1:486 considers the Qurʾān's interpretation of *furqān* to be a blend of its original Syriac root and the notion of discernment characterised by the Arabic verb *faraqa*.

[525] Ibn Manẓūr *Lisān* 13:73.

[526] *Muhannad* is also based on a non-existent verb. I have not seen reference to *hannada/tahnīd* (to Indicise) that should technically underly the participle *muhannad*.

[527] Beeston *et al* (1982) 18-19, Biella (2004) 381-383.

pre-Islamic Arabian usage via Syriac or Hebrew,[528] so unless there is a cogent reason to connect the Qurʾān's ʿarabī with Bedouin aʿrābī, and/or the verb ʿarraba with taʿarraba, we should not assume the need to force one. Words as culturally important as ʿarabī are not amenable to study under rigid semantic 'rules' alone: the conceptual differences that distinguish ʿarabī from ʿ-R-B quasi-homophones should instead be highlighted to free Arabness from Bedouin-ness, a topic I explore further in Chapter 5.2. For present purposes, I would argue that the Qurʾān's idiomatic usage of ʿarabī evidences a new, distinct semantic universe of clarity/expressiveness and revelation which is unrelated to other ʿ-R-B words attested in older Semitic languages. It is surely not coincidental that the Qurʾān's novel and multiple repetitions of the word ʿarabī hearkens a sudden appearance of this *exact* word over the next century to connote a group of Muslims whereas 'Arabs' are not attested in the pre-Islamic historical record.

It remains to consider historical factors and the ʿ-R-B root since the verb taʿarraba is connected to an interesting set of references to the word ʿarabī in what seems a genuinely old context, essentially contemporary with the Qurʾān. Arabic histories report the phrase *bayʿa ʿarabiyya* which modern scholars interpret as a special oath of allegiance given by Bedouin to the Muslim state during the early Caliphate and perhaps even the time of the Prophet.[529] *Bayʿa ʿarabiyya* is the opposite of *bayʿat al-hijra:*[530] the latter involve physical settlement in a Muslim community, whereas *bayʿa ʿarabiyya* was given by those who did not emigrate to Muslim towns, hence its connection with Bedouin and the verb *taʿarraba* seems clear. This, in turn,

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[528] Mahler "ʿArūba" *EI¹* 1:463. In Syriac, 'Friday' is ʿrubtā which is derived not from Arabness, but instead the verb ʿrab (for the sun to set), connoting the eve of the Sabbath (Payne Smith (1903) 427) or, as a Syriac text reads, because "Friday is accustomed to making the living set at its evening" (Sokoloff (2009) 1134). Arabic renders the setting sun *gharaba*, though interestingly imported the specifically Syriac pronunciation for the liturgical terminology for Friday.

[529] Kister (1991) 279-280, Marsham (2009) 98.

[530] See the discussion in Athamina (1987) 8

suggests early associations between Bedouin-ness and the word ʿarabī. If it means a 'Bedouin oath', however, it is curious that it should be called ʿarabiyya and not the more familiar aʿrābiyya (Bedouin), and moreover, the Qurʾān's self-reflexive use of ʿarabī for 'revelation' sits uncomfortably as an adjective for an 'outsider's oath'.[531]

Perhaps a better solution can be found with closer scrutiny of linguistic history. In Old South Arabic, the verb tʿrb (c.f. taʿarraba) means "to give pledges" and the noun ʿrb (c.f. taʿarrub) means "guarantee of good conduct",[532] or "pledges in token of submission".[533] At law, pledges, guarantees and other securities are granted to secure an obligation that is otherwise practically difficult to enforce. This would perfectly suit an oath of allegiance given by an outsider: his pledge cannot be enforced directly since he does not settle within the remit of the state's power (he has no hijra), so he must provide a more theoretical security to evidence his allegiance. The bayʿa ʿarabiyya is the law's solution for converts who did not move within the boundaries of the state (the hijra communities) and hence lived outside of the direct observation of Muslim authorities. The adjective ʿarabiyya is therefore not related to Bedouinism, but rather to the specific pledge terminology of the Old South Arabic ʿrb,[534] and it seems that the early Arabian Muslims borrowed this form of security from South Arabian parlance since such 'pledges of good conduct' or

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[531] See Chapter 5.2(a) for fuller discussion of aʿrāb outsider-ness.

[532] Beeston et al (1982) 18-19.

[533] Biella (2004) 382.

[534] Beeston et al (1982) 18, Biella (2004) 381: both modern dictionaries of Old South Arabic place the 'pledge' (ʿrb/tʿrb) family of words in a separate category from the 'Bedouin' (ʾʿrb/ʿrbn). The verb ʿrab also means "to pledge/give security" in Syriac liturgical texts, also without relation to Arabness (Sokoloff (2009) 1133). It is possible, therefore, that Arabic borrowed this usage from Syriac, though its secular/legal citations in South Arabic better fit the semantic usage of bayʿa ʿarabiyya. The Arabic qurbān (offering/sacrifice) is obviously derived from this semantic root, but the political usage in early Islam suggests a direct loanword.

'submission' are most appropriate for the kinds of agreements Muslims had to make with groups outside of direct control.[535]

In pre-Islamic South Arabia, where the term originated, the pledgors could be anyone, but in the Muslim North Arabian context, those living outside of the *hijra* communities would, as a practical matter, almost always be Bedouin in the Ḥijāzī and Najdī deserts, hence the borrowed technical pledge term semantically melded with their label as *aʿrāb* outsider Bedouin. As *ʿarabī* developed into an ethnicon in the early Islamic era (as we have seen in the poetry), it would not long suit the pledge language, and this perhaps best explains why the *bayʿa ʿarabiyya* disappears in later Arabic literature. It is potentially misleading to study such terms with anachronistic assumptions that words 'sounding like Arab' must be somehow related to 'Bedouin', and to interpret verbs like *taʿarraba* only via classical Muslim-era lexicons which are removed from the words' original contexts by centuries. We must be more rigorous in searching etymology and in abandoning preconceptions to probe the origins of early Muslim practices and the history of the Arabic language at the dawn of Islam.

3.9 New trajectories for Arabness:

Further support for the hypothesis that the Qurʾān's *ʿarabī* is distinct and not linked to a pre-existing notion of Arabness as an ethnic identity stems from the crucial observation that the Qurʾān's references to *ʿarabī*, even "Arabic tongue/language" (*lisān ʿarabī*) are invariably indefinite. The Qurʾān never speaks of '*the* Arabic language', only "an Arabic language". Given the dearth of any mention of '*the* Arab people' in pre-Islamic Arabia, this underscores the indefiniteness of the

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[535] That the Muslims would borrow such terms is not illogical: for centuries before Islam, pre-Islamic South Arabia had a developed system of state administration which was lacking in North Arabia. When constructing an Arabian Muslim state, it is likely they borrowed many terms, ideas and administrative practices from their southern neighbours just as they would co-opt Byzantine and Sasanian practices following the Conquests.

Qurʾān's vision of Arabic, unlike the rigidly defined language that 'al-ʿarabiyya' would later come to connote as *kalām al-ʿarab*, 'the language of *the* Arabs'. The transition from an indefinite to definite *ʿarabī* underlines the importance of the first century of Islam in developing new meanings for this Qurʾānic term.

The absence of ethnic connotation in the Qurʾān's notion of 'Arabic', and its unprecedented citation in the Qurʾān as an a description of clarity of expression strengthens my hypothesis that the Peninsula was only retrospectively 'Arabised' during the early Islamic period.[536] The Qurʾān's linguistic Arabness also mirrors the definition of 'Arab' in the earliest dictionary *al-ʿAyn* explored in Chapter 2. Through its multiple glorifications of itself as an "Arabic Qurʾān" in an "Arabic language", the Qurʾān established a new lofty connotation for the root ʿ-R-B, and set the framework for the total reverence of its own koine, but it did not articulate the grounds for thinking about Arabic people as an ethnicity. The establishment of 'Arabia', 'Arabs' and 'Arab history' would be left for subsequent generations of Muslim scholars, but the foundation text's self-referential 'identity' as an Arabic text, most likely fated all reconstructions to tend inevitably towards the creation of an 'Arab' identity for Muslims with the Qurʾān's 'Arabic' language as the prompter for the new Muslim community to adopt the name 'Arabs' as 'people of Arabic revelation' as opposed to the "People of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) – the Qurʾān's term for Christian and Jewish populations in the pre-conquest Near East.

We must embrace the notion that pre-Islamic Arabia was not the home of a cohesive Arab people. The open-ended linguistic parameters of the Qurʾān's indefinite Arabness could permit a whole bevy of different people to seek to become

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[536] I thus question the utility of the thesis that pre-Islamic Arab unity was formed around the poetic koine of the *qaṣīda*. Poets never called their language *ʿarabī* and the Qurʾān's indefinite 'ʿarabī' mitigates against associating it with a specific language too. The Qurʾān also categorically rejects itself being called poetry Q36:69;69:41, and it seems that a pre-existing Arabian poetic background was not a condition precedent to the success of the Qurʾān's message as Montgomery argues (2006).

ʿarabī, and this offers a cogent explanation for the difficulties third/ninth century genealogists had in constructing family trees to synthesise all those who, over a 200-year period, did choose to call themselves 'Arab'. The fact that ethnic Arabness emerged not from pre-Islamic Arabia, but from Muslim-era imaginations also affirms that we must look to Muslim period discourses to understand the construction of the archetypal 'original Arab' so common today. Relinquishing the anachronistic assumptions of Arabian Bedouin Arabness before Islam, we behold the greater ethnic complexity of pre-Islamic Arabia and can accord the Qurʾān the status it deserves for emphasising a novel notion of ʿarabī.[537] In the new socio-political map of the Near East forged by the expanding Muslim community, the Qurʾān's Arabness ideas would be debated and eventually transformed into the signature ethnos of the modern Near East. To begin to understand this process and what Arabness meant in early Islam, the next chapter traces the shift of Qurʾānic ʿarabī towards ethnic ʿarabī over the first three centuries of Islam.

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[537] This thesis provides additional support for Donner's notions of Arabness in his 2010 *Muhammad and the Believers*, and introduces a new layer of problems for Hoyland's 2012 critique of Donner. See Note 177.

Chapter 4: The Changing Faces of Arabness in Early Islam (1): Arab Ethnic Development to the mid-third/ninth century

The evidence of an 'Arab-less' pre-Islamic Arabia and Arabness' gradual development in early Islam undermines the paradigm in which Islamic history has hitherto been studied. For centuries in Western scholarship, the conventional beliefs that (i) pre-Islamic era Arabia was the formative homeland of the Arab nation, and (ii) its deserts' physical rigours compelled the original Arabs to lead simple Bedouin lifestyles, melded with the Enlightenment-era dualist paradigm of static pre-history *vs.* progressive modernity to paint a seemingly compelling model of Arab and Islamic history that depicted the pre-Islamic era as 'pre-history' in which Arabs existed in cyclical, primordial nomadism until Islam ushered them into progressive history and moved them from the desert to the wider Middle East.[538] The model stipulated that those Bedouin who remained in Arabia stayed 'traditional' and could be studied as veritable museum pieces of 'authentic' pre-Islamic life until they too finally entered urban modernity with the twentieth century oil boom. This inaugurated an abiding ahistorical appraisal of Arabian nomads that assumed any 'unmodernised' Bedouin were paragons of original Arabness and faithful representatives of the Arabians in Muḥammad's lifetime and before. From the eighteenth century's Edward Gibbon and Carsten Niebuhr,[539] through William Palgrave, Charles Doughty and T.E. Lawrence in the nineteenth

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[538] Von Grunebaum's 1963 depiction of early Islamic history as the transition from Arab *Kulturnation* to *Staatsnation* epitomizes this paradigm and has recently been approved (with slight modification) in Cook (1986), Hoyland (2001) and (2009), Montgomery (2006).

[539] Gibbon cited the explorer Niebuhr's observations of Arabia to reconstruct pre-Islamic history (5:230-244 *passim*), revealing his Enlightenment fascination with primitivism, also noted aspects of Niebuhr's writing (Tidrick (2010) 13-18; Toral-Niehoff (2002)).

century,[540] to modern scholars Sowayan, Kurpershoek, Serjeant and Conrad,[541] the Arabian nomad embodies Islam's primordial milieu.

The absence of evidence that pre-Islamic Arabians knew of themselves as 'Arabs' reveals the Desert/Bedouin model of Arab origins is a synthetic retrojection onto the past. Pre-Islamic Arabian Bedouin culture does not explain Islam's formative environment, rather, Muslims homogenised pre-Islamic Arabian history into an 'Arab story' which European historians later embraced. Consequently, Arabness should not be geographically determined by the Arabian Desert – that region did not spawn and nurture Arabs; it housed a host of people in the early centuries CE who were retrospectively unified as Arabs and reconstructed into the Arab archetypal community. To understand why Maꜥaddites, Yemenis and other occupants of a fairly arbitrarily demarcated land of 'Arabia' would all become 'Arabs' in Muslim and European imaginations requires Arabness be disentangled from axiomatic Arabian Bedouinism. We should investigate Arabness as a process of ethnic formation in early Islam, rather than assume it was emblematic of pre-Islamic desert habitation.

In the copious Arabic literature about Arabia written since the mid-late third/ninth century, Arabia is already well-'Arabised': its inhabitants are all 'Arabs',

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[540] Palgrave (1865) 162 explained "Arabia and the Arabs begin south of Syria and Palestine...what is below that line is alone Arab". From observations of the "nomad Arabs", Doughty extrapolated "we may see in them that desert life, which was followed by their ancestors, in the Biblical tents of Kedar" ((1888) 1:35; see also 1:84,100,143); Lawrence (1936 1:22-25). Tidrick (2010) details this aspect of British colonialist impressions of Arabia.

[541] Conrad's survey of pre-Islamic Arabia in the Cambridge Ancient History published in 2000 cites Musil's 1928 anthropological *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins* to explain the social and political history of sixth century Arabia (680,681). Conrad also employs Jabbur's *The Bedouins and the Desert* which transports observations from modern Arabia to explain pre-Islamic customs (680,688). The Saudi literary scholar Sowayan (1985) 3 read pre-oil boom Saudi Nabaṭī poetry as a preservation of the Arab *longue durée*, "a valuable source – often the only one available – of information on the culture and history of pre-modern Arabia". Likewise, Kurpershoek (1999) sought to authenticate pre-Islamic poetry via analysis of twentieth century Nabaṭī verse, and Serjeant (1962) explained pre-Islamic religious practice via analysis of twentieth century Ḥaḍramī ritual spaces.

narratives of its history assert Arabia's 'original settlement' by kinsmen of the 'first Arabic speaker' Yaʿrub ibn Qaḥṭān, and classical texts describe Arabia's tribally segmented society, ʿaṣabiyya (violent partisanship) and the minutiae of Bedouin life in congruence with familiar modern stereotypes. In the two hundred and fifty years since the rise of Islam, therefore, Arabness had blossomed, the Peninsula's history was rewritten to teem with Arabs, and the paradigmatic model of the Arab had substantially matured. While this thesis has revealed that earlier Muslim authors had less synthesised notions of Arabness and Arab history, the paltry survival of texts from the early third/ninth century and the complete absence of writings prior to the late second/eighth entails that literary analysis alone cannot expose the full complexity of the first stages of the Muslim reconstruction of the Arab pre-Islamic past. An alternate method is needed.

Reconstructing earlier notions of Arabness is crucial to reading the third/ninth century accounts of pre-Islamic Arab history because the extant texts did not concoct Arab ethnic identity from nothing: they could only develop existing discourses. Like any historical reconstruction, classical narratives of Arab history walked a conceptual tightrope between what Richard Terdiman, a modern historiographer and theorist on memory, describes as a balance of "fact and interpretation" and "reproduction and representation".[542] Rejecting the extremes of Fuentes notion that we "remember the future and invent the past", Terdiman argues that history is never rewritten wholesale: "[t]he past is not just our own invention. *The past still answers us and constrains our responses to it*".[543] Accordingly,

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[542] Terdiman (1993) 350.

[543] Terdiman (1993) 350, his emphasis. Terdiman echoes Marx's 1851 "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon" historical materialist framework: "men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already." (Marx (1978) 595). Ricoeur's narratological historiography is similar: he sensibly

third/ninth century writers cannot be read as truly autonomous creators of Arabness: they lived in a world where Arabness had meaning and they inherited the ideas and memories of their predecessors. The modern historian seeking to understand Arab history must approach the extant third/ninth century literary corpus as but one stage in the history of the Arabness idea and contextualise its narratives: what did 'Arab' signify at the dawn of the third/ninth century and what conditions prompted writers to develop the notions of Arabness we read in the surviving texts?

As the last chapter argued, the Qurʾān's novel prominence of the word *ʿarabī* and the sudden appearance of *ʿarabī* as a term of collective identification in early Islamic poetry suggests that Arab history properly begins with Islam, but Islam cannot have instantly created the Arab ethnos. Groups of people may have begun to self-identify as 'Arabs' in the first/seventh century, but the gradual Arabisation explored in narratives of Dhū Qār accords with modern theories of ethnic development which stipulate that ethnicities emerge gradually under the influence of socio-political and cultural currents. In the absence of textual survivals, the first two parts of this chapter marshal contemporary theories of ethnicity to reconstruct the early stages of Arab ethnic development, and the last part interrogates the more securely datable records of the early third/ninth century to reveal major changes in the status of Arabness which inaugurated a decisive period of Arab history and enabled authors from the mid-third/ninth century to conceptualise 'the Arabs' in the particular ways they did.

4.1 Ethnicity as a process of development

Studying 'the Arabs' engages issues of ethnic identity, race, and the categorisation of world peoples. Arabic authors from the third/ninth century

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rejects the "wiping out of the boundary of history and fiction" ((1988) 3:154) that could arise from a too extreme reading of White's narratological theories in *Content of the Form*.

onwards referred to *al-ʿarab* in myriad discourses, but almost always as one undifferentiated collective: they describe *kalām al-ʿarab* (*the* speech of *the* Arabs), *ansāb al-ʿarab* (*the* genealogy of *the* Arabs) and *dīwān al-ʿarab* (*the* register of *the* Arabs – *i.e.* early Arabic poetry). Developing collective identities to categorise people is perhaps one of the most basic human impulses,[544] but the attendant generalisations/racial stereotypes are potentially misleading: they construct monolithic identities that anachronistically narrate ethnic history in neat linear narratives that disguise complexities and contradictions arising from the processes of ethnic formation.

In the Western study of Arabness, the nineteenth century racialist discourses about the 'Arab race' as part of the 'Semitic race'[545] have been exposed as oversimplifications. Maxime Rodinson's 1966 *Islam and Capitalism*[546] and his 1979 *Les Arabes* deconstructed essentialised models of Islam and introduced the term 'ethnos' to discuss Arabness instead of the ahistorical 'race';[547] Edward Said's 1978 *Orientalism* further critiqued the discourses based on notions of the natural 'Arab character' and 'Arab mind'.[548] In the last decades, a more nuanced, open-ended approach to

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[544] Rowlands (1994) 130 and McCrone (1998) 23-24 caution against applying ethnicity in analysis of ancient peoples, but Gruen (2011) asserts the validity of studying ancient identity, and Geary (1983) and Pohl (1998) reveal the importance of ethnic issues in the Late Antique and Medieval periods. Even Qurʾān 49:13 invokes an ethnic discourse, urging believers to behold the differences between peoples of the world (*qabāʾil* and *shuʿūb*) in order to "know each other".

[545] Conflation of Arab and Semite is common in the work of nineteenth century explorer-anthropologists such as Doughty (1888) and Richard Burton (Tidrick (2010) 78-79). Twentieth century Orientalists such as Hamilton Gibb and Bernard Lewis perpetuated the notion, and until recently, Arabic was considered the quintessential 'Semitic language' (a notion critiqued by Versteegh (1997) 10-21).

[546] For Rodinson's critique of essentialised notions of Islam, see (1966) 76-117.

[547] Some call the race/ethnicity distinction merely a semantic exercise – Wallerman called it a 'quibble' (see Jenkins (2008) 23-24), but Boas' 1940 *Race Language and Culture* explained the difference as 'race and biology' *vs.* 'ethnicity and culture', and this division clearly was in the background of Rodinson's *Les Arabes.*

[548] Said (1991) 284-321.

modern Arabness emerged.[549] But it is less remarked in current scholarship that the classical Muslim-era discourses about 'the Arab' are just as sweeping and stereotyped as the now obsolescent European racialist models, and contemporary models of ethnicity are underutilised in reading classical Arabic narratives of Arabness. The historical 'Arab' thus remains as he is presented in classical literature: largely unproblematized, visualisable as one solitary figure to represent them all, inevitably astride a camel and generally unshaken by the winds which have blown away racial stereotypes in other parts of the world. This chapter challenges ahistorical Arabness and this section outlines how theories of ethnic identity can break the textual display case in which late third/ninth-fourth/tenth century Muslim writers confined their model of the archetypal Arab.

4.1(a): Ethnicity after Weber: transactionists and constructivists

Max Weber deconstructed rigid racialist paradigms by revealing that kinship is symbolic, not biological, and that notions of common ancestry between people is a consequence of collective political action, not its cause. Weber redefined ethnic groups as

> those human groups that entertain a *subjective* belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonisation and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely it does not matter whether or not an *objective* blood relation exists.[550]

Weber's rejection of the traditional model of race as a fixed identity enabled anthropologists to question how and why ethnic groups form. Weber's own argument that they coalesce as a result of political or economic forces has been

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[549] Ibrahim (2011) 14.

[550] Weber (1996) 35 (my emphasis).

debated,[551] and subsequent theorists refined his model. Fredrik Barth's 1969 *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* proposed what would later be called a transactionist[552] (or instrumentalist)[553] approach, positing that groups form as the result of social transactions occurring at boundaries between people. For Barth (initially),[554] the usual traits by which peoples are distinguished such as language, religion or even cuisine and dress are merely "cultural stuff"; group formation should instead be analysed via study of "the *ethnic* boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that the boundary encloses."[555] The study of one ethnicity thus begins with analysis of the formations of and changes to boundaries between that group and its neighbours which prompt interactions between different groups.

In evaluating Barth's model, Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm and others articulated a rival 'constructivist' paradigm which shifts "emphasis from ethnicity as an aspect of social organisation to ethnicity as consciousness, ideology and imagination". [556] Constructivists envisage ethnicity as a subjective intellectual construct whereby groups are distinguished by the way or style in which they are imagined.[557] Groups take objective traits such as a shared language or religion and imagine them as 'evidence' of a shared heritage to 'prove' a given group is a 'real' ethnicity.

Neither transactionist nor constructivist models dominate anthropology today: blends of both frameworks have been shown through historical analysis and anthropological fieldwork to explain ethnic development in different parts of the

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[551] Banton (2007). Although Raum (1995) 81-85 argues that Weber did not intend to be so narrow.

[552] Ibrahim (2011) 14.

[553] Vermeulen and Govers (1997), Jenkins (2008).

[554] He refined his theory ((1994) 17-18), discussed below, Note 515.

[555] Barth (1969) 15.

[556] Vermeulen and Govers (1997) 5.

[557] Anderson (1991) 15.

world,[558] but overall, old notions of racial blood-ties have been replaced with analysis of consciousness: ethnicities must be believed to become real; to paraphrase Hamlet "there is no *kin* or *race*, but thinking makes it so." What then are the factors we can identify to study how people in the early Islamic Near East thought their way into Arab ethnicity?

4.1(b) Boundaries: determinative and permeable

Boundaries are an important starting point. Interactions between peoples are logically a necessary catalyst for ethnic formation since it engenders the sense of 'us' and 'them': "it takes two, ethnicity can only happen at the boundary of us".[559] Population movement, new political divisions and changing relationships between groups erect boundaries and generate new ideas of ethnic identity, but boundaries themselves are not fixed and have a two-way function.[560] Epstein's 1978 *Ethos and Identity* observed that boundary transactions first prompt consciousness of difference: "it is meaningful to talk of ethnicity only where groups of different ethnic origin have been brought into interaction within some common social context",[561] but eventually interaction and cooperation begins to foster assimilation. Anthropologists accordingly take a long view of history and discern a pattern whereby transactions between groups create awareness of different ethnic identities, but if the transactions flourish and persist, the boundary will dissolve and with it the earlier consciousness of difference. Then difference can flare again, brightly, but fleetingly like a dying star in a phenomenon known as "ethnic revival"

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[558] Vermeulen and Govers (1997) 19-22.

[559] Wallman (1979) 3.

[560] Vayda (1994) 320.

[561] Epstein (1978) xii.

that occurs when the inexorable process of assimilation has nearly run its course.[562] This ethnic revival is a reaction to decreasing cultural difference: people, often those who have most assimilated with the 'other', make the loudest claims of ethnic particularism before homogenisation finally overrides all old notions of difference, and the former boundaries between groups fade into oblivion.[563] For ethnographers, therefore, history is a story of the rise and re-articulation of ethnic identity against the background of socio-political changes that bring groups into contract and shape demographic divisions that become the ever-mutating boundaries between ethnicities.

4.1(c) 'Cultural Stuff' Revisited

In Arab ethnic development, the boundary transactions created by political forces that shifted populations and changed relations between groups of people in early Islam give ample scope to account for many of the ethnic debates evidenced in later literature, but as critics of Barth repeatedly note, the "cultural stuff" are relevant to understand the ethnic debates too. Constructivists stress that groups need tangible cultural traits such as shared language, religious practice or mythology/symbols in order to imagine their 'unique' ethnicity.[564] The imagination of blood-ties and the generation of genealogical family trees are also frequently employed to make a political group 'feel ethnic'.[565] In the case of Arabness, the

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[562] Steinberg called ethnic revival a "dying gasp" in a process of homogenisation ((1989) 76). Roosens (1989) elaborates a similar argument; see Eirksen's fieldwork in Mauritius (1997) and Sansone's in Bahia (1997) for fascinating studies of ethnic revival at work.

[563] Sansone (1997) found that black identity in Bahia is more pronounced among the young educated population which has most contact with whites. The less educated population, living in supposedly more 'traditional' black Bahian culture, are less vocal in defence of their culture.

[564] Jenkins (2008) 25-27.

[565] Though Weber demonstrated that notions of kinship are not related to real blood-ties, Roosens (1994) argued that a believable, imagined kinship is key to constructing an ethnicity, and Lancaster's 1981 study of the Rwala Bedouin reveals the importance of this "generated genealogy" for Bedouin identity articulation in modern Jordan.

spread of the Arabic language, the Islamic faith[566] and the development of common models of Arab genealogy, history and poetry are relevant as an array of "cultural stuff" that helped make Arabness tangible and gave shape to the ethnic boundaries of the early Muslim-era Arab community.

To theorise how we can include "cultural stuff" in studying the history of Arab ethnic development, I turn to Barth's 1994 revision of his transactionist model. Barth maintained the primary role of interaction between peoples across boundaries in creating awareness of ethnic difference, but he accepted that cultural content maintains the boundaries (and so the consciousness of difference between groups) by making ethnic identity appear tangible.[567] So an ethnos must be studied in the *longue durée* as an evolving process combining (i) transactionist factors across boundaries between groups such as population movements, changes in socio-economic and political developments; and (ii) conceptual discourses within a bounded community that articulate its history and culture to establish its ethnic unity. Formerly disparate people thus find themselves in new relationships caused by political and economic circumstances, and those groups with common interests marshal "cultural stuff" to develop notions of 'self' and 'other', defining who is 'in' the ethnos and who is 'out'. Such are the ingredients of ethnic formation, but understanding how an "imagined community" emerges from such conditions involves a further variable.

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[566] Enloe (1980) 361 and Jenkins (2008) 111-127 argue the importance of religion in ethnic formation. It is necessary to stress this, since most constructivist theories were based on European nationalisms since the Enlightenment when the congregational map of Europe did not reflect the proliferation of nation states, and as religious outlooks were being replaced by increasingly secular articulations of nationalism. Hence religion was downplayed, even overlooked, in Anderson, Gellner and Hobsbawn's important contributions to the field.

[567] Barth (1994) 17-18.

4.1(d) Ethnicity and Actors

Because ethnicity is a conceptual categorisation, it relies on individuals to jointly imagine and embrace their identity. We must therefore question who is doing the imagining. Who were the actors who articulated and shaped early Arab ethnic development within the transactional boundaries created in the early Islamic Near East?

Studying actors reveals that an ethnos emerges from negotiations between a plurality of different voices. A group can be described by its own members, by members of other groups, and, to further complicate matters, different factions within each of the inside/outside camps may make different claims. The competing discourses each assert the 'correct' interpretation, but given the subjective nature of ethnic identity, there are no empirical grounds to determine 'accuracy' – objective criteria only establish a range of credible definitions. The dominant conception of identity therefore can only be ascertained by measuring its ability to generate consent and to silence dissent, and here power enters the structure: the relative power of different actors promulgating an ethnic identity determines its accepted, 'canonical' articulation from time to time. Following Gramscian notions of negotiation between hegemons and subalterns, the 'canon' will shift as the most powerful group establishes its view, plus or minus some concessions to subaltern views.[568]

Akin to writing history, the establishment of a canonical notion of ethnic identity is also tied to the past since even the most powerful hegemons are constrained by the 'tradition' in which a group has been depicted (like historians are restrained by memories of the past). Though some scholars postulated that

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[568] Jenkins (2008) 22-23.

ultimate power can create ethnicity,[569] it seems that even hegemons are restricted: no one is truly autonomous to 'create' an ethnicity as Attwood observed in Australian Aboriginal ethnicity. Attwood declared that "the aboriginal is both determined and determining"[570] to explain how English/Australian administrators categorised Aborigines and so 'determined' the tribal composition of Australia. Their determinations, however, were not made in a vacuum: pre-existing local groups shaped the colonial categorisations to an extent,[571] then, later, when Aborigines gained power to express own identities, they inherited the old categorisations and reinterpreted them in turn, taking the old template but 'determining' a new trajectory. Regardless of how strongly new agendas strove towards articulating new ethnic ideas, Attwood demonstrated the influential legacy of the past.[572] Hence the long view is again necessary: we cannot read any one set of writings about an ethnos as *de novo* creations; they are all partially determined results of a process of development during which different interest groups negotiate the ethnos' identity and remodel it according to changing power relations over time.

4.1(e) Arabness as ethnic identity

In light of the above, we cannot speak of Arabness in early Islam as a static phenomenon, or as a straightforward classification of Near Eastern people between 600 and 900 CE. Equally, Arabness as it was expressed in classical literature could not have formed with the single act of Qurʾānic Revelation. The notion of Arabness in the Prophet's Medina cannot have been identical, or even similar to the Arabness

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[569] Vail (1989) and Ranger (1983) argued that colonial powers created the ethnic composition of Africa.

[570] Attwood (1989) 150.

[571] Attwood (1989) 136-137.

[572] Ranger (1993) observed the same two-way process in ethnic formation in colonial and post-colonial southern Africa.

perceived by a fourth/tenth century writer in Baghdad on account of the dramatic socio-political changes during the interim, and the supposedly primordial Bedouin Arabness described in later Muslim-era writing also cannot be an explanation for the social and political change in the Late Antique Near East, but was instead the result of those changes as later Muslim writers conceptualised what Arabness 'must have been' when they reconstructed the past. The social, political, economic, theological and cultural changes that radically transformed the Near East in the three centuries after Muḥammad are precisely of the type that anthropologists identify as potent drivers of new articulations of ethnic identity, and the varied notions of Arabness and pre-Islamic history so far explored in this thesis reflect the Arabness idea's open-endedness. Studying early Islamic Arabness as an open-ended process allows us to deconstruct modern stereotypes and explore how the changing power relationships between different peoples and different groups in the early Islamic Middle East invoked their own notions of Arabness to articulate their identity and status in the developing Caliphate.

4.2 Arabness and Islam in Iraq to the second/eighth century

4.2(a): Pre-Islamic Arabness and Iraqi Muslim-era Literature

The following sections analyse Arab ethnic development in Iraq up to the third/ninth century. I focus on Iraq because it was the location where the majority of classical sources describing pre-Islamic *Arabica* were written, hence studying the Iraqi context reveals the drivers behind the third/ninth century literature and enables us to place it within the evolution of the Arabness idea during the early Muslim period.

Classical Arabic Iraqi authors since the third/ninth century accord Iraq a salient role in the pre-Islamic Arab story. Precise details vary, but the long chronological narratives preserved in al-Yaʿqūbī, al-Ṭabarī and al-Masʿūdī's

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histories, [573] as well as anecdotes scattered across the writings of their contemporaries[574] present a common story that dates the Arabs' first arrival in Iraq to the reign of the Neo-Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar.[575] Their story relates that Nebuchadnezzar launched a bloody campaign in Arabia to exterminate the Arab people, and deported survivors to the town of al-Ḥīra on the Euphrates near site on which Muslims would found their city of al-Kūfa in 14/636.[576] The Arab story then skips to the period after Alexander the Great and describes fresh waves of Arabs invading Iraq and establishing kingdoms in al-Ḥīra and al-Anbār.[577] The sources affirm the Arabness of these kingdoms by reference to their Arabian origin and their kin-relation to Arab tribes, and they remained 'Arab': the texts give no indication that urban settlement affected these invaders' Arabness or that they ever assimilated or even mixed with the *Nabaṭ* (the usual classical term for Mesopotamia's ancient agricultural population), the *Armāniyyūn* (al-Ṭabarī's rendering of Iraqi Aramaean/Syriac peoples)[578] or the *Furs* (the dynasts of Mesopotamia and Iran).[579] Unlike what modern anthropologists would propose,

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[573] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:208-216; al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:558-565,1:609-632,2:95-98,2:213-218; al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §§1037-75.

[574] See, for example, Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 6-7 for Nebuchadnezzar and the Arabs; al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 15:305-310 for the Iraqi 'Arab' king Jadhīma and the Syrian 'Arab' Queen Zabbāʾ, this was apparently well known judging by the language of Ibn Qutayba's references to it in *al-Maʿārif* 108,618 and even al-Mubarrad's *adab* text *al-Kāmil* refers to it, as well as a longer version he wrote in his (now lost) *al-Ikhtiyār* (*al-Kāmil* 3:1443-4).

[575] Nebuchadnezzar reigned 605-562 BCE. Classical sources date him to the ancient past, but with less precision, Ibn Ḥabīb (*al-Muḥabbar* 2) dates his reign 2,240 years after the founding of Jerusalem.

[576] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 6-7, al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:558-561. Bosworth notes a rival tradition from the earlier Ibn al-Kalbī that dates the founding of al-Ḥīra to the reign of the Sasanian Ardashir (reigned c.224-240 CE) which Bosworth considers "improbable" ((1983) 597). Yāqūt's *Muʿjam al-Buldān* 2:329 gives a variety of narratives including the Nebuchadnezzar story along with others. The town's foundation myths fit into a number of narratives of ancient history for classical historians.

[577] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:609-611.

[578] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:611 equates them with the Nabaṭ, and considers a possibility that they were related to ʿĀd of Iram given the lexical similarity of Iram and Aramānī.

[579] See, for example, al-Ṭabarī's discussion of the first wave of 'Arabs' deported to al-Ḥīra whom he describes as subsequently departing (leaving the town in ruins for centuries), and joining the "Arab

classical historical narratives depict unchanging Arabness amongst the new settlers in a manner akin to the static notion of racial purities. In keeping with a remarkably racialist-sounding discourse, the ancient Arabs in the Muslim narratives appear indistinguishable from how Muslim historians depict Arabs of Muḥammad's day. Muslim writers seem to have intended to narrate a long Arab presence in Iraq, and to insinuate the Arabs' long-standing right to kingship in Iraq, an obviously utilitarian narrative to explain the post-conquest Near East.

Despite their relatively detailed treatment of pre-Islamic Iraq, the classical texts do not accord with the history of ancient Mesopotamia as historians currently reconstruct it. The Classical sources only refer to Assyrian and Babylonian kings who are also mentioned in the Biblical tradition such as Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, revealing that Muslim-era historians constructed pre-Islamic Iraqi history from Hebrew sources as opposed to indigenous Iraqi memories.[580] Their descriptions of how early Arab tribes in the Seleucid and Parthian period (which they call *Mulūk al-Ṭawāʾif*) capitalised on weak Iraqi central authority to invade Mesopotamia may be a true reflection of nomadic/settled relations at that time,[581] but their stress on the *Arabness* of those ancient nomads and their belief that the nomadic incursions were a "desire to defeat the non-Arabs (*al-aʿājim*) in the

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tribes" in the town of al-Anbār where an Arab community was maintained. Al-Ṭabarī gives no indication that any joined the Mesopotamians (*Tārīkh* 1:609).

[580] See al-Masʿūdī's Babylonian king-list which contains mostly unknown names, the recognisable of which are only those mentioned in the Bible (*Murūj* §§524-526). Al-Ṭabarī does not even offer a king-list as he deems Babylonian history part of Persian kingship (*Tārīkh* 1:453-456), but he does mention Sennacherib as "King of Babylon" and his war against Judah (recorded in Kings II.19.6-36) within his narrative of Hebrew history (*Tārīkh* 1:532-538).

[581] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:610-611. Modern historians note the presence of "romantic legend" in these accounts (Bosworth (1983) 596), but seek to use them empirically, identifying names of tribes and kings which they reconstruct into alternative narratives (Hoyland (2009), Bosworth (1983))

Iraqi/Arabian borderland, or share kingship with them,"[582] encumbers the classical narratives with difficulties.

I have demonstrated that it is very problematic, if not impossible to speak of pre-Islamic Arabness, and pre-Islamic Iraqi records also contain no mention of any groups named 'Arabs' during the five centuries before Islam.[583] While the classical narratives may contain names of 'real' tribes and kings, and while their stories of nomad/settled relations may have the proverbial kernel of truth, they mislead readers by treating those ancient nomads as part of their Muslim-era conception of Arab unity. In grouping all nomadic/settled relations in Mesopotamia since the Neo-Babylonians into one overarching narrative of 'Arab history', the Muslim-era scholars cease to record a 'true memory' of ancient Iraqi history, but instead project an Arab national story into the past. The close affinity between the third/ninth century narratives of (a) ancient Arab migration, Arab kingship and clear distinction between Arab and indigenous Iraqi (a‘ājim), and (b) the situation inaugurated by Muslim Conquest, strongly suggests the Muslim stories of pre-Islamic Iraq were creative re-workings of the canvas of Iraq's past to Arabise it and to bring it into conformity with post-conquest notions of history. Closer textual analysis confirms this reading.

To create Arab history, the classical narratives appropriate real events of the distant past and reformat them in an Arab guise. For instance, they erased memory of the Roman capture of Palmyra in 272 CE and rewrote it as the victory of an Iraqi

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[582] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:611

[583] Daryaye (2009) 16,22,29 and Bosworth (1983) 597-609 use the label 'Arab' to describe events across the four centuries of Sasanian Empire, but turning to actual pre-Islamic records, the Achaemenid '*Arabāyā*' to refer to denizens of Mesopotamia's desert fringe (a borrowing from the Babylonian and Assyrian *Aribi, Arba-ā* etc) had fallen out of use by Sasanian times: like the absence of 'Arabs' in Latin and Greek sources after the second century CE (see Notes 402-403), the last use of an 'Arab' cognate in Mesopotamian records seems to be the late first century CE where a Mesopotamian Parthian adopted the title *Malkā dhī ‘Arabh* (Bosworth (1983) 596).

Arab king Jadhīma ibn Mālik al-Abrash.[584] Classical writers' depiction of the nomadic/settled relations along the southern and western borders of Iraq as a binary ʿarab/ʿajam power-sharing structure also involved the appropriation of memories of various peoples and their amalgamation into putative Arab national independence, a point al-Ṭabarī reiterates three times.[585] By converting every independent group along Mesopotamia's borders since the Seleucid period into 'Arabs', Muslim authors forged a long history of 'Arab' political independence and tradition of defiance against Mesopotamian hegemons that neatly foreshadows the Muslim Conquest of Iraq. The literary reconstruction of the Battle of Dhū Qār[586] seems part of this same binary ʿarab vs. ʿajam narrative.

Alongside the appropriation of others' history into an Arab narrative, the Muslim-era texts also contain a generous proportion of poetry to accompany each story about the ancient 'Arab' Iraqi kingdoms during the full millennium before Muḥammad.[587] This is almost certainly a consequence of the widely held view amongst third/ninth century scholars that poetry was a skill unique to the Arabs.[588] In an era where poetry was called *dīwān al-ʿarab* (the register of the Arabs),[589] poetry emphatically Arabised any narrative, and history furnished with poetry would

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[584] The 'Arab' capture of Palmyra is widely cited: see al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:208-209; al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:618-628. Adnan Abdulla (2004) argued that Palmyra was indeed captured by Arabs allied with the Romans, though his analysis is based on assumptions that both the Palmyrenes and Iraqis were part of an Arab unity in the third century CE, which, for the reasons adduced in the past chapters, are anachronistic, and Macdonald (2009b) rejected the Palmyrenes' Arabness on the basis of pre-Islamic evidence alone.

[585] "They [the Arab kings] were not subjugated by the Aʿājim, nor did they subjugate the Aʿājim" (al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:611, see also 1:612,627).

[586] See Chapter 3.6.

[587] al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:209-214, Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī even records lines of poetry ascribed to Arab immigrants during the "Ṭawāʾif period" – a Muslim periodization covering the Seleucid/Parthain era between Alexander and the Sasanians (al-Iṣfahānī *Tārīkh* 75).

[588] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Ḥayawān* 1:51-57; Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 149-150.

[589] Al-Jumaḥī *Ṭabaqāt* 1:24-25, Ibn Qutayba *ʿUyūn* 2:185.

automatically appear to be 'Arab history'.[590] The authenticity of such ancient 'Arabic poetry' was lambasted by the third/ninth century poetry critic Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī, and by the polymath and belles-lettrist al-Jāḥiẓ too,[591] but historians such as al-Yaʿqūbī and al-Ṭabarī nonetheless cite poetry in the stories of pre-Islamic Iraqi Arabs more than in any other parts of their histories,[592] revealing the apparent length to which the historians sought to portray the Iraqi past as Arab history, depicting ancient Iraqi nomads in the manner which third/ninth century Muslims believed corresponded with 'original Arabness'.

The presence of poetry also betrays the influence of early Islamic storytellers in creating the narratives of pre-Islamic Iraqi Arab history,[593] and can also explain the volume of dramatic and romantic details in the 'historical' narratives. Lakhmid history (the century immediately preceding Islam), was already more than 300 years in the past when classical writers began to record it, and while the Lakhmids certainly did exist as a political group, the copious poetry, stories of court conspiracies and prominence of intrigues around women in the Muslim-era narratives about Lakhm indicate romanticisation and reorientation of Lakhmid history around a model of court history that resonates with the manner in which third/ninth century historians remembered the archetype of 'Arab' Umayyad princes. The classical accounts of more ancient history contain fantastical embellishment too, for example the Iraqi Arab capture of Queen Zabbāʾ's Tadmur

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[590] Heinrichs (1997) considers the role of poetry in creating authentic 'ʿilm', a component of the prosimetric form *adab* would take which van Gelder notes is ubiquitous in classical literature (2011). I more closely consider the role of poetry in early narratives of 'Arab history' and its role in constructing the heroic 'Arab warrior' archetype in Webb (2013a) 122,133-138.

[591] Al-Jumaḥī *Ṭabaqāt* 1:8-12, see pages 108-109. Less impassioned, but clearly making the same point, al-Jāḥiẓ affirms that the oldest Arabic poetry pre-dates Muḥammad by a maximum of 200 years (*al-Ḥayawān* 1:53).

[592] For the importance of poetry in writing 'Arab history', see Webb (2013a) 120-124.

[593] I argue for the enhanced status of poetry in second/eighth century Arabic historiography and the connection of poetry with the storytelling *Quṣṣāṣ* milieu of early Islam in Webb (2013a) 131-133.

(Zenobia's Palmyra) is said to have been achieved by hiding soldiers in camel saddle-packs in a remarkable parallel to the Trojan Horse,[594] and the legend of the Ṭasm and Jadīs tribes in al-Yamāma whom Muslim writers dated to the Ṭawāʾif period, includes a battle where armies advanced under the cover of bushes reminiscent of Great Birnam Wood.[595] The embellished epics that colour the Arabisation of Iraqi history recreate a time that was too distant, to use Bakhtin's reading of literary epic, to have a tangible connection to any sense of 'real' history.[596]

The Muslim narratives also accentuate the distinction between the pre-Islamic Arab settlers and local Iraqi. The Iraqi-domiciled Arab kings are oriented towards relations with their 'Arab' kinsmen in the Syrian and Arabian deserts rather than Iraq, the kings remain entirely Arab, eternally Arabic-speaking, poetry-singing, and aware of their belonging to Arab unity.[597] Once again, the classical Muslim depictions of the Iraqi 'Arab' kings and their activities oriented not into Iraq, but outwards, to Arabia mirror the settlement of the Conquest-era Muslim community on the edges of Iraq in new-founded cities at al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa.

The classical narratives also reverse pre-Islamic Mesopotamian historical traditions. Ancient Mesopotamian civilisations expressed little interest in the deserts beyond Iraq,[598] while newcomers into Mesopotamia assimilated rapidly,

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[594] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:209; al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:624-625.

[595] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 1:630; al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1157. Al-Ṭabarī also relates memories of Ṭasm and Jadīs with the Iraqi 'Arab' king Jadhīma al-Abrash (*Tārīkh* 1:613).

[596] Bakhtin (1981) 3-40 in a comparison of epic and the novel refers to epic as a "high distance genre" and proposes that the epic past is one that is irretrievable and idealized and its characters turned into stark heroes and villains. Bakhtin's notions of abstract epic chronotope (1981) 99-101 also seem applicable to studying *Ayyām* literature. A closer Bakhtinian reading of these narratives as epic stories would be a fascinating basis for further study of the classical reconstructions of *al-Jāhiliyya*.

[597] See for example, al-Masʿūdī's references to the collective 'Arab people' in his reconstructions of dialogue among the early kings of al-Ḥīra (*Murūj* §1051).

[598] Though Mesopotamian trade with 'Dilmun' – Arabia's Gulf littoral – is dated to the fourth millennium BCE (Potts (2010) 71), and while central Arabia trade is inferred from at least the early

leaving little trace or literary longings for their former desert homeland.[599] Since the first millennium BCE, Mesopotamian historical records treat Arabians as undifferentiated nomads possessing useful trading links who, when not cooperating, were essentially a problem which successive Assyrian, Babylonian and Achaemenid kings summarily disciplined.[600] It appears that only once did a Mesopotamian ruler establish a presence in Arabia: the Neo-Babylonian Nabonidus sojourned for ten-years away from Babylon in Tayma and its environs,[601] but this led to his lambasting in contemporary Babylonian writing,[602] his absence was immediately followed by the collapse of their empire in 539 BCE, and one century later, when Herodotus described Arabia from Persian and Achaemenid-Egyptian

third millennium BCE (Mallowan (1971) 285), no Mesopotamian records refer to central and western Arabia (*i.e.* Najd, al-Ḥijāz, Tihāma) before the eighth century BCE (Potts (2010) 71,74), and Mesopotamian cultures lack expression of interest or intimate links with the peoples of inner Arabia.

[599] Ephʾal studied the seventh century BCE arrival into Mesopotamia of peoples identified in Assyrian texts as "*Arba-ā*" (not 'Arabs', but a term likely meaning 'nomads from the south west' (Ephʾal (1982) 7-8, Robin (2010)). Ephʾal observed the newcomers maintained the nomadic moniker *Arba-ā* for almost one hundred years, but all mention of them disappears by the beginning of the sixth century BCE and the term later returns to designate nomads outside of Babylonia. In terms of ethnic articulation, it seems that the immigrants' settling in Iraq, their adoption of new lifestyles and the political reorganisation of Iraq after the fall of the Assyrians in 612 BCE cleft the *Arba-ā* from their desert ties and integrated them as Iraqis. The complete forgetting of their nomadic roots took three generations (1982) 113-115).

[600] Macdonald (2009f) 338-339 dates the first central Arabian record in Mesopotamian cuneiform to an eighth century BCE reference to a caravan attacked on the road to Tayma. The text, found in Sūr Jarʿa on the Euphrates in western Iraq indicates the opening of trading connections with Arabia, but it is noteworthy that Sūr Jarʿā is removed from the traditional Mesopotamian heartland of Babylonia, and only from the later Assyrian period do Mesopotamian records begin to evidence interest in controlling trade into Arabia (Ephʾāl (1982) Potts (2010)). These records speak, sometimes very confusingly, about disparate Arabian groups, always as outsiders, causing trouble, requiring military attention or paying tribute to the Assyrian king.

[601] Potts (2010).

[602] Lewy cites the Cuneiform 'Verse Account' which blames Nabonidus "for having built, in the far-off oasis town of Tēmā, a palace as his residence like the palace of Babylon" ((1971) 737). Lewy comments on a Babylonian aversion to shifting the capital-residence anywhere outside of Babylon, an important observation regarding notions of ritual space in Mesopotamian culture which the Muslims would retain (through the location of Baghdad), but also modify, through their novel interests in the desert.

informants, it appears as a fantastic land clearly beyond the bounds of his informants' experience or direct observation.[603]

The Muslim-era narratives are thus the first body of texts written in Iraq that construct pre-Islamic Mesopotamian history with an orientation towards Arabia. They essentially forget the millennia of Mesopotamian history in favour of a novel emphasis on Arab heritage. Written in the generations following Iraq's Islamicisation, the approach coincides with the first appearance people who identified themselves as 'Arabs' in the historical record; hence the reorientation of Iraqi history seems indeed to be the product of a new ethnic identity arising in Mesopotamia that chose to remember the past with very different orientations.

The Arabisation of pre-Islamic Iraqi history also involved appropriating religious material. In claiming that Nebuchadnezzar introduced Arabs into Iraq, Muslim-era historians borrowed from the Biblical story of the Hebrews' Babylonian Captivity following Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the Temple in 587 BCE. Classical Arabic authors were both familiar with that story and the Bible's portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar as a tyrant,[604] whereas Neo-Babylonian records make no record of Nebuchadnezzar's deep foray into Arabia or ordering mass deportation of Arabs to Babylonia.[605] The Muslim story of Nebuchadnezzar's Arab war is thus not a Mesopotamian memory, but borrowing from the Bible, and it usurps the Hebrews'

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[603] Herodotus, III.107. For his fanciful impressions of Arabia's peculiar characteristics, see III.108-109.

[604] Ibn Ḥabīb identifies Nebuchadnezzar and Nimrod as *kāfir* world kings, in apposition to Dhū al-Qarnayn (Alexander the Great) and Solomon, the *muʾmin* world kings (*al-Muḥabbar* 394). This quartet was oft repeated: see Ibn Qutayba *al-Maʿārif* 32; and the later Ibn Kathīr (d.774/1373) notes that the story was known by the "exegetes and other scholars of genealogy and reports from the past" (*al-Bidāya* 1:139).

[605] Nebuchadnezzar did record campaigns against *Arabi* peoples in the Transjordan and Palestine (Ephʾal (1982) 171-172), but these could not be the kernel of the Muslim-era narratives: the Babylonian term *Arabi* connoted "desert dwellers" or perhaps specifically "dwellers-of-deserts-to-the-(south)west" (Ephʾal (1982) 7-8, Robin (2010)), so it is far removed in time and space from the Muslim-era Arab ethnos 1,300 years later. Moreover, Nebuchadnezzar's campaign did not penetrate Arabia, and it was not even very decisive in stemming nomadic pressures Ephʾal (1982) 179.

monopoly on pre-Muḥammadic monotheistic heritage. Muslim historians wove Arabs into the ancient struggle of tyrant *vs.* monotheist, and by beginning Arab Iraqi history on this religious note, they offer yet another example of how the Arabisation of history also involved Islamicisation.[606] The slow adoption of this story in Arabic writing also points to its novelty: Ibn Ḥabīb's mid-third/ninth century *al-Muḥabbar* appears to be the first extant text that records the campaign,[607] but later the later third/ninth century histories such as Ibn Qutayba's *Maʿārif*, al-Dīnawarī's *al-Akhbār al-ṭiwāl* and al-Yaʿqūbī's *Tārīkh* ignore it,[608] and only with the early fourth/tenth century al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* does the story receive full narrative treatment, and it is repeated in all subsequent chronological-prophetic world histories.[609] The 'orthodoxy' of the story could thus be dated to the later third/ninth century, also contemporary with the increasing emphasis of the prophetic angle in Dhū Qār's memory explored in Chapter 3.6.

The accounts of pre-Islamic Iraqi Arabness expressed in Muslim narratives accord with my findings about pre-Islamic Arabness. Muslim writers had no actual memories of pre-Islamic Iraqi Arab history and fabricated new material, forgot Mesopotamian history and radically reoriented the past. This points to the novelty of the Arab ethnos and the fact that we must search for its origins not in pre-Islamic Iraqi history, but in the new ethnic milieu engendered by the Muslim Conquests.

4.2(b): The Islamic Conquests: new boundary transactions and "cultural stuff"

The sudden and repeated appearance of the word ʿ*arabī* in the Qurʾān from the Arab-less void of the pre-Islam renders Islam the most evidentially secure point

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[606] I noted in Chapter 3.6 that the development of Dhū Qār's memory in Muslim historiography involved a similar Arabisation/Islamicisation of the pre-Islamic conflict.

[607] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 6-7.

[608] Each of these three historians relates Nebuchadnezzar's deportation of the Hebrews without mentioning the story of his Arab conquests (*al-Maʿārif* 46-48; *al-Akhbār* 63-64; *Tārīkh* 1:65-66).

[609] Al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* (1:557-560). See the later chronicles: Ibn al-Jawzī *al-Muntaẓam* 1:281, Ibn al-Athīr *al-Kāmil* 1:271-273; and Ibn Kathīr *al-Bidāya* 2:180,196-7.

for dating the beginning of the process that created today's Arab ethnos, but the Qur'ān's use of *ʿarabī* to connote a speech idiom and not an ethnicity indicates that it sits at the very beginning of the Arab story, *i.e.* before *ʿarabī* connoted a cohesive group of people. To support this thesis, and further question the common scholarly belief that there 'must have been' a pre-Islamic ethnic Arabness grounded in shared language,[610] the extremely small corpus of pre-Islamic Arabic epigraphy, the linguistic variance between the inscriptions, and their geographic restriction to Syria and northwest Arabia[611] suggest that there was no pan-Arabian Arabic across the whole area where pre-Islamic cultural Arab unity is supposed. If we discard *a priori* assumptions of pre-Islamic Arabness, these inscriptions can be seen to prove only that a nascent script that would later become Arabic was beginning to develop in northwest Arabia to record a language(s) that resemble the Arabic codified by Muslim grammarians centuries later. Moreover, theories of ethnic formation warn against over-determining the power of "cultural stuff" traits such as language to create consciousness of ethnic identity. Rodinson problematized the using language to unify Islamic-era Arabs,[612] so why should we believe pre-Islamic Arabs were different? A community needs to exist within some common transactional framework before it can alight on shared language as a means to tangibly express its unity, and analysis of the transactional boundaries in the Near East during the century before Islam reveals that they precluded awareness of Arabian unity.

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[610] Suleiman (2003) 38-66; see also Montgomery (1997), Conrad (2000) 680.

[611] In the seven centuries before Islam, fourteen inscriptions in variants of what modern scholars identify as the Arabic language have been found between Zebed in northern Syria to Qaryat al-Fāw in southern Saudi Arabia, though the majority (eight) are from southern Syria and Jordan and all but three date from after 328 CE (Hoyland (2008) 60 accordingly argues for the Nabataean region as the birthplace of Arabic writing). For lists and discussion of individual inscriptions, see Gruendler (1993), al-Ghul (2004) and Hoyland (2008) 53-60.

[612] Rodinson (1981) 5-6, 22.

Within sixth-century CE Arabia, both the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires vied for influence inconclusively, dividing Arabia between different political and religious/doctrinal spheres of influence.[613] This situation militates against pan-Arabian awareness of common interests. In Iraq, Muslim-era sources written 300 years later describe the 'Arab' Lakhmids based in al-Ḥīra and the 'Arab' Bedouin deeper in Arabia as subgroups within a pan-Arab community, but the Lakhmids, as frontier guards employed by the Sasanian Empire to extend influence into Arabia, interacted with other Arabians on unequal terms as agents of an imperial power. The Lakhmids were probably ex-Bedouins, and as such, they may have shared some "cultural stuff" with Arabians such as similar language, customs and perhaps a taste for poetry,[614] but the militarised frontier was exactly the type of political barrier which anthropologists identify as creating ethnic difference. The modern identification of both Lakhmids and Arabian Bedouin as 'Arabs' seems to be based purely on the fact that Muslim-era texts written three hundred years later tell us that they were, but it is difficult to imagine how this could actually have been the case. Momentous events following the Qurʾān's revelation, however, can be read as fundamentally reorganising these relations in a way conducive to creating an ethnic sense to the Qurʾān's unprecedentedly frequent citations of ʿarabī that appear from the Arabness void of the pre-Islamic Arabian historical record.

The events following the Qurʾān were the Muslim Conquests. When studied from the perspective of their effect on transactional boundaries, "cultural stuff" affinities and power relations, the Conquests match the conditions which

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[613] Byzantine and Sasanian relations with Arabia are detailed at length in Shahid (1984) and (1995-2009), Hoyland (2001) 49-57,78-83 and Fisher (2011a) 72-127.

[614] The power of poetry in culturally unifying the Arabs is well-rehearsed: for a traditional approach see al-Najjār (1979), and for an interesting reappraisal see Montgomery (1997) 8n.11 who accepts there was a difference between the Bedouin poets and the Bedouinising taste of poetry audiences in Lakhmid Iraq, but retains the notions of a cultural unity, or at least a nostalgia for traditional Bedouin culture amongst the Lakhmid princes.

anthropologists identify as conducive of new ethnic articulation that enabled formerly disparate Arabian groups to become aware of affinities that would be expressed as Arabness.

The Conquests changed the divisive socio-political transactional boundary of the Mesopotamian/Arabian border by eliminating the Persian and Byzantine hegemons, and so terminated generations of divide-and-conquer politics in Arabia. The nature of the conquerors' settlement also eased the traditional friction of settled *vs.* nomad, since Muslims established new towns (the *amṣār*) on the edge of Iraq, which obviated competition over living space and enabled non-militarised, and therefore more peaceable and regularised interaction between conquering *amṣār*-dweller and indigenous Iraqi agriculturalist. The stable settlement pattern and regular contact more easily nurtures a shared social context that facilitates new perceptions of ethnic difference.

The *amṣār* also created fertile conditions for spawning ethnic cohesion within. Their populations hailed from far-flung regions of the Peninsula – Yemenis, Ḥijāzīs (who constituted part of the initial political leadership in the person of members of the Quraysh and Thaqīf groups), other central and western "Maʿaddite" Arabians (*e.g.* Qays ibn ʿAylān, Hudhayl) and more 'local' "Maʿaddite" groups from the fringes of Iraq (the Bakr ibn Wāʾil groups)[615] – for the first time these disparate people found themselves living together in one space, and while the Iraqi *amṣār* may have been internally divided by tribal unit,[616] on the wider-scale, they created

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[615] For indications of the diversity of the settlers in al-Baṣra al-Kūfa, ibn Khayyāṭ's *al-Ṭabaqāt* provides an early list which can be read in conjunction with Ibn Saʿd's nearly contemporary *Ṭabaqāt*. For a modern study of the prevalence of Yemeni settlement in Iraq, see Madʿaj (1988) 85-87.

[616] Hisham Djaït describes the tribal *khiṭaṭ* arrangement of the neighbourhoods of al-Kūfa (1986) 117-132. Djaït does not problematize the notion of tribe, however, and assumes that they arrived with pre-Islamic cohesion; ethnic theory suggests that close-quarter living in the *amṣār* would rapidly change genealogies and develop new tribal groups. Similarly, Djaït does not pursue the notion that al-Kūfa helped create a sense of unity around the Arabness idea: he accepts the traditional model

cohesive and concentrated population centres spatially segregated from the indigenous Iraqi towns, prompting a new ethnic boundary to form within Iraq.

Akin to Barth's theory of ethnic development, the shared space inside the *amṣār* and the political differentiation between conquerors' *amṣār* and indigenous Iraqi population centres engendered a common sense of difference between Arabian and Iraqi/Mesopotamian, enabling the *amṣār*'s populations to conceptualise themselves as an Arabian 'us' against the Iraqi 'them'. Previously, Arabian groups would never have collectively experienced difference – they lacked any basis for a collective impression of 'other' by which they could define themselves, and hence the Conquests and subsequent *amṣār* settlement pattern are compelling transactionist grounds to pinpoint the gelling of Arabian peoples as one ethnos. To analyse how a sense of ethnic cohesion arose under the name 'Arab', "cultural stuff" inside the *amṣār* provide equally compelling explanations.

The first *amṣār* settlers hailed from different tribes, different regions and different cultural backgrounds, but their diversity was counteracted by two strong cultural commonalities cultivated for the first time within the *amṣār*. The first is linguistic: not all Arabians spoke one language at the dawn of Islam, but the early classical philologists' discussions of tribal dialects and the research of Arabists today reveals that the Arabians spoke broadly similar dialects (perhaps only the Yemeni dialects were less intelligible to other Arabians).[617] Whereas in Arabia, their shibboleths and linguistic differences would have highlighted disunity, in Iraq, the linguistic differences within the *amṣār* would be insignificant compared with the

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that Arabs entered history with Shalmanesser III's 853 BCE stele, he calls these "proto-Arabes" (181) and treats all Arabian settlers of al-Kūfa as equally 'Arab' in a generalised, almost racially-stereotyped study of 'Arab settlement tendencies' (190-203).

[617] Reference to the difficulties of other 'Arabs' understanding Yemeni dialects are noted in Ibn Fāris' *Al-Ṣāḥibī* 55-59, and the chequered linguistic map of Arabia on the eve of Islam is detailed in Versteegh (1997) and Macdonald (2009e).

emphatically non-Arabian Syriac and Aramaean vernaculars of indigenous Iraqis. Communication with Iraqis would rapidly demarcate a collective 'non-Iraqi-ness' within the *amṣār* and enhance perceptions of similarity between their Arabian languages; the close quarter living in the *amṣār* can also be expected to catalyse homogenisation of the Arabian languages, shifting the perception of difference even more starkly outside the *amṣār*'s precincts and fostering a common sense of 'us' around language on the inside.

In addition to, and perhaps even more determinative than language, the Arabians of the *amṣār* also possessed a common religion different to that practiced by indigenous Iraqis. Religions entail a wide array of communal customs – prayer, diet, fasts, ethics and burial practices – and in the case of first/seventh century Iraq (where conversion was initially limited outside of the *amṣār*),[618] the dual process of (i) awareness of community engendered by their shared Islam contrasted by (ii) very different customs, behaviours and beliefs outside the *amṣār* naturally accelerated ethnic cohesion. [619]

The religion and language "cultural stuff" also offer an explanation for why the Muslims chose to identify themselves as 'Arabs'.[620] It is unlikely that Iraqis so named the newcomers, since they had not used cognates resembling the word 'Arab' for several centuries before Islam.[621] 'Arab' can be better explained as the name the settlers gave themselves, given that the Qurʾān refers to itself as "*qurʾān*

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[618] The speed of conversion is difficult to measure and likely depended on region. Buillet's classic 1979 survey cautioned against assuming it was rapid, as does Crone (1980) 49-50. Morony (1984) 178n55,199,431 considers that conversion would have begun in substance towards the later first/seventh century, which, given the nature of Iraq's close population centres and the tremendous power and wealth of the *amṣār* seems reasonable. He notes "pagans" could be found in remote areas in the eighth century (398).

[619] Morony (1984) 445-458 discusses the formation of Muslim communal identity via ritual and burial.

[620] Though he pre-dated the current iterations of ethnic development theory, Müller's instincts again appear correct when he posited that the Arab "Nation" came together under "einer 'arabischen' Sprache und einem 'arabischen' Koran" (1896) 344.

[621] See Note 583.

ʿarabī" (an Arabic Qurʾān) in "lisān ʿarabī" (an "Arabic tongue"), and in the absence of other pre-Islamic evidence of Arab cohesion or self-expression, the common worship of the ʿarabī Qurʾān and the amṣār settlers' unique ability (compared to the indigenous Iraqis) to understand its ʿarabī language, the name ʿarabī appears as a logical label for the conquerors to adopt and distinguish their collective difference from the Iraqis. This endorses Müller's thesis of the Islamic invention of the Arab as well as Gibb's conception that "[a]ll those are Arabs for whom the central fact of history is the mission of Muhammad and the memory of the Arab Empire…";[622] but, in light of theories of ethnic formation, we can see that the specific conditions engendered by the settlement of the amṣār, not merely the revelation of the Qurʾān, triggered communal identity around the idea of 'Arab'.

The power structures in the first/seventh century amṣār resemble the situation anthropologists envisage as necessary for ethnic redefinition. Different Arabian groups held different ranks within the amṣār,[623] but vis-à-vis the Iraqis, the settlers held a common monopoly on military power, and hence power was concentrated in the amṣār, spatially differentiating conqueror and conquered. The conquering 'elite' can be expected to seek to maintain their exalted status by articulating identity in terms that separate them from the conquered and the Arabness idea is ideally suited to such a purpose. By virtue of the fact that Arabness was restricted to the speakers of the conquerors' language and adherents to their religion, it was a concrete marker for the new order and superior status. So it seems that the early Muslims articulated Arabness in their own image – i.e. Arab was defined as a religious and linguistic marker of the political elite.

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[622] He continues, "and who in addition cherish the Arabic tongue and its cultural heritage as their common possession" (Gibb (1940) 3).

[623] Donner (1981) 75-82,221-244 stresses the differentiation between rulers mostly drawn from the Thaqīf tribe and other urban centres of western Arabia vis-à-vis the 'foot soldiers' of central and eastern Arabia settled in al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa.

Reading Arabness in early Islam as a reaction to the radical otherness of ethnic Iraqis offers a more coherent explanation for the emergence of Arabs in the historical record than the projecting of an intangible Arabness into pre-Islamic Arabia. The analysis accepts the Muslim Conquests did in fact occur, that they were launched by Arabian peoples, and that those Arabians settled in separate communities. This follows the Muslim conquest narratives, and while the 'Muslim tradition' has been radically critiqued in recent scholarship, and while this thesis is not the forum to debate those claims in detail, it seems that the study of the Arabness idea offers new grounds to accept the *broad tenor* of the tradition. Between the silence of the pre-Islamic period and the unambiguous discussions of Arabness in late second/eighth century literature, there is a window of less than 200 years in which the Arab ethnos formed, and we must theorise a model to explain Arabness' rapid development. While the depiction of the first conquerors in classical Arabic writing is an impossibly tidy reconstruction of monolithic, unified pan-Arabian identity that overlooks the *process* of Arab ethnic formation, the broad thrust of their depiction of first/seventh century history does reveal how early Islamic history developed Arabness and set the stage for the ethnic discussions of the second/eighth century.

4.2(c): Arabs and Arabness in Iraq to the early second/eighth century

Post-conquest Iraq's formative influence on Arabness corresponds with Donner's observation that in the mid to late first/seventh century "interest in pre-Islamic Arabian history crystallized...as an historiographical theme" and that tribal genealogies were developed and projected backwards into pre-Islamic times, not as an exercise of historical curiosity, but as an act of communal legitimisation.[624] Arabness was new, and the community needed to be imagined, but the conquerors

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[624] Donner (1998) 197-198.

also competed for power amongst themselves and they used different constructions of history to jockey for position.[625] For Arabness, this disrupted its smooth process towards one cohesive, 'canonical' idea. While Arabness *qua* the conquerors' term of self-identification enabled all Arabic speaking Muslims (*i.e.* all the conquerors) to theoretically recognise themselves as Arabs, Arabness' connection with power and status meant it was sensitive to fissures within the empire's elites. The conquests nurtured awareness of unity, but the early Muslim community that was developing Arabness was not unified before Islam, and early Muslims had to contend with legacies of pre-Islamic fissures.

Competition over leadership and the spoils of conquest irrupted into four or five civil wars in the century between 35/655 and 132/750 against the difficult backdrop of experimentation in developing a form of authentic political leadership. Whilst hindsight sees the Caliphate as the 'natural' embodiment of Muslim sovereignty, the first century and half of Muslim history involved the process of inventing the Caliphate as a form of governance which initially lacked an established tradition to legitimate itself.[626] The inability to centralise power even by the end of the Umayyad-era,[627] makes it difficult to generalise about pan-Muslim unities in the early period, including a cohesive unitary notion of Arabness.

In the absence of consistent central, unifying leadership, the civil wars exacerbated awareness of difference between 'Arab' conquerors that manifested in regionalism and tribalism: two alternative forms of identity discernable in the historical record. Regionalism was relevant to the Iraqi milieu, as Iraqis often competed with the Umayyad Caliphal centre in Syria (al-Shām), and the respective

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[625] Donner (1998) 198, Goldziher (1889-1890) 1:61-97, though Goldziher's notions of tribalism and innate pre-Islamic 'Arab character' that led to the spirited rivalries in early Islam are dated.

[626] Marsham (2009) and Crone and Hinds (1986) reveal the evolving nature of Caliphate in early Islam.

[627] Blankinship (1994) well detailed the struggles of the Caliph Hishām to centralise the Caliph's control.

elites embraced territorial nomenclature of *ahl al-Shām* (People of Syria) and *ahl al-ʿIrāq* (People of Iraq) which feature in the record of their interactions since the first *fitna* of 36-40/656-661,[628] epitomised in a statement recorded in Abū ʿUbayda's relatively early *al-Naqāʾiḍ* in which the Iraqi Qutayba ibn Muslim's exhorts his followers against the Umayyad Caliph Sulaymān:

> Oh people of Iraq, consider my lineage … by God you will find me to be an Iraqi, son of an Iraqi; al-Shām is a father obeyed, Iraq is a father disobeyed, for how long will you let the People of al-Shām luxuriate in your houses?[629]

Qutayba refers this lineage to Iraqi space, not Arab genealogy, and such sentiments are logical if we consider that notions of Arab unity would be otiose for Iraqi belligerents as any unity under Umayyad Caliphs manifestly benefitted their rivals in al-Shām.

Akin to regionalist identities, tribal *ʿaṣabiyya* couched in terms of tribal collectives Yamān, Maʿadd, Muḍar, Qays, Rabīʿa and Nizār added layers of politicised identity across the Muslim Empire in competition with pan-Islamic Arabness. These tribal groups may not have been fully cohesive political parties,[630] but the emphasis on tribal lore, contested genealogies and the masses of Umayyad-era poetry in which struggles even between sub-tribes appear as very serious socio-political matters, argue for maintaining a belief that tribal rivalries, even if not developed into full-blown political blocs, were disruptive to the articulation of a unified Arabness idea.

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[628] See, for example, the earliest surviving text about the first *fitna*, Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim's *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn* where the *ahl al-Shām* vs. *ahl al-ʿIrāq* dichotomy is pervasive. Haldon and Kennedy consider the interaction of regional identities with tribal in the Umayyad period, and, arguing from an economic perspective, note the "common interest" ((2012) 543) the militarised elite had with their tax-paying farmers, and hence the enhanced importance of regional identities (2012) 541-553.

[629] Abū ʿUbayda, *al-Naqāʾiḍ* 1:355

[630] Crone (1994) demonstrated that the 'Arab tribes', especially the Qaysi and Yamāni, never constituted cohesive political parties as Shaban argued ((1971) 135-137). Crone accepted that they did coalesce into looser factions by the end of the first/seventh century.

The fissures in early Arabness should be expected. Anthropologists stress that a new ethnic identity can only emerge as a process, and in the case of Arabness, the disparate tribes had their own identities before they became 'Arab' in the *amṣār* following the Muslim Conquests. Old allegiances and new groupings based on the new power relations in early Islam logically militate against the conquerors simply embracing Arab identity and discarding their old affiliations, and conversion of the *Arabian* tribes into *Arab* tribes was complex, as revealed in Chapter 2's analysis of the development of Arab family trees and Chapter 3's explanation of the only gradual Arabisation of Dhū Qār. Early Arabness was open-ended, the post-conquest power struggles appear to be the root of the multiple, and contradictory narratives of Arab history that bedevilled synthesis when Muslim authors began to write about Arabness in the second/eighth century, and hence speaking of the first generations of Islam in totalising terms of 'Arab history' imposes a unity within the fledgling Caliphate that likely never existed.

While division is the most obvious ramification of conflict, conflict also facilitates new forms of solidarity as groups find strength in unity and even marshal identities as a means to alleviate conflict and gel truces into more lasting peace. The repeated conflicts of early Islam therefore ultimately (and perhaps tortuously) fostered the unifying power of Arabness to resolve civil conflict and centralise power. Classical sources suggest that towards the end of the Umayyad period narratives of 'Arab history' were being employed as a means to unify opposition to the Umayyads: the narratives isolated the Syrian Arabs, but unified the Arab Muslim elites in other parts of the Caliphate.[631] Also, tied with politics, the creation of the

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[631] Suggestions of a developing tribal consciousness and shared 'Arab past' are perceptible in reports of the Iraqi discontent of the last 30 years of the Umayyads, particularly from the Muhallab revolt during the reign of Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (101-105/720-724). They become more pronounced during fall of the Umayyads, for example al-Dīnawarī relates a fascinating anecdote in which an alleged pre-Islamic alliance between 'Yemenis' and 'Qaysī' Arabs against Muḍar was cited by anti-

state *dīwān* to pay stipends to every 'Arab' suggests the central authority's attempt to forge unity and consent by appealing to a sense of Muslim Arabness amongst the conquerors and their kin,[632] and the novel appearance of 'Arab' as a term of collective identity in Umayyad poetry seems a logical result of the first century of the process of developing Arab ethnic identity notwithstanding the tribal power relations that also led the descendants of the Muslim conquerors to look to regional and tribal affiliations that asserted competing identities and narratives of Arab history. The first/seventh century explains both the conditions conducive to articulating Arabness and the genesis of contradictions with which later Muslim-era authors would have to contend. When they recorded Umayyad history, they applied their own idealised notions of centralised Caliphate and Arab unity on the early period, but those concepts were initially underdeveloped, and we should accordingly speak of Umayyad history as 'Arab' only in very caveated terms.

4.2(d): Arabness and second/eighth century Iraq: al-Shuʿūbiyya

Contemporaneous with the political struggles between 'Arab' elites, developments in Iraqi society during the later first/seventh and second/eighth centuries exerted their own influences on the Arabness idea. We have seen that the first iterations of ethnic Arabness enabled conquerors to articulate their privileged status around notions of the Qurʾān, language and Islam. But these are open-ended cultural traits: language can be learned and Islam invites conversion. For the period when the conquerors were spatially distinct in their *amṣār*, they could monopolise the 'Arab' language and religion, but from the later Umayyad period, the prosperity of the *amṣār* prompted the abandonment of pre-Islamic Iraqi cities as indigenous Iraqis emigrated to the *amṣār* for economic opportunity and began to share the

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Umayyad agitators in Khurāsān who called for the alliance to be 'renewed' to unite Yemeni and Qaysī 'Arab' groups against the 'Muḍarī' Umayyads (*Akhbār* 514).

[632] Discussed in Bashear (1984) 10-11.

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same social contexts as the descendants of the original conquerors. These (mostly) convert populations working in the *amṣār* acquired the identity of *mawālī*,[633] and after the Abbasid founding of Baghdad between 141/758 and 145/762, the unprecedented economic and administrative activity in Iraq enabled court-employed *mawālī* nudged their way into the upper echelons of Abbasid society.[634]

The emergence of the *mawālī* rewrote the boundaries of Iraqi social transaction, the *amṣār* were no longer purely 'Arab', and political/economic status could no longer be monopolised by the descendants of the Muslim conquerors. The "cultural stuff" by which Arabness had been defined was changing: by the mid-second/eighth century, the *mawālī* were Muslim, they spoke Arabic as their first language and they had been born in the same *amṣār* as the Arabians. Other than lineage, therefore, the *Mawālī* shared most attributes of the Arabians, and as a practical matter, discerning ʿarabī from *mawlā* in the latter half of the second/eighth century would have been extremely difficult.

Theories of ethnic development observe that the types of forces that brought Arab and *mawālī* together prompt ethnic revivalist backlash. In the Iraqi

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[633] Conversion to Islam is a complex study with much regional variation which received little attention in classical literary sources. Many Iraqis must have converted in first/seventh century, but neither Morony (1984) 119 nor Kennedy (1986) 199-200 interprets the evidence as connoting mass conversions at this time. Morony considers the first converts would have been the ex-Persian aristocracy who interacted most with the new Muslim leadership in Iraq (1984) 431; Bulliet attributes wide-scale conversion to the urbanisation of Iraq during the early Abbasid period (1979) 87. *Mawālī* play an important role in al-Mukhtār's 66/685 revolt in al-Kūfa, though Crone argues that the first *mawālī* were not necessarily all converts nor wholly assimilated (1980) 49,n358. *Mawālī* conversion in Iraq will remain debated, but wide-scale conversion during the course of the second/eighth century seems reasonable given the population concentrations and immigration into the Muslim cities of al-Baṣra, al-Kūfa, al-Wāsiṭ and Baghdad, and the rulings against the building of churches in these cities (*c.f.* Ibn Ḥanbal *Masāʾil* 260) indicates that while Christian populations undoubtedly coexisted with Muslim, the urban centres were predominantly Muslim. Ahola (2004) 75-100 provides statistics to support a thesis of early conversion of settlers moving to the *amṣar* while the Iraqi countryside converted very gradually.

[634] Baghdad's development as *al-Madīna al-Mudawwara* and Baghdad and its subsequent flourishing is described in Lassner's classic *The Shaping of Abbasid Rule* (1992).

context, Arabs could perceive their loss of the monopoly over power, and *mawālī* Iraqis could view assimilation as a loss their heritage to the 'newcomers'. This backlash has been famously described in scholarship as *al-Shuʿūbiyya*, but it has not been examined as an ethnic revival. Early twentieth century European scholarship drew parallels between *al-Shuʿūbiyya* and the nationalistic chauvinism then prevailing in Europe and read *al-Shuʿūbiyya* as an essentialised clash between ethnic 'Arab' and 'Persian' (the Iraqis).[635] As European nationalistic sentiments softened, so did approaches to *al-Shuʿūbiyya*, and scholars have shifted away from discourses about politicised Persian nationalism,[636] but some politicised and essentialist notions about *al-Shuʿūbiyya* remain. Enderwitz retains some nationalistic flavour in calling the movement a "more or less successful attempt on the part of the different subject races to hold their own and to distinguish, at least between Arabism and Islam",[637] but this perhaps makes too much of the notion of 'race' and leaves the notion of Arabism unproblematized. She also considers that the "cultural Shuʿūbiyya" peaked in the third/ninth century,[638] but this is perhaps a function of the fact that literature survives only from that period; there is little other basis to support its notion that the second/eighth century sentiments were less significant. Similarly, Mottahedeh's observation that *al-Shuʿūbiyya* conceptualised the Arab *vs. ʿajam* division as a distinction of (Arab) genealogical community and non-Arab territorial community,[639] embraces genealogical assumptions about the basics of Arabness that may be anachronistic when applied to the early manifestations of *al-*

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[635] See the traditional accounts of *al-Shuʿūbiyya* in Goldziher (1889-1890) 1:137-197; Gibb (1962) 62-73.

[636] Norris (1991) 31,34-38. See especially Mottahedeh (1976) 162 who argues cogently against the politicised assumptions surrounding *al-Shuʿūbiyya*.

[637] Enderwitz, *EI²* "Shuʿūbiyya" 9:514.

[638] Enderwitz, *EI²* "Shuʿūbiyya" 9:513.

[639] Mottahedheh (1976) 169-171.

Shuʿūbiyya. But both Enderwitz and Mottahedeh make vital observations about the discourse which can be developed by reading *al-Shuʿūbiyya* as ethnic revival.

I have demonstrated that Arabness was contested and not universally adopted as the ethnic rallying-cry for an eponymous, cohesive community during the first century of Islam, and hence a binary 'Arabs *vs.* the others' reading of *al-Shuʿūbiyya* is untenable. With reference to theories of ethnic revival, I propose that *al-Shuʿūbiyya* was a relatively short-lived burst of cultural insecurity in the assimilating milieu of late Umayyad and early Abbasid Iraq which answers two lingering questions. First, it explains why so few *Shuʿūbī* texts survive today, since by the third/ninth century, when writing became more common, the cultural clash of the century before must have waned.[640] Second, it explains why Arabness became more clearly articulated as a cohesive genealogical community by the third/ninth century, since in the face of *Shuʿūbiyya* challenges, the previously divided 'Arab' elites can be expected to have cooperated more than hitherto to erect a closed-ended, cohesive notion of Arabness to defend their collective status against *mawālī* rivals.

The shift in the definition of Arabness explored in Chapter 2.2 reflects *al-Shuʿūbiyya*'s legacy. The earlier open-ended models of Arabness conceptualised around religion and language offered no means for a second/eighth century Arab to monopolise Arab identity since the *mawālī* were adopting both the Arabic language and Islamic faith and hence the descendants of the conquering elite only possessed

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[640] Enderwitz *EI²* 9:514 notes that no original texts survive, but nonetheless dates the "height" of the movement to the third/ninth century. Texts do survive from that period, begging the question of why, if *al-Shuʿūbiyya* peaked in the third/ninth century, it left such scant literary trace. *Al-Shuʿūbiyya* may have been politically explosive for a brief period in the early Abbasid Caliphate, datable to the apogee of *Zindīq* persecution during al-Mahdī's reign (775-785) (Gutas (1998) 65-69), and terminating shortly after. Goldziher linked *Zandaqa* and *Shuʿūbiyya* (1889-1890) 1:148 as did Gibb (1962) 69, but Taheri-Iraqi doubted the connection between the two (1982) 161-173. Further study of the two phenomena in the light of 'ethnic revivalist' theory is necessary, though beyond the scope of this thesis.

memory of their genealogy to distinguish themselves from the *mawālī*. To maintain the distinction between Arab and indigenous Iraqi, and so protect the special status of the Arabs, Arabness would have to be recast around closed-ended lineage. Thus, in contrast to the Umayyad period when tribal *ʿaṣabiyya* was a source of division, tribalism in the latter second/eighth century constituted the basis upon which the 'Arab' elites could articulate their unity, and the appearance of Ibn al-Kalbī's pan-Arab genealogical models in the later second/eighth century suggests this is precisely what happened. With Iraqi Arabs playing the 'lineage card' to maintain their distinctiveness, it is logical that the *mawālī* would respond in kind, and praise their own pre-Islamic past, casting the 'nobility' of the Sasanians as a counterpoint to the Arab tribes. *Al-Shuʿūbiyya*, therefore, did not begin with Arab chauvinism; ironically it prompted the defensive reconceptualization of Arabness into a kin-based ethnos with emphasis on noble heritage (epitomised in the concepts of tribal *sharaf* (nobility) and *muruwwa* (manly virtue)) which are evidenced in the shifts in the definitions of Arab and descriptions of *al-Jāhiliyya* explored in Chapters 1 and 2.

My interpretation of *al-Shuʿūbiyya* accords with Rina Drory's 1996 thesis on the construction of *al-Jāhiliyya* noted in Chapter 1 inasmuch as the second/eighth century *Shuʿūbiyya* discourses can be seen to have prompted a new interest in a heroic, nostalgic 'Arab past'.[641] But her proposal that the non-Arab ethnicity of the poetry narrators of the late eighth/second century marked a rupture when 'foreigners' wrested control over remembering the Arab past from the ethnic Arabs[642] is more problematic. Who exactly were those 'Arabs' and the 'Persians' and to what extent can cultural production be related to ethnicity? The road-map

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[641] Drory (1996) 34,43.

[642] Drory (1996) 40. She elaborates: the "non-Arab *mawālī* were the ones who actually constructed Arab identity for the Arab community through a colossal effort of collecting and organizing knowledge belonging to 'the Arab (and Islamic) sciences'" (42).

towards Arabness which I have been tracing argues that the cohesion of the Arab people was not fully articulated in the second/eighth century and the notions of a pan-Arab genealogical system were not settled until the later third/ninth. In this situation, while groups must have used the term 'Arab' to identify themselves, the notion of a cohesive bloc of Arab partisans is difficult to maintain – they were still in the process of defining themselves – and Drory's binary division of cultural producers into 'Arab' or 'non-Arab' camps is accordingly too stark.

Moreover, while many the early Abbasid narrators of the Arab *Jāhiliyya* such as Ḥammād al-Rāwiya, Khalaf al-Aḥmar, al-Madāʾinī and al-Jāḥiẓ did not claim Arab lineage, many others did: for instance the poetry collectors al-Aṣmaʿī, al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī and Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī, the genealogist and historian Ibn al-Kalbī, the belles-lettrist al-Mubarrad and the *akhbār* historians Ibn Ḥabīb and al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār all hailed from 'Arab tribes'. Although the non-Arab poetry collector Abū ʿUbayda is cited as a key 'hater of Arabs', pro-*ʿajamī* partisan,[643] his surviving work, *al-Naqāʾiḍ* contains such extensive anecdotes about past Arab glories that it is difficult to adduce it as anti-Arab invective of a supposedly excited *Shuʿūbī*. It is even more difficult to find scorn against the Arabs in surviving Iraqi works, and I am not aware that any scholar has been able to demonstrate that 'ethnically Arab' authors wrote different versions of history than their 'ethnically Persian' peers as should be expected if a binary ethnic discourse dominated scholarly activity. This ought to underline the importance of avoiding essentialised notions of cultural production on ethnic lines: *al-Shuʿūbiyya* seems better interpreted as an ethnic revival of the second/eighth century and not a deep-rooted, principle and divisive backdrop to classical-era Iraqi intellectual activity and literary output.

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[643] Gibb notes Abū ʿUbayda had "no respect for the contemporary Arab sharīfs", and describes his role in the "anti-Arab camp" of *al-Shuʿūbiyya* (Gibb *EI²* "Abū ʿUbayda" 1:158).

In any event, the earliest extant sources were written after populations had been assimilating in Muslim Iraq for 200-250 years. Considering that ethnic revivals are short-lived reactions to inexorable assimilation, we cannot assume that early second/eighth century *Shuʿūbiyya* sentiments were burning so brightly when the extant texts were written in the third/ninth. By the third/ninth century, *al-Shuʿūbiyya* seems to have run its course: it helped create new notions of Arabness around a kin-based community, but ethnic divisions were no longer a primary agenda in Iraqi intellectual circles. The surviving works from third/ninth century Iraq are the literary output of a highly assimilated society: an urban, Iraqi, Muslim cosmopolitan intellectual environment where ties of allegiance and scholarly sympathies were not functions of ethnocentrisms. This perhaps explains why two of the staunchest defenders of the idea of Arabness in extant third/ninth century literature were non-Arabs – al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba,[644] but prompts the question of why did non-Arabs vociferously champion the Arab cause? To answer this question, we must shift analysis to the context of the late second/eighth and early third/ninth century where the issue of Arabness evolved yet again as the power structures and actors on Islam's political stage took an unprecedented turn away from 'Arabs' and created a new situation that enabled an entirely new discourse to arise around the Arabness idea.

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[644] Ibn Qutayba expressly admits he was not of Arabian stock (*Faḍl* 37). Al-Jāḥiẓ was likely born of a freed African slave father, see Ḍayf (1946) 154. For mention of his "*aswad*" roots see al-Baghdādī *Tārīkh* 12:209 and Yāqūt *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ* 4:473. Arḥīla (2004) 29 defended al-Jāḥiẓ's Arabian origins, although adduces limited evidence.

4.3 Arabness in the third/ninth century Iraqi political sphere

4.3(a): Arabness between continuity and change in the early Abbasid period: 132/750-193/809

Western scholars used to employ a strict periodization that depicted the transition from Umayyad to Abbasid as a shift from 'Arabic' to 'Persianate' Caliphate.[645] The model is now questioned,[646] and my arguments against a cohesive notion of Arabness in the first century and a half of Islam underline the difficulties of assuming that the Umayyad Caliphate was an 'Arab' period of history. Similarly, the Persian-ness of the Abbasids does not manifest immediately: the *ʿaṣabiyya* tension familiar in Umayyad times between tribal groups (who would later be all classified as 'Arab') remained a violently disruptive force in early Abbasid times. The Abbasid takeover moreover relied on a union between Yamānī and Qaysī tribal affiliations against Muḍar which turned the tide against Umayyad fortunes in Iraq, and the notion that the Abbasids initially relied only on eastern Iranians for their power base seems inaccurate.[647]

Al-Yaʿqūbī's chronological account of Abbasid history organised by Caliphal reign makes particularly clear reference to such *ʿaṣabiyya* conflicts in early Abbasid times. During the reign of the first effective Abbasid Caliph, al-Manṣūr (136-158/750-775), *ʿaṣabiyya* factionalism prompted change between Yamānī and Nizārī control over Azerbaijan in 141/758-9,[648] Qaysī and Yamānī sympathies are accorded a role in Caliphal appointments,[649] and rivalry between Rabīʿa and Yamān flared into

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[645] Goldziher (1889-1890), Wellhausen (1927).

[646] Sharon (1990) 112-115,263-301; Turner (2004).

[647] Western scholars traditionally identified the *abnāʾ* (Arabo-Khurasānians of mixed background) as the collective identity of much of the Abbasids' support, but Crone's 1998 and Turner's 2004 reappraisals of *abnāʾ* identity demonstrate that this faction does not appear in classical texts with any regularity or coherence before, at the very earliest, the reign of al-Rashīd.

[648] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 2:371.

[649] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 7:532.

conflict in the province of Sind in 142/759-60.[650] Al-Yaʿqūbī notes that the killers of the disgraced Tamīmī governor of Sind ʿUyayna ibn Mūsā were from the Yamānī faction, and records the Caliph's Yamānī officer (ʿāmil) (and later governor of al-Baṣra) ʿUqba ibn Salam's 152/769 attack on members of Rabīʿa in al-Baḥrayn in apparent retribution for transgressions of the Rabīʿa governor in Yemen.[651] Al-Mahdī's reign (158-169/775-785) witnessed continued ʿaṣabiyya conflict in Sind,[652] and the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (170-193/785-809), traditionally identified with the epitome of Persianate Caliphal rule, experienced ʿaṣabiyya disturbance across the Caliphate: Yamānīs and Nizārīs fought in Sind after the appointment of a Yamānī governor, Ṭayfūr ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥimyarī,[653] the anti-Abbasid Nizārī Abū al-Haydhām attacked Yamānīs in al-Shām in 176/792-3,[654] and Yamānīs and Nizārīs fought repeatedly over influence in Armenia.[655]

The tribal based conflict and competition over influence in various provinces of the Caliphate is also reflected in the continued high-status of tribesmen as governors, generals and high officials during the reigns of al-Manṣūr and al-Hādī.[656] Al-Yaʿqūbī notes that al-Manṣūr relied particularly on 15 "Arab ʿummāl" along with 11 ʿummāl from the mawālī.[657] During the reign of al-Rashīd, however, whilst the appointment of Arab tribal governors remains common, we

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[650] Al-Yaʿqūbī Tārīkh 2:372, al-Ṭabarī notes the conflict, but does not mention tribal antagonisms (Tārīkh 7:512).

[651] Al-Yaʿqūbī Tārīkh 2:373,385. Al-Ṭabarī makes no mention of this conflict.

[652] Al-Yaʿqūbī Tārīkh 2:398. Al-Ṭabarī laconically notes the three changes in governorship in Sind in 161/777-778, but does not elaborate at all on the causes.

[653] Al-Yaʿqūbī Tārīkh 2:409.

[654] Al-Yaʿqūbī Tārīkh 2:410, al-Ṭabarī refers to this as the fitna between Yamānīs and Nizārīs (Tārīkh 8:251-252).

[655] Al-Yaʿqūbī Tārīkh 2:426-427. Al-Ṭabarī Tārīkh 8:270 adds that in 183/799-800 a Khazar invasion in Armenia may have been started when an inter-tribal blood feud spilled over, and members of one tribe sought revenge against the Abbasid governor Yazīd ibn Mazyad al-Shaybānī by inviting Khazar incursions.

[656] Al-Yaʿqūbī Tārīkh 2:371-372.

[657] Al-Yaʿqūbī Tārīkh 2:384.

find records of increased reliance on *mawālī*. For instance after the tribal *ʿaṣabiyya* in al-Shām, al-Rashīd appointed one of the Persian Barmakids Jaʿfar ibn Yaḥyā ibn Khālid (which seems to have caused some friction and *ʿaṣabiyya* unrest in Ḥimṣ),[658] and during the tribal infighting in Armenia, al-Rashīd appointed a Hashemite, Mūsā ibn ʿĪsā, to quell the trouble, and then, when that move failed, the Caliph dispatched the Khurasānian al-Ḥarashī with soldiers from "Ahl al-Khurāsān", though their presence roused further unrest amongst both the Nizārī and Yamānī Arabs.[659]

The evidence of the gradual increase in the status of the *mawālī* is in keeping with the models of ethnic assimilation that portray development of group identities as a protracted process rather than an overnight change (as the Abbasid revolution was previously supposed to have accomplished for the 'Persians'). The evidence of tribal *ʿaṣabiyya* and the ethnic components of Caliphal appointments shows a continuity in political rhetoric and power groups between the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates against the backdrop of increasing *mawālī* status which seems to have been an inevitable consequence of assimilation in Iraq and not a particular Abbasid policy aim.

4.3(b): Changing fortunes of Arabness: political disenfranchisement after al-Rashīd

Al-Rashīd's decision to divide the Caliphate between his sons al-Amīn in Baghdad and al-Maʾmūn in Merv and the subsequent *fitna* between them seems to have marked a decisive change in the status of Arabs amongst the Caliphate's political elite. Scholars have noted a discrepancy between al-Amīn's Arab tribal leaders and support from *al-abnāʾ* (a Khurasānian collective of mixed genealogies)[660] *vs.* al-Maʾmūn's reliance on Eastern Iranian support, and in his analysis of the

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[658] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 2:410.

[659] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 2:427.

[660] Crone (1998) 3 dates the rise of prominence of *al-abnāʾ* to the reign of al-Rashīd, though Turner (2004) cogently argues that the sources more strongly suggest *al-abnāʾ* gathered into a collective during the war/*fitna* between al-Amīn and al-Maʾmūn.

identities in the *fitna*, Turner concludes that the total victory of al-Maʾmūn's camp resulted in a "period of social renegotiation of power roles, [when] individuals began to coalesce around the new caliph and their identities were reconstituted and adapted".[661] Examination of these renegotiations reveals a rapid decline in the fortune of individuals related to the Arab tribes.

Al-Yaʿqūbī lists each of the provincial governors at the outset of al-Maʾmūn's Caliphate, and they are primarily related to Arab tribes and most had served as provincial governors during the prior Caliphates of al-Amīn and al-Rashīd,[662] but it appears that al-Maʾmūn sought to change the *status quo* and plant his own mark by promoting those who supported his rise to the Caliphate. In terms of provincial governorships and military appointments, al-Maʾmūn began replacing control over fractious regions with Khurāsānians: for instance, he quelled unrest in al-Jazīra with the appointment of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir whom he later granted control over the Caliphate's western provinces of al-Jazīra, al-Shām, Egypt (Miṣr) and al-Maghrib; unrest in Egypt in 211 resulted in the replacement of an Arab governor with a *mawlā* loyal to the Ṭāhirid house; and al-Maʾmūn entrusted a Persian from Badghīs to control the unstable Armenia where we have noted previous *ʿaṣabiyya* friction (the new governor was apparently selected for his personal loyalty to the Caliph, as he was known by the *nisba* al-Maʾmūnī).[663] Al-Maʾmūn similarly dealt with the Arab tribal *ʿaṣabiyya* in Sind which had been almost continuous since the reign of al-Manṣūr. According to al-Yaʿqūbī, al-Maʾmūn initially sought to quell the problem appealing to Arab groups: he called the leader of al-Baṣra's Muhallab tribe to discipline a fractious Muhallabī governor in Sind, but when this failed, al-Maʾmūn turned to Khurāsānians and dispatched a Barmakid, Mūsā ibn Yaḥyā as governor of

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[661] Turner (2004) 22.

[662] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 2:445.

[663] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 2:456,460,464.

Sind. Replacing the Muhallabī Arabs, and sending them back to al-Baṣra, Mūsā reigned over Sind and passed on his governorship after his death to his son.[664] 'Arab' control over the province was thus ended, and the sources never again mention any *ʿaṣabiyya* conflict in the region.

During the reign of al-Maʾmūn's successor, al-Muʿtaṣim (218-227/833-842), the military balance of power shifted even more dramatically away from descendants of Arab tribes to new mercenary armies. Al-Muʿtaṣim's reliance on mercenaries is well known and widely reported: he 'imported' warriors from nomadic communities beyond the Abbasid frontiers – Berber North Africa and the mixed-ethnic Turkestan whom he formed into a private army even before he became Caliph. Al-Masʿūdī reports he already had 4,000 'slave-soldiers' (*mamālīk/ghilmān*) by the early part of his reign,[665] and by the end of his Caliphate, they numbered between ten and twenty thousand.[666] These soldiers would become known as the 'Turks' (*atrāk*) and would become the most powerful generals in the Caliphate, accorded all the most important posts: al-Yaʿqūbī remarks al-Muʿtaṣim's special reliance on a group of 5 named Turks,[667] and classical histories recount the privileged roles of the Transoxanians Afshīn and Ashnās during al-Muʿtaṣim's reign, and the reliance of the succeeding Caliph al-Wāthiq (227/842 to 232/847) on both Ashnās, Itākh and Bughā.[668] By the reign of al-Mutawakkil, Arab tribesmen remain in

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[664] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 2:458.

[665] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §2801. Gordon (2001) 15-26 traces the process by which powerful Abbasid family members collected Turkic guards between 200-218/815-834, following which the Turks converted into a military force under the command of the Caliph.

[666] Ibn al-Jawzī *al-Muntaẓam* 6:358. Modern scholars estimate the Turks numbered between 100,000 (Kennet) and 20,000 (Töllner), Gordon (2001) 73 prefers the lower estimate. Northedge (2007) 192 also argues for lower estimates than Kennet, but his excavations reveal large expansions in the Karkh and Dūr "cantonements" which indicate dramatic increases in the size of Turkic soldiers being procured for al-Muʿtaṣim's force.

[667] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 2:478.

[668] El-Hibri (2010) 296. Gordon (2001) 111-118 details the networks of influence of these prominent Turks.

only a small number of leadership positions; almost all important political events involve Turkic or Khurāsānian figures along with battalions of Turkic mercenaries.

Al-Yaʿqūbī, who expressly stresses the tribal ʿaṣabiyya during the reigns of al-Manṣūr to al-Rashīd, makes no further reference to such tensions following al-Maʾmūn's victory in the *fitna* (he only mentions one ʿaṣabiyya between Muʿtazilites and "al-Jamāʿa),[669] and it is clear that the shift in political power following the fourth *fitna* had a direct affect on Arabs in positions of authority and the notion of the Arab tribes as political blocs at the centre of power and attention. The disappearance of tribal ʿaṣabiyya in the sources suggests that the tribal blocs no longer had a substantial stake in the power structure and that the former influence and utility of tribes as collective identities of status had collapsed.[670]

The eclipse of Arab tribal military units also accords with the traditional dating of the removal of Arabs from the *dīwān al-ʿaṭā* – the official stipend payments that the state had paid to the descendants of the original Muslim conquerors. Al-Kindī records a decree in 218/833 in which the Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim ended *dīwān* payments in Egypt,[671] this decree has been linked to the official end of the *dīwān* system,[672] though it seems more accurate to limit it to the Egyptian context, especially since only Egyptian authors record it.[673] Gordon's observation that Egyptian Arab military units would have been indistinguishable from non-Arab Egyptians by the third/ninth century enables us to conceptualise the decree as Kennedy described it: "the last traces of [the *dīwān*] system",[674] and hence evidence for the end of the gradual process we have traced by which ethnic Arabs lost all

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[669] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 2:462.

[670] See Gordon (2001) 75-88 for the ramifications of the rise of Turks in the public sphere at the expense of old elites between the reigns of al-Muʿtaṣim to al-Mutawakkil.

[671] Al-Kindī *Governors* 193-194.

[672] Ayalon (1994) 21-22.

[673] See Gordon (2001) 39-40 and Mikhail (2008) 383-384.

[674] Kennedy (1986) 150, Gordon (2001) 40.

official status and military privilege across the Caliphate. The decline of Arab power was not the function of a Caliphal decree, but rather a function of wide-ranging social and political changes that culminated in the first half of the third/ninth century.

A further ramification of the increased reliance on Turkic soldiers resulted in the rewriting of Iraq's political landscape which also accords with declining influence of Arabs in the third/ninth century. According to Arabic historians, al-Muʿtaṣim's Turkic/Berber armies were unpopular in the capital Baghdad for their rowdy and violent ways, and al-Muʿtaṣim responded by moving his army and administration to Samarra, a site 60 miles north.[675] Samarra was a massive project, requiring construction of the palace city from scratch, and while it was not the first large 'second-capital' of the Abbasids (al-Rashīd had made similar construction in al-Raqqa), al-Muʿtaṣim's Samarra was on an unprecedented scale and seems to have been designed to separate his new army from the traditional centres of population, as el-Hibrī notes, it was the beginning of a "rift between ruling elite and general Islamic society".[676] Now surrounded by his personal militia and predominantly Turkic and Khurāsānian courtiers, the Caliph was spatially separated from the original 'Arab' towns of al-Baṣra and al-Kūfa, as well as Baghdad, and it is logical to connect the move to Samarra with further decline in the influence of Arab tribal blocs.

Simultaneous with the dwindling appointments of officials from Arab tribes and the disappearance of the tribal blocs as effective political units, al-Maʾmūn's reign is also noted for the *Miḥna* inquisition over the status of the Qurʾān. Subsequent Sunni scholars would stress the *miḥna* as a theological dispute in which the Caliph endorsed Muʿtazilite doctrines and sought to eradicate Sunni theology,

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[675] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 9:17-18; al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §§2801-2802, al-Kutubī *Fawāt* 4:49.
[676] El-Hibri (2010) 296.

but such a view is apocryphal, as the fully-articulated Sunni theology would only arise after the *miḥna* and Nawas' recent reappraisals of the *miḥna* have demonstrated that it was a "Maʾmūnite platform" in which

> the point at issue … was … not a particular theological doctrine, but the authority of the caliph versus the authority of those men who saw themselves and not the caliph as the legitimate repository and authentic transmitters of religious knowledge and tradition.[677]

From an ethnic standpoint, the *miḥna* has also been seen as a direct attempt by al-Maʾmūn to quash opposition from Arab-Khurāsānians, but, as Nawas also notes, discerning an ethnic element to the opposition against al-Maʾmūn is extremely difficult,[678] and his statistical enquiry into the *miḥna* reveals that Arab-Khurāsānians were not specifically targeted, but rather that *mawālī* represent between two-thirds and three-quarters of all participants in the *miḥna*, both on the side supporting the Caliph and the interrogees.[679] Nawas' findings indicate a comprehensive decline in Arab prominence around the Caliph. Al-Maʾmūn's aim to enforce strong central Caliphal authority and his concentration of power around the person of the Caliph[680] explain part of the decline in the Arab-ness of political factions: proximity to the Caliph, not strict Arab lineage defined around membership with a tribal political bloc, would have promoted one's status in al-Maʾmūn's court.[681] In this sense, not only do Arab groups fall away from power as they were replaced by Turks, and not only did the end of the *dīwān al-ʿaṭā* payments signal the end of economic utility in being Arab, but also the stress on Arabness as a political tool became less expedient, and thus, by the mid-third/ninth century,

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[677] Nawas (1994) 624.

[678] Nawas (1996) 707 critiques the earlier interpretations of al-Miḥna as a markedly anti-Arab-Khurasānian purge as hypothesised by Lapidus (1975) and Madelung (1990).

[679] Nawas (1996) 703.

[680] Al-Maʾmūn's intention to monopolise authority is also noted in Gutas (1998) 75-83.

[681] Gordon (2001) 105.

ethnic 'Arabs' who did remain near the centre of power would subsume their Arabness into other identities to avoid old stigmas of ʿaṣabiyya and allegiances to the defeated al-Amīn. The decline of political Arabness would be even more acute in Samarra where the Turkish leaders built their own patronage systems and even changed the connotation of *mawālī* from the Umayyad-early Abbasid designation of a non-Arab to a new meaning of lower order soldier in the Turkic/Caliphal patronage ladder.[682]

It would be too abrupt to propose that following the fourth *fitna* the notion of Arabness disappeared as a political marker of status, although the shifts in power from militarised tribal elites in post-Conquest Iraq to Turkic mercenary armies around the person of the Caliph by the early third/ninth century depict a trend of the declining prominence of Arabness as a marker of elite status. In light of this, an anecdote recorded in al-Tanūkhī's (d.384/994) *al-Faraj baʿd al-shidda* describing the Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim's punishment of Khālid ibn Yazīd ibn Mazyad, indicates ethnic change in the early third/ninth century.[683] Khālid was the son of one of the most visible 'Arab' generals during the reign of al-Mahdī and al-Rashīd, and the old military Arab families logically constituted potential opposition to the new military elites following the reorganisation of power in al-Muʿtaṣim's reign. Al-Tanūkhī relates that Khālid was released from prison on the connivance of Aḥmad ibn Abī Duʾād, another 'Arab' judge who maintained great power and influence in the *miḥna* up until the reign of al-Wāthiq, and al-Tanūkhī described how Khālid, on returning to his people was greeted as "Lord of the Arabs" (*Sayyid al-ʿArab*). The fact that such a term would be recorded not for the Caliph, but for one of the Caliph's opponents, suggests an intriguing reversion of the status of 'Arab' into a subaltern group in the face of the new Caliphate dominated not by an ethnic community, but by the

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[682] Gordon (2001) 106.

[683] Al-Tanūkhī *al-Faraj* 2:60-62.

courtiers around the Caliph's person. Khālid rejected the title, saying instead that the *Sayyid al-ʿArab* was in fact Aḥmad ibn Abī Duʾād. The notion that Aḥmad ibn Abī Duʾād was perceived as the head of an 'Arab faction' accords also with his status as one of the chief judges of the *miḥna*, and, perhaps explains one of the most celebrated events of the *miḥna*, the trial of Aḥmad ibn Naṣr ibn Mālik al-Khuzāʿī during the reign of al-Wāthiq.[684] Aḥmad was one of the *abnāʾ*, the Arab-Khurāsānians whose political status suffered after the fourth *fitna*, and during the trial the *Sayyid al-ʿArab* Aḥmad ibn Abī Duʾād was the only judge who urged al-Khuzāʿī be spared. Al-Wāthiq's persecution of al-Khuzāʿī has been argued as less doctrinally than politically motivated,[685] and further implies the decline of individuals claiming Arab lineage to maintain their grip on power.

The argument of declining Arab fortunes consequent to the political changes in the third/century is supported in a comment of the contemporary observer al-Jāḥiẓ in his *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*:

> I must mention some statements made by our Caliphs from the Abbasid House, even though their state (*dawla*) is non-Arab and Khurasānian (*ʿajamiyya khurāsāniyya*), whist the state of the Marwanid House [i.e. the Umayyads] was Arab Arabian (*ʿarabī aʿrābī*) in the Syrian Marches.[686]

Al-Jāḥiẓ's statement reflects an early third/ninth century assessment of the ethnic character of the Caliphate and the contemporary designation of al-Maʾmūn's and al-Muʿtaṣim's reigns (with whom al-Jāḥiẓ was a contemporary) as formed from "*ahl Khurāsān*".[687] Al-Jāḥiẓ's dismay that the new rulers were out of touch with Arabness will be considered in the next chapter, but for present purposes, his statement

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[684] Al-Khuzāʿī's trial and his violent execution are narrated at length in al-Ṭabarī, and El-Hibri (2001) examines the narrative.
[685] El-Hibri (2001) 51-53.
[686] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 3:366.
[687] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 3:366.

demonstrates an express unease that the Caliphate was no longer "Arab/Arabian" and that times had changed from the prior period when Arabians were at the centre of power and able to define the Arab ethnos in their own image.

Judith Ahola's 2004 investigation of the tribal *nisba*s in al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's biographical dictionary, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, revealed a decline in individuals claiming Arab lineage from the third/ninth century onwards.[688] Her findings correspond precisely to the changes I have traced herein. The political obsolescence of Arabness, the end of ethnic Arab military units and the broader changes in ethnic self-identification Ahola identified point to Arabness becoming a relic of the past by the mid-third/ninth century. This is exactly contemporary with events in Arabia that would have far-reaching consequences for the idea of Arabness in the Iraqi milieu.

4.3(c): Insurrection in Arabia and a new focus of Arabness

The changes in Arabia concern a decline in the relationship between Arabian Arab tribes and central authority. The early Abbasid Caliphs, al-Manṣūr and particularly al-Mahdī and al-Rashīd expended tremendous energies in developing Arabia in order to connect their capital in Baghdad with the pilgrimage Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. Their collective works during the second half of second/eighth century would become known as the *Darb Zubayda*: a well-provisioned and carefully managed network of roads, parts of which were paved, replete with way-stations, traveller amenities and rest stations that facilitated smooth transit (and in the case of the *barīd* road, rapid transit for official messengers) across a 750 mile track from al-Kūfa to Mecca. Saad al-Rashid's archaeological surveys confirm the scale of their operations,[689] and by the reign of

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[688] Ahola (2004) 107-110.

[689] See al-Rashid's survey (1980) and his revisions (1993). Various classical Arabic sources provide the literary evidence of the scale and enormous cost of the buildings: Ibn Khordādbih, al-Ḥarbī, Qudāma

al-Rashīd, classical sources describe the *Darb Zubayda* in luxurious terms, describing how the Caliph had carpets spread along the road to ease travel on one of his many Hajj pilgrimages.[690] The effect of the Hajj road infrastructure on Arabia's population was very positive, and evidence suggests that the official attention provided employment to Bedouin populations and steady pilgrim traffic provided bountiful charity and food for the nomads.[691] Following the war between al-Amīn and al-Maʾmūn, however, Iraq's economy declined and the 50 years of close Caliphal attention to the road abruptly ceased. Between the reign of al-Amīn (193-198/809-813) and al-Wāthiq's ascension in 227/842, no major works are reported along the *Darb Zubayda*, and only limited construction is attested in Mecca itself. Pilgrimage continued, but official energies were directed to the rebuilding of Baghdad and then the massive greenfield project at Samarra, and Arabian infrastructure that demanded continuous attention to maintain wells and supplies suffered.[692]

Al-Wāthiq planned a renaissance in Caliphal attention to the pilgrimage: his brother Jaʿfar led the Hajj of 842 to mark the Caliph's accession (the highest ranking prince to do so for a generation) and al-Wāthiq's mother also made the pilgrimage in the same year (though she died en-route).[693] Al-Wāthiq declared his intention to make the Hajj himself in 846, the first time a Caliph would consider leaving his court for Arabia since 802, but circumstances intervened and the Hajj was found to be impossible. Perfunctory Caliphal attention over the preceding twenty years left the

ibn Jaʿfar, al-Ṭabarī, and Ibn al-Athīr relate the most pertinent information and are collated in al-Rashid (1980) 12-45.

[690] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi *al-ʿIqd* 5:124. My study of the Darb Zubayda with Saad al-Rashid (al-Rāshid and Webb 2014) suggests some hyperbole regarding al-Rashīd's Hajjes may be exaggerated by later classical writers seeking to portray his reign as a 'golden age' of centralised Caliphal authority, but the *Darb Zubayda* was undoubtedly a major undertaking that successfully facilitated communication between Iraq and Mecca.

[691] See al-Rāshid and Webb (2014) Chapters 3 and 4.

[692] I detail the third/ninth century decline and insecurity on the Darb Zubayda in al-Rāshid and Webb (2014) Chapters 4 and 5.

[693] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 9:123.

Darb Zubayda in precariously decrepit state: during the pilgrimage of 843, a draught of water cost 40 dirhams (perhaps a 600% increase since al-Rashīd's reign),[694] and when al-Wāthiq announced his intention to lead the Hajj in 846, the roads' superintendent, ʿUmar ibn Faraj, reported that acute water shortages made it inadvisable. Al-Wāthiq provided ʿUmar with funds to undertake emergency repairs,[695] but the Caliph died in 847 before he could enjoy the fruits of his generosity, and for the next fifty years, the road was again neglected as Caliphal attention, Caliphal power and the Iraqi economy further weakened.[696] In sum, there was almost no reported construction in the Peninsula during the century between the death of al-Rashīd and the reign of al-Muqtadir (295-320/908-932)[697] – a particularly significant fact since this is the period when the sources about Arabness were written in Iraq.

For Arabian Bedouin, the reversal of Caliphal interest in the road and the sudden end to the lavish expenditure and charity which the Bedouin had come to expect from the Caliphs, courtiers and ordinary pilgrims must have caused economic hardship and famine (especially given the fact that the 'fat' years of building on the *Darb Zubayda* likely swelled Bedouin populations), and these hardships resulted in a security collapse. In 230/845, Bedouins from the Banū Sulaym raided pilgrim caravans, threatened Medina and killed its governor when he

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[694] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 9:124.

[695] ʿUmar levelled parts of the road's surface at Dhāt al-Tanānīr and provided it with milestones. He also established a new route at the northern part of the *Darb Zubayda* between Zubāla, Līna and al-Thaʿlabiyya and dug wells and constructed new reservoirs to provide for pilgrims. Along the northern section of the road, ʿUmar also repaired about twenty old wells, the network of fire-signals and way-markers as well as two rest stations (al-Ḥarbī *Manāsik* 286-287).

[696] Iraqi economic decline in the latter half of the third/ninth century has been long established (Waines (1977) 285-288). More recent analysis further explores the economc hardship that accompanied this period of Abbasid political crisis (Kennedy (2004) 13-16, Mårtensson (2011) *passim*).

[697] There are cursory mentions of Caliphal appointments of governors over Mecca to oversee road-works, but apart from scattered reports for the reigns of al-Muʿtaḍid (279-289/892-902) and al-Muktafī (289-295/902-908), nothing else is mentioned (al-Rashid (1980) 24-25).

marched out to oppose them. Al-Wāthiq responded by dispatching his personal Turkic army under the command of Bughā into Arabia with initial success, but the Bedouin proved difficult to contain and the unrest spread. The Banū Sulaym regrouped and began a kind of guerrilla war, and the tribes of Hilāl, Fazāra, Ghaṭafān and Murra also took arms, raiding the Hajj roads and markets in Arabia. In 231/846, Bughā engaged them again, and eventually restored a temporary semblance of control, but the Caliphs failed to capitalise on Bughā's peace, and the lack of subsequent building works for the next fifty years caused more water and food shortages, and made the pilgrimage a very difficult undertaking. This initiated a vicious cycle whereby insecurity curbed pilgrim numbers and the dwindling pilgrim traffic in turn made the Bedouin increasingly desperate and rapacious.[698]

Troubles with water supply are reported for the Hajj of 258/871, a revolt of the Banū Asad in 265/878 claimed the life of Mecca's governor, and in 268/882 groups of Bedouin attacked the pilgrims as they returned from Hajj between Tūz and Samīrā, robbing the pilgrims, stealing 5,000 camels and taking many prisoners. In 898 the Ṭayyiʾ tribe attacked the returning pilgrims at al-Ajfar, killing their Turkic guards and plundering two million gold dinars and women pilgrims.[699] In 899, Banū Shaybān Bedouins in the desert near al-Kūfa, evidently emboldened by the successes of Ṭayyiʾ and the lack of security in the Iraqi countryside, took to marauding Iraq itself, attacking villages, killing locals who defended their land and stealing their livestock. Detachments from Baghdad were defeated and the Bedouin menace spread through the Iraqi/Arabian border zone with impunity. Finally, a large force was dispatched from al-Raqqa (in modern Syria) to corral them, but the

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[698] Al-Rāshid and Webb (2014) in press, Landau-Tasseron (2010) 406-412, and al-Rashid (1993) 83-100.

[699] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 10:67. Al-Ṭabarī's language casts some doubt on the value of goods stolen, suggesting the figure of two million dinars may have been inflated by the time it reached the historical record.

Bedouin retreated back into the desert and central authority took no punitive measures.[700] Ṭayyiʾ attacks continued in 900, and while their force of 3,000 Bedouin was eventually defeated,[701] by this time, pilgrim caravans now required heavy guards and insecurity continued; Ṭayyiʾ raids are recorded in 906 and 907 too.

At the end of the third/ninth century, Arabian insecurity reached unprecedented levels of disaster with the rise of the Qarāmiṭa in Eastern Arabia. Their bold and utterly ruthless attack on pilgrims in 286/899 was successfully punished in the following year, but their threat grew, and during the early 300s/920s, the Qarāmiṭa expanded, wrested control over most of Arabia from the Caliph, devastated pilgrim caravans and even succeeded in sacking Mecca and al-Kūfa. The Qarāmiṭa severed almost all Iraqi contact with Arabia and from the later third/ninth to the fourth/tenth century, Arabia disappears from the literary historical record.[702] A sharp decline of pilgrims' graffiti in the al-Ṣuwaydira site on the Darb Zubayda pilgrimage road provides concrete evidence to confirm the date of Arabia's isolation after the early third/ninth century.[703]

4.3(d) Arabness to the third/ninth century: conclusions

The new power structures of the third/ninth century Caliphate and the Caliphal polices vis-à-vis Arabia were not connected as concerted efforts to ignore Arabs, but their effect on Arabness was profound. The political elites of first/seventh century Iraq claimed lineage to tribes that would eventually be called

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[700] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 10:71-72.

[701] Al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* 10:74.

[702] Landau-Tasseron (2010) 413.

[703] Al-Rashid (2009) catalogues graffiti at the site of al-Ṣuwaydira dated on the basis of epigraphy which can be analysed statistically. Of the 257 inscriptions, 2 are dated to the first/seventh century, 109 to the first/seventh-second/eighth century, 94 to the second/eighth, 44 to the second/eighth or third/ninth, and only 7 date to the third/ninth (1 is undatable). The concentration in the second/eighth century corresponds with the literary evidence of the Darb Zubayda's heyday and the dramatic drop in the third/ninth century underlines the sudden disruptive power of the tribal raiding and lack of administrative attention to the pilgrim road.

'Arab', but their notion of Arabness was not tribal nor Arabian, but rather a mark of political/religious/linguistic status in the *cities* of the early Muslim Empire. They were not Bedouin, and their notions of Arabness did not imagine affinity with the Arabian Bedouin – the Muslim elites were *ʿarab*, whereas the Bedouin were *aʿrāb*. It is important to highlight this distinction because it would become blurred in later Arabic writing when the stereotypes of the pre-Islamic Arab Arabia were generated. That blurring can be seen as the direct result of the dual processes of declining *ʿarab* power in Iraq and the isolation of Iraq from the *aʿrāb* following the prevailing insecurity in Iraq. Whereas the 'Arabs' in Iraq had originally been the actors creating perceptions of Arab identity, by the third/ninth century Arabness ceased to be a relevant symbol of power and status groups ceased citing Arabness as a powerful rallying cry. In tandem with this, the debates of *al-shuʿūbiyya* and assimilation in Iraq created new definitions for Arabness that associated the idea of *ʿarab* with lineage connected to Arabian tribes, and by the third/ninth century, these tribes were essentially cut-off from the Iraqi milieu. From an Iraqi perspective in the third/ninth century, Arabness became a relic of past politics and a phenomenon of the unfamiliar outside world of Arabia, and the 'Arab' transformed from a familiar actor in the Iraqi milieu to a distant object of study.

At the moment when classical Arabic literature begins to record the stories of the Arabs and pre-Islamic Arabia, therefore, self-styled Arab groups in Iraq had lost the power to drive the political discourse and to control the definition of Arabness, and Arabia was so isolated from the Iraqi view by virtue of its insecurity that actual Arabians could not take an active part in the Iraqi depictions of Arabness either. The power shifted to cultural producers who were Arabic-speaking but neither ethnically 'Arab' nor Arabian domiciled. They became custodians of the definition of Arabness and could recreate the Arab in a new image conducive to the

new realities of third/ninth century Iraq. The fact that Arabs were both temporally and spatially 'outside' the third/ninth century Iraqi worldview facilitated an 'othering' of the Arab by Iraqi writers in order to create the stereotypes by which the 'Arab' is familiar today. The story of the changes wrought to Arabness when its definition fell into the hands of non-Arabs is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: The Changing Faces of Arabness in Early Islam (2): Philologists, 'Bedouinisation' and the 'Archetypal Arab' after the mid-third/ninth century

The political changes and shifts in power structures in the third/ninth century Caliphate and the contemporaneous cultural, religious and linguistic assimilation between 'Arab' and others in Iraq's urban centres, left few perceptible markers to identify 'Arabs' as a distinct ethnos in Iraqi society. The mid-third/ninth century, however, did not herald a decline in scholarly interest in ancient *Arabica*: remarkably, the period marks the beginning of an unprecedented outpouring of literature about Arabness and Arab history which today constitutes the 'primary sources' for the study of pre-Islamic Arabs. But the particular context in which the texts were written is peculiar. By the mid-third/ninth century (unlike any previous period), discourses about Arabness no longer impacted actual and/or politically significant communities. Iraqi scholars were remarkably detached from their subject matter: their cosmopolitan community was not 'Arab',[704] and thanks to the collapse of Hajj traffic, their urban milieu was severed from the desert world of pre-Islamic Arabia which they described. The detachment, coupled with the fact that pre-Islamic history was already more than a quarter of a millennium old at the time, opened new horizons for conceptualising the 'Arab', and this chapter explores the articulations of Arabness that emerged from this novel discursive environment.

The mid-third/ninth century shift in scholarly approaches to Arabness appears from a survey of narrators of the quintessential subjects of pre-Islamic *Arabica*: *ayyām al-ʿarab* (Battle Days of the pre-Islamic Arabs) and *nasab* (Arab genealogy). Modern researchers propose that the initial Muslim interest in these fields was prompted by (i) tribal infighting in the early Caliphate (when tribes

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[704] See Note 688.

jockeyed amongst themselves for status); and (ii) the second/eighth century *shuʿūbiyya* (when Arab partisans marshalled the 'Arab past' to defend pan-Arab status).[705] In both periods, attention to Arab history was entwined with politicised debates where partisans summoned different versions of the past to suit their competing agendas. Those writings do not survive, however, and the earliest extant records of the *ayyām al-ʿarab* are narrated in poetry anthology,[706] the fourth/tenth century Andalusian *adab* encyclopaedia *al-ʿIqd al-farīd* (which later gained prominence in Syria and Iraq),[707] and Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's (d.356/967) *al-Aghānī*, a collection of and commentary on popular songs derived from old poetry from *al-Jāhiliyya* to the early Abbasid Caliphate. The tales of *ayyām al-ʿarab* as we can study them today, therefore, are transplants from a period when they impacted actual political arrangements into a new era where they served a range of purposes which share one commonality: none speak to the earlier, politicised discourses. The extant texts on Arab genealogy are similarly de-politicised. We possess two books of Ibn al-Kalbī written around the time of the momentous changes precipitated by al-Maʾmūn's capture of Baghdad, and the two other major survivals of the third/ninth century were written by authors identifiable as 'historians' and had evident political agendas;[708] but in the following century, the major surviving texts on genealogy

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[705] See, for the first/seventh century Donner (1998) 197-198, for the second/eighth see Gibb (1962) 69, Norris (1990) 34-38.

[706] Abū ʿUbayda's (d.210/825) *Naqāʾiḍ Jarīr wa-l-Farazdaq*, Abū Tammām's (d.231/845) *Naqāʾiḍ Jarīr wa-l-Akhṭal* (attrib) and to a lesser extent, al-Sukkarī's (d.275/888 or 290/903) *Sharḥ Ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn* and al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad al-Anbārī's (d.304/916-7) *Sharḥ al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* are the main sources, all ascribed to scholars known particularly for their knowledge of poetry and/or Arabic philology.

[707] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's (d.328/940) *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* is steeped in questions of Arabness, though from an Andalusian perspective where the Caliphs in Spain in the fourth/tenth century adopted notions of authentic Arabness to bolster their own status and legitimacy against rulers in other parts of the Caliphate, many of whom were of Turkic or other mixed ethnicity (Isabel Torall-Niehoff, personal communication). See Norris (1990) 45-47 for a survey of this *shuʿūbī* milieu particular to al-Andalus. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's discourse is distinct from the early Iraqi narrators of *al-Ayyām*.

[708] Al-Zubayrī's *Nasab Quraysh* vaunts the past of the Quraysh tribe as part of a wider phenomenon of lauding the Abbasid Caliphs via positive depictions of the history of pre-Islamic Quraysh. The title of

pass into the hands of seemingly unlikely writers: the philologist Ibn Durayd's (d.321/933) *al-Ishtiqāq* and, much later, in the Muslim West, the jurist Ibn Ḥazm's (d.456/1064) *Jamharat ansāb al-ʿarab* and in the East, the encyclopaedist Yāqūt's (d.626/1228) *al-Muqtaḍab*.

Al-Nadīm's 377/987 *Fihrist*, a compendium of classical Arabic scholars and their books arranged by scholarly discipline, enables us to quantify that apparent shift in writing pre-Islamic Arab genealogy and battle history. When recounting *akhbāriyyūn, nassābūn* and *aṣḥāb al-aḥdāth* (genealogists and narrators of events from the past), al-Nadīm reveals that up to the mid-second/eighth century (when tribal infighting was presumably at its peak) 29% of them were known for expertise in *ayyām al-ʿarab* and 65% for genealogy.[709] Over the next century, when Arab and Persian elements of society argued the merits of *al-shuʿūbiyya*, 23% wrote about *ayyām al-ʿarab* and 45% composed books of *nasab*.[710] But from the mid-third/ninth century until al-Nadīm's day, only 12% of scholars are accorded books on *ayyām al-ʿarab* and 35% on *nasab*.[711] Al-Nadīm's categorisations of scholarly activity do not completely dovetail with modern disciplines, but we can discern that scholars classifiable as historians and genealogists decidedly turned away from composing monographs on the 'Arab past' and 'Arab lineage' after the mid-third/ninth century.

Al-Nadīm's lists, together with the surviving books present us with the intriguing prospect that after the third/ninth century, a wider range of scholars

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al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-ashrāf* (Genealogies of the Nobles) perpetuates the notion that the early Muslim tribal elites constituted the 'noblemen' of Islam.

[709] Of the 14 *akhbārī* scholars al-Nadīm associated with this period, 4 are associated with *al-Ayyām* and 9 with *nasab* (al-Nadīm *al-Fihrist* 101-104).

[710] Of 62 named scholars, 14 are ascribed works on *al-ayyām* and 28 on *nasab* (al-Nadīm *al-Fihrist* 104-120).

[711] Al-Nadīm *al-Fihrist* 120-128. Note that the *nasab* books often specifically detail the genealogy of the Abbasid House, implying a shift towards genealogy as a means to prop the Caliphate, not to rehearse the glory of Arab tribes.

embraced an interest in the 'Arab past',[712] but 'historians' were ironically less interested in that past than were philologists, poetry experts and *adab* belles-lettrists.[713] The shift is precisely contemporaneous with the decline of Arabness' practical political importance – remembering the discrete differences between the relative glories of individual Arab tribes had little relevance in a world where no important individuals claimed membership to those groups. The detailed preservation and re-narration of the old, seemingly obsolescent tribalist material thus leads to questions of why it continued to be so interesting for grammarians and litterateurs, and how their new agendas affected the depictions of Arabness. Closer analysis of post-mid-third/ninth century writing reveals one of the most dramatic changes in the definition of Arabness hitherto encountered and a new backdrop for all subsequent interpretations of 'Arab history' and a*l-Jāhiliyya*.

5.1 Philologists and Arabness

Investigating the persistence of scholarly interest in 'Arabness' after the mid-third/ninth century begins with the practical question: for whom did Arabness retain tangible importance, and what did they need the 'Arabness' idea to do? In searching the extant literature for a group of mid-third/ninth century scholars whose interest in Arabness extended beyond mere antiquarian curiosity,

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[712] Al-Nadīm only notes three 'grammarians' (al-Aṣmaʿī, al-Akhfash and Aḥmad ibn Ḥātim) who wrote on *nasab* and only one, Abu ʿUbayda who wrote on *al-ayyām* before the mid-third/ninth century. (al-Nadīm *al-Fihrist* 58,60,61,78).

[713] Consider that the first book of *Tārīkh* ('dating', thence 'history'), Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ (d.240/854) *Tārīkh* contains no pre-Islamic material at all; al-Dīnawarī's *al-Akhbār al-ṭiwāl* narrates nothing relevant to *ayyām al-ʿarab*; likewise al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* only details *ayyām* which intersect with pre-Islamic Persian royal history. In the fourth/tenth century, no historical works of which I am aware devote more than passing attention to pre-Islamic Arabian battles: al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj* devotes only one paragraph to them §1120, though he refers to a longer treatment elsewhere in a work now lost (or never written?), al-Maqdisī's *al-Badʾ wa-l-Tārīkh* has a chapter on Arabs including their *ayyām*, but he gives no information about the battles, focusing instead on pre-Islamic Meccan history (4:105-130). Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī's *Tārīkh* similarly focuses its chapter on pre-Islamic Arabian "Maʿaddī" history on Meccan events, not *al-ayyām* (113-116), and in remarking that non-Meccan Arabs did not have precise chronologies, he insinuates why he ignored them in his *Tārīkh* (115).

philologists emerge as an important group. Grammarians and lexicographers were concerned with codifying and explaining every detail of the Arabic language as it existed in the pre-Islamic period in order to correctly interpret the Qurʾān.[714] Since the Arabics spoken in the philologists' Iraqi urban milieu no longer retained the syntax, morphology or even lexicon of the Qurʾān's Arabic, the grammarians were compelled to look to the past: they needed a historical reconstruction of Arabic as *it was really spoken.*

The philologists' empiricist-historical discourse confronts the same basic narratological problems of history-writing. As noted above, Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur and likeminded historiographers and philosophers remark on the impossibility of recreating the past *as it really happened,*[715] and hence we ought not trust on faith the Muslim philologists' reconstructions of the pre-Islamic Arabic language *as it really was spoken.* But their speculations on historical Arabic are fertile ground for historical investigation: grammarians supported their linguistic arguments with a thorough reconstruction of pre-Islamic Arabness by recording anecdotes from the past that contained the phrases they adduced to prove their rules of the 'correct' Arabic. The philologists' enterprise in re-creating a 300-year-old language thus appears as a large-scale historical reconstruction, which, akin to any historiographical exercise, did not simply invent the Arab past and language, but chose to remember the past in ways apposite to their discourses. In so doing, as I argue in this section, the philologists directed the paradigm of historical, 'original' Arabness on an unprecedented trajectory.

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[714] Levin (2004) 1,13 argued the motivation of second/eighth century grammarians such as Sībawayh was not as religious as later authors assume, and while this is possible (see also Carter (2004) 56-73), by the early third/ninth century, the emergence of al-Farrāʾ and al-Akhfash's *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* texts reveals that at least part of the study of Arabic was intended to help study Islam's foundational texts.
[715] Ricoeur (1990) 3:142. See Chapter 1.2 above.

5.1(a) Arabia, Arabic and Arabness: a mid-third/ninth century perspective

Al-Jāḥiẓ, a polymath, philosopher, philologist, humanist and belles-lettrist,[716] offers one of the most detailed surviving mid-third/ninth century discourses about Arabic and Arabness in his *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, an extensive text on language and communication. *Al-Bayān* constructs a linguistic-geographical framework involving Arabia (*Jazīrat al-ᶜArab*,[717] or just *al-Jazīra*[718]). Al-Jāḥiẓ stresses that *Jazīrat al-ᶜArab* is outside his Iraqi world by marking its border at the edge of his hometown al-Baṣra.[719] He then turns the spatial border into a rigid linguistic boundary, as exemplified in an anecdote he relates about Zayd ibn Kathwa, a poet originally from Arabia who settled in al-Baṣra. Al-Jāḥiẓ describes Zayd's house as situated at "the last place of Pure Speech [*mawḍiᶜ al-faṣāḥa*], and at the first place of Non-Arabic speech [*mawḍiᶜ al-ᶜujma*]".[720] The division of Arabian/non-Arabian land is thus not simply a partition of Arabic and non-Arabic speakers, but a divide between what al-Jāḥiẓ portrays as 'correct', 'pure' Arabic and the 'adulterated' Arabic of his Iraqi compatriots. The Zayd anecdote is situated immediately following al-Jāḥiẓ's explication of the basis of good communication,[721] and when lamenting that Zayd's ability to speak eloquent Arabic was sorely affected when he left Bedouin life in Peninsula, we perceive a strict emphasis on Arabian space in al-Jāḥiẓ's notion of proper Arabic language.

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[716] The 'humanism' applied to al-Jāḥiẓ is described at length in the collected essays in *Al-Jāḥiẓ: a Muslim Humanist for our Time* (see Heinemann *et al* (2009) v) and for the cosmopolitan 'humanism' of his cultural milieu see Anghelescu (1995) 63,66 and Pellat (1953) and (1966).

[717] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:307.

[718] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:163. In its context, this citation cannot be confused with *al-Jazīra*, a term commonly used by Arabic authors to refer to the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

[719] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:163.

[720] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:163.

[721] What al-Jāḥiẓ refers to as *balāgha* and *bayān*. In the passages preceding the Zayd anecdote, al-Jāḥiẓ argues that mere communication is not deserving of the exalted label *balāgha*, as such a term must be reserved for eloquent rhetoric. The argument is started in *al-Bayān* 1:88, and made most emphatically at 1:162, immediately before the Zayd anecdote.

Al-Jāḥiẓ maintains his spatial portrayal of correct eloquence throughout *al-Bayān.* He contrasts the city – the "the abode which corrupts language [*tufsid al-lugha*] and diminishes eloquence [*tanquṣ al-bayān*]"[722] – with Arabia, the desert beyond al-Baṣra's border which he dubs the "land of the pure Bedouin [*Bilād al-Aʿrāb al-khullaṣ*] and the source of the correct/pure Arabic [*maʿdin al-faṣāḥa al-tāmma*]."[723] Why does al-Jāḥiẓ erect this boundary? In practical terms, the division enables him to argue that his urban environment intrinsically lacks eloquence and contrasts an image of desert Arabia as land where Bedouin have long perpetuated ideal Arabic. Al-Jāḥiẓ's description of Arabia as "*maʿdin al-faṣāḥa*" is a pointed shift from the second/eighth century dictionary *al-ʿAyn*'s definition of *Jazīrat al-ʿArab* as "*maʿdin al-ʿarab*" (source of the Arabs),[724] and al-Jāḥiẓ renders the purity of the Arabic language a direct function of Arabia's land:

> [The Arabic] language only runs correctly, stands upright, flows mellifluously, and reaches perfection by virtue of the aspects which come together in that Peninsula [*jazīra*] and between its neighbours [*jīra*], and because other peoples [*umam* – al-Jāḥiẓ intends non-'natural' Arabic speakers] do not tread there.[725]

As a consequence of his philological discourse, al-Jāḥiẓ nudges forward a notion of Arabness constructed around the archetype of eloquent Bedouin.

Why did al-Jāḥiẓ devote such praise for Arabia and deride his own milieu? Al-Jāḥiẓ has been identified as one of the most effusive Arab partisans: his writings are cited the context of the *Shuʿūbiyya* debate,[726] and al-Jāḥiẓ expresses his

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[722] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:163.

[723] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 3:29.

[724] Al-Khalīl *al-ʿAyn* 6:62.

[725] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:163.

[726] Norris (1990) 36,39,43-45 and Pellat (1990) 88. Note, however, that Norris (1990) 34,n10 also makes reference to "ambiguous examples" of *al-Shuʿūbiyya* in which he includes an epistle of al-Jāḥiẓ. The ambivalence accords with my identification of *al-Shuʿūbiyya* as a short-lived second/eighth century ethnic revival in Chapter 4.2(c), and I would caution against interpreting the slightly later al-Jāḥiẓ in simplistic *Shuʿūbī* terms.

antagonism to anti-Arab *Shuʿūbiyya*.[727] His argument that town-dwellers (*baladiyyūn* or *qarawiyyūn*) and non-Arabian Muslim converts (*muwalladūn*) are largely incapable of replicating the most correct Arabic[728] would seem to play into a cultural defence of Arabness, for the Arabs' communicative skills were a lynchpin of the 'Arab' cultural achievements with which Arab-partisans defended them against *Shuʿūbiyya* critique.[729] But al-Jāḥiẓ's argument in *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* pushes further: the construction of the desert as pure Arabic (linguistic) space is not merely an apparatus for praising ethnic Arabs against their detractors, for the issue of desert/city and pure/corrupt speech intersects with an even more fundamental theme in *al-Bayān* which investigates the essence of *bayān* and *balāgha* – eloquence and the pure use of language.[730] Al-Jāḥiẓ's thoughts on this issue transcend ethnic divisions.

Al-Jāḥiẓ's Mutazilite theology posits that *bayān* is the cornerstone of all aspects of life including the means to understand God and the nature and the meaning of the Qurʾān.[731] He explains that intellectual culture is only perpetuated by the communication of knowledge (*ʿilm*), this occurs via eloquence (*bayān*) and necessarily begins with the Qurʾān since its excellent *bayān* is the means by which God teaches His (ultimate) knowledge. Ideal *bayān* and *ʿilm* thus belong to God, not any one group of people, and the first pages of *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* discuss the

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[727] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:383. See also *al-Bayān* 3:14-93 for a long refutation of *al-Shuʿūbiyya*'s censure of Arab cultural heritage.

[728] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:145-146,163-164.

[729] See Pellat (1953) 224-234, (1966), (1969) 3; Webb (2012a) 48-50. Enderwitz (2009) 235-237 argues that *al-Ḥayawān*'s seeks to defend Arabness by blending Arab/non-Arab culture together into *adab*.

[730] Montgomery describes the centrality of this theme at length in (2009a) and (2009b).

[731] See L. Behzadi (2009a) and (2009b). Also, the recent series of articles by Montgomery demonstrate the theological leanings of al-Jāḥiẓ's 'nature/speech' dichotomy which figure prominently across his writings (2010a, 2010b).

primacy of God's *bayān* and its centrality to His Revelation for mankind.[732] But because the Qurʾān is in Arabic, and pure Arabic (*faṣīḥ*) at that, the Arabic language becomes the object of al-Jāḥiẓ's effusive praise:

> there is no speech more enjoyable or elegant, nor sweeter to hear, nor so in accordance with sound reason, nor more freeing for the tongue nor finer upon which one can discover eloquence than long hours listening to the clever, eloquent desert Arabians [*al-aʿrāb al-ʿuqalāʾ al-fuṣaḥāʾ*], or articulate scholars [*al-ʿulamāʾ al-bulaghāʾ*].[733]

Al-Jāḥiẓ's praise of Arabic appears to promote Arabs against their detractors, but al-Jāḥiẓ pursues the issue beyond ethnicity for he does not speak of innate *Arab* ability to speak well; rather, he consistently notes that the praiseworthy native speakers of Arabic are the *Arabian* Bedouin (*aʿrāb*) and Arabs of the past (until the end of the Umayyad era).[734] His contemporary 'modern Arabs', especially the city-dwelling, would have found only limited ammunition in al-Jāḥiẓ for defence against *Shuʿūbiyya* critique as al-Jāḥiẓ only guardedly lauds the Arabic spoken since the Abbasid Revolution.[735] Instead, al-Jāḥiẓ offers his most effusive praise to Arabia, and specifically its desert, which he calls the "Land of the *aʿrāb* [Bedouin]," not, in his words, the 'Land of the Arabs [*ʿarab*]'.[736]

In terms of the fundamental arguments about *al-Bayān*, therefore, al-Jāḥiẓ does not champion the Arab ethnos so much as he does the land of Arabia. Arabia is the space in which al-Jāḥiẓ projects the best Arabic and the closest terrestrial equivalent to the ultimate standard of Qurʾānic Arabic. Arabia is al-Jāḥiẓ's intermediary between the Arabic of his urban compatriots and the idealised

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[732] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* (1:8-9). He expands the argument at 1:75-88. I explore this in more detail in the context of al-Jāḥiẓ and the book culture of his third/ninth century Iraq in Webb (2012a) 41-47.

[733] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:145.

[734] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:11,91,383;3:366.

[735] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 3:366-367.

[736] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 3:29.

language of Revelation. He lauds some Arabs and defends their heritage, but that is only a by-product of his construction of Arabia's linguistic purity to bolster his arguments about the primacy of the Qur'ān. Further analysis reveals that these arguments pertain directly to al-Jāḥiẓ's discussion of his own scholarly community.

The temporal and spatial removal of 'ideal Arabic' from al-Jāḥiẓ's own urban, third/ninth century milieu, makes Arabic a relic of Arabia, not Iraq, and of Muḥammad's day, not al-Jāḥiẓ's own. This discourse presents al-Jāḥiẓ's contemporary society in a linguistic crisis of inexpressiveness. He directly chastises his contemporaries, explaining that their ability to understand impure speech was an impurity in itself: merely mixing with substandard communication was rhetorically harmful,[737] and al-Jāḥiẓ opens *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* with a prayer for eloquence:

> Mighty God! We seek refuge in You from the trials of speech, as we seek refuge in You from the trials of action ... we seek refuge in You from uncouth yelling (*salāṭa*) and from woolly prattle (*hadhar*), as we seek refuge in You from spluttering (*ʿiyy*) and stammering (*ḥaṣar*).[738]

Arabia offers al-Jāḥiẓ a space to project the pure Arabic language and elevates Arabians as the people associated with what al-Jāḥiẓ believed to be the world's most expressive language, but his discourse only benefitted the Bedouin, and not all Bedouin – only those who had not mixed with urbanites, for only they still retained the purity for which Arabic is praiseworthy.[739] Al-Jāḥiẓ accords no praise to corrupted forms of Arabic, nor Arabic with grammatical mistakes. Ideal speech, al-Jāḥiẓ's cornerstone of enlightened existence, is therefore (naturally) the

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[737] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:162.

[738] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:3.

[739] A point he makes repeatedly in *al-Bayān* 1:162-164.

preserve of God, and terrestrially manifest in those Arabians whose total isolation from the sounds of city speech preserved their language.

The argument enables al-Jāḥiẓ to cunningly inspire his readers to seek perfect eloquence while denying them opportunity to attain it since their domicile "corrupted" their language *ipso facto.* This leads to a crucial observation regarding al-Jāḥiẓ's thinking in *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn.* Returning to the quotation above about the beauty of Arabic, al-Jāḥiẓ noted the best Arabic could be heard from "long hours listening to the clever, eloquent Arabian Bedouins [*al-aʿrāb al-ʿuqalāʾ al-fuṣaḥāʾ*], or articulate scholars [*al-ʿulamāʾ al-bulaghāʾ*]".[740] The addition of scholars to Bedouin is significant: al-Jāḥiẓ's discourse ultimately results in self-praise: he and his community of scholars whose efforts to learn Qurʾānic Arabic are presented as the only city dwellers who approach what al-Jāḥiẓ constructs as the linguistic ideal. In locking Arabic away in Arabia, al-Jāḥiẓ left himself the key and projected his scholarly companions as the urbanites' surrogate Bedouin. This is clear when considering how al-Jāḥiẓ erects a linguistic scale to classify his contemporary society. At the bottom are the "*aʿārīb*" Arabic-speaking street people of al-Jāḥiẓ's Iraq whose poor attempts to replicate Arabic seem to have offended al-Jāḥiẓ the most.[741] Above them are the townspeople (*baladiyyūn*), tradesmen, farmers and the like, and above them are those whom al-Jāḥiẓ styles the 'general people' (*al-ʿawāmm*) by whom he means educated, but non-specialist scholars.[742] At the top of the hierarchy of eloquence, al-Jāḥiẓ places the Bedouin, and, crucially, also those

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[740] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:145.

[741] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:146.

[742] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:137. Toorawa (2005) 1-2 notes al-Jāḥiẓ's differentiation of *ʿawāmm* and *khawāṣṣ* (general public vs. elite) was not a commoners/aristocracy distinction familiar in Western society, but rather was determined on education, the *ʿawāmm* representing a non-specialist educated class. Toorawa defines the *ʿawāmm* as "landlords, landowners, merchants and entrepreneurs, judges and jurists, physicians, poets and littèratures, teachers and ... other scholars".

scholars (*al-khawāṣṣ*) whose mastery of Arabic brings them close to the Bedouin linguistic perfection[743] (though al-Jāḥiẓ denies them the ability to fully match it[744]).

Al-Jāḥiẓ thus needs the Bedouin and the idea of the isolated desert's linguistic purity to prove that the language which he and his like-trained scholarly companions studied and (nearly) perfected is the standard to which all should all strive.[745] As a result of his self-promotion and undoubtedly sincere admiration of the Qurʾān, Arabia becomes a special linguistic reservation that relies on the geographical difference between desert and city to make tangible the difference between urban and desert language and to leave the urbanite craving for Bedouin teachers. But since the desert in al-Jāḥiẓ's day was virtually inaccessible because shortly before he wrote *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*,[746] Arabian security began its dramatic and terminal decline as detailed in Chapter 4.3(c); hence the Bedouin 'experts' of Arabic were out of reach, leaving city-dwellers with no option but to employ al-Jāḥiẓ for the necessary instruction. Al-Jāḥiẓ's Arabia was accordingly more imagined than real, and perhaps it was desert Arabia's quintessential distance and isolation that in fact facilitated its construction as the idealised locus of pure Arabic.

The isolation of Arabia coupled with the political eclipse of ethnic Arabs also points to a change in the power to define Arabness. Iraqi scholars such as al-Jāḥiẓ emphasised Arabness as Arabian Bedouin-ness in order to transfer status to themselves and promote themselves (and not ethnic Arabs) as intermediaries for urban Iraqis to approach Islam. The role of grammarians in promoting new forms of Arab identity and engaging in power relations of early Islam has already attracted

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[743] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:145.

[744] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:162-164.

[745] Al-Jāḥiẓ instructs supporters of Arabic *bayān* to lead the hypothetical *Shuʿūbī* doubters "by the hand" into desert Arabia (*bilād al-aʿrāb*) to test the eloquence of language there, offering the Bedouin as 'living proof' of his theories about language (*al-Bayān* 3:29).

[746] Pellat considers *al-Bayān* was written "anterieur à 237" ((1984) 133), uncannily correspondent to the collapse of Arabian security from 230/845.

some scholarly consideration,[747] but their role in developing the identity of Arabness has not, to my knowledge, been analysed. The next section argues how we can appraise classical philologists' arguments to appreciate a crucial step in the genesis of the Arab archetype.

5.1(b) Arabians and Arabic between the second/eighth and fourth/tenth centuries

In accordance with the common belief that the Arabs, at their root, were a Bedouin people from the Arabian Desert, modern scholarship on the Arabic language has, also since the mid-nineteenth century, deemed the Arabian Bedouin dialects to be the most 'authentic' versions of the Arabic vernacular.[748] The Bedouin paradigm so pervades the study of Arab culture that it makes al-Jāḥiẓ's discourse seem entirely typical to readers today, but in the sections below, I argue that the mid-third/ninth century marks a watershed in grammatical thinking which inaugurated a new process of defining the Arab that only in hindsight renders al-Jāḥiẓ's arguments seem orthodox, whereas they were in fact a radical departure from earlier Arabic philological thought.

In proposing that philologists helped create the enduring archetype of Arab ethnic identity, I borrow from the recent studies of Yasir Suleiman, his 2003 monograph *The Arabic Language and National Identity*, and his 2011 chapter "Ideology, Grammar Making and the Standardisation of Arabic" which make the valuable observation that classical Arabic philology should be situated within the "cultural

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[747] Both Carter (1983) 66 and Suleiman (2003) 32,202 note the power relations and identity formation inherent in classical grammatical works which I discuss below.

[748] Tidrick recounts the opinions of nineteenth century English explorers in Arabia regarding the superiority of Desert Arabic, noting the writings of Palgrave, Doughty and Burton in particular. She reasons that Burton's familiarity with classical Arabic philological texts may be the route by which the stereotypes of Bedouin linguistic purity entered English scholarship (1990) 153-154. As examples of the modern scholarly endorsement of Bedouin purity, see Levin (2004) 3-10 and Suleiman (2003) 36-48 who claim all grammarians since the beginning sought to emulate Bedouin Arabic.

ethos" of the Arabic "discourse community"[749] and argue that the codification of Arabic grammar was a cornerstone in the definition of Arab identity.[750] In broad terms, Suleiman's thesis is logical, but some refinement is necessary, as I argue that the classical philologists' work must be read in the context of other classical writings about Arabness to reveal a clearer picture of Arab identity formation in early Islam.

> Suleiman proposes that in the
>
> period of inter-ethnic strife [the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries by his reckoning] ... grammar-making [was] an on-going practice in a never ending standardisation enterprise [that] developed a heightened ideological edge that attempted to discover the wisdom of the Arabs in their language, or, alternatively, sought to ascribe the excellence of the language to the character of its people ...[751]

But this reading of Arabic philology as a "never ending standardisation enterprise" imposes one essentialised purpose upon classical writing which conceptualises all Arabic philological discourses across the first four centuries of Islam as a contiguous whole within a rigid binary division of Arab/non-Arab.[752] Suleiman's call to contextualise grammar writing is astute, but the cultural/political contexts in which the grammarians wrote were subject to various changes during that 'classical period'. For instance, Suleiman proposes that "there is no doubt that this take on grammar-making was coloured by the dynamic of the inter-ethnic strife in the first centuries of Islam (and beyond)",[753] but we must doubt it. Suleiman's ensuing statement that the Arabic language was used "most clearly" as an identity marker to

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[749] Suleiman (2011) 10-11.

[750] Suleiman (2003) 42 admits that pre-modern philological discourses cannot be assumed as carbon-copies of modern-era Arab nationalism, but he argues that a nascent Arab unity must have been expressed through language even in the earliest Islamic times (2003) 44-46,69.

[751] Suleiman (2011) 20.

[752] See in particular Suleiman (2003) 44-66.

[753] Suleiman (2011) 19.

distinguish Arab from non-Arab in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth century[754] is in fact entirely contrary to the evidence of classical writing I examined in Chapter 2.2 that revealed language had actually lost its central role in defining the 'ethnic Arab' after the second/eighth century, and it runs counter to Ahola's findings that self-styled ethnic Arabs begin to disappear from the historical record in the third/ninth century.[755] Notions of shared Arabic language did not return to promote the unity of the people from Egypt to Iraq until the sixteenth century.[756] Suleiman too axiomatically identifies Arabic speakers with ethnic Arabs during the classical period, and in not differentiating his sources chronologically, he treats second/eighth century philologists as part of the same discursive universe as fifth/eleventh century philologists, not heeding the changes in the arguments and agendas I have revealed hitherto. Arabic grammatical texts exhibit paradigmatic shifts in their portrayal of Arabness, and rigorous diachronic analysis reveals a crucial mid-third/ninth century paradigm shift.

Some other modern scholars of classical Arabic philology have raised doubts about the deep-rootedness of the Bedouin *qua* pure Arabic speaker paradigm. Bohas, Guillaume and Kouloughli refer to the role of the Bedouin in the early philological works (*i.e.* those before the late third/ninth century) as an "afterthought",[757] and Versteegh suggests that the early Bedouin may have preserved some aspects of an ancient Arabic koine, but he questions the extent to which Bedouin vernaculars corresponded to the rules of the early urbanite grammarians and whether

[754] Suleiman (2011) 20.

[755] See Note 688. Ahola's findings reveal grave difficulties inherent in Suleiman's assumptions about fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh century Arabness as a mark of contemporary identity.

[756] Rodinson discusses the role of language as the first possible hallmark of Arabness (1981) 5-6, but concluded language was an insufficient bases, and notes that "[t]he extension of the term [Arab] to all speakers of Arabic came about only very gradually" and cites a fascinating anecdote about seventeenth century Istanbul that evidences an ethnic-linguistic correlation of Arabic language and Arab ethnicity (22).

[757] Bohas *et al* (1990) 42.

grammarians even valued Bedouin vernacular at all when codifying the rules of Arabic grammar.[758] A review of the earliest extant grammatical texts, Sībawayh's *al-Kitāb* and al-Akhfash's *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, written 60-70 years before al-Jāḥiẓ, confirms these observations and leads me even further to question whether second/eighth century grammarians ever held such fixed notions about Arabness as researchers assume. The following analysis examines the depiction of Bedouin and the 'Language of the Arabs' (*kalām al-ʿarab*) and their relationship to the *Arabic language* as codified in classical philology.

5.1(b)(i) From Sībawayh (d.180/796) to al-Akhfash (d.215/830)

The text of Sībawayh's *al-Kitāb* only infrequently mentions inner Arabian Bedouin. In the first three volumes of *al-Kitāb* (*i.e.* more than two-thirds of the work), I found only 4 references to *aʿrāb* (the term for nomadic Arabian) as sources of grammar,[759] and in one of these, Sībawayh expresses misgivings, describing the alleged report of Bedouin speech cited by his contemporary Basran grammarian colleague, Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb (d.182/798) as "queer (*baʿīd*), the Arabs do not speak like that nor do many (*nās kathīr*) use it".[760] In another instance, Sībawayh refers to one particular Bedouin informant as "one of the most correct-speaking people" (*min afṣaḥ al-nās*),[761] implying that Sībawayh (unlike al-Jāḥiẓ 60 years later) did not operate under a blanket assumption that all Bedouin intrinsically embodied correct-Arabic. While Levin argues that Sībawayh did rely on Bedouin (though he does not provide quantitative analysis),[762] he does note that Sībawayh's Bedouin informants

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[758] Versteegh (1997) 50-51.

[759] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 2:411;3:81,300,314.

[760] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 2:411.

[761] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 3:300, though Sībawayh's use of the verb *zaʿama* (to allege) in respect of the Bedouin's testimony, implies Sībawayh himself did not entirely trust the authenticity of the poem cited by this eloquent Bedouin.

[762] The limited presence of *aʿrāb* in *al-Kitāb* questions Levin's observation that "Sibawayhi's great interest in the dialectical features of the spoken language of the Bedouins and in Arab grammatical

were likely restricted to those living near al-Baṣra,[763] indicating no special esteem for inner Arabian dialects. Though Carter too stresses the importance of Bedouin Arabic in *al-Kitāb*, he also notes that Sībawayh relied on Bedouin near al-Baṣra, and perhaps specifically the market-area of Mirbad, and that Sībawayh "relied far more on indirect evidence" than personal interaction with the Bedouin.[764] Furthermore, "not everything was accepted merely because it came from a Bedouin Arab".[765] Modern scholarship, therefore, seems to have presumed that Sībawayh relied on Bedouin (under the anachronistic influence of the Bedouin-emphasis in later grammatical texts), and Carter assumes that each reference to *ʿarabī* in *al-Kitāb* must be a reference to Bedouin. But if every 'Arab' mentioned in *al-Kitāb* was a Bedouin, why does Sībawayh specifically mention *aʿrāb*, and why, when Sībawayh himself examines the word "*aʿrāb*" and its relation to "*ʿarab*", does he deny their connection, arguing that the *aʿrāb* are a separate group?[766] The *aʿrāb* Bedouin actually have only a limited role in Sībawayh's conception of the language he sought to codify in *al-Kitāb*.

If the language detailed in *al-Kitāb* is not Bedouin Arabic, then what is it? The text lacks introduction or other direct expresses of Sībawayh's precise aims, but a reader can infer that his goal was to codify Arabic grammar. In stark contrast to later grammatical texts where philologists almost ubiquitously ground their

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theory, both of which were irrelevant for the study of the Qurʾan and other religious sciences, indicate that the emergence of Arabic grammar was mainly stimulated by intellectual curiosity and not by religious motivations" (2004) 13. Levin sought to prove that Sībawayh's motivations for codifying Arabic grammar had no religious motivations, and hence he left the issue of the Bedouins unproblematized, preferring to adopt the traditional view about Bedouin Arabic purity.

[763] Levin (2004) 2-3. The absence of reference to *aʿrāb* does not mean Sībawayh did not use *any* Bedouin informants, but I suggest Levin too quickly assumed the Bedouin-ness of Sībawayh's grammar as a function of later grammarians' insistence on the purity of desert Arabic.

[764] Carter (2004) 40.

[765] Carter (2004) 40-41. Compare the status of *aʿrāb* in *al-Kitāb* with, for example, the ubiquitous presence of *aʿrāb* in al-Jāḥiẓ's *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, written one generation after Sībawayh's death.

[766] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 3:379. This is considered further in section 5.2, below.

grammatical arguments in the linguistic ideal of *kalām al-ʿarab* (the speech of the Arabs), however, Sībawayh only sparingly uses the term *kalām al-ʿarab*. From a survey of the first two volumes of *al-Kitāb* (some 840 pages and approximately 40% of the work), I found only 18 references to *kalām al-ʿarab*.[767] The infrequency calls for closer scrutiny – in what context does Sībawayh invoke the term and how does it relate to his codification of Arabic grammar? Of the 18 citations, Sībawayh uses *kalām al-ʿarab* 10 times as quantitative measure: "this is frequent/more frequent (*kathīr*) in *kalām al-ʿarab*",[768] or "this is infrequent/less frequent (*qalīl/aqall*)".[769] Only in four cases does he cite *kalām al-ʿarab* as the basis for a strict grammatical rule,[770] in another case a construction is "known (*maʿrūf*) in *kalām al-ʿarab*" (implying acceptability, not absolute correctness,[771] and in another, a construction is called "permissible (*jawāz*) in *kalām al-ʿarab*, but it is weak"[772] – Sībawayh, the non-Arab, asserts his right to judge grammatical correctness outside of merely copying what is heard from Arabs. In another citation he explains:

> You have the choice to make [the word] *Zayd* [in the exceptive grammatical construction] *badal* or an adjective (*ṣifa*) [and in a specific case] it can only be an adjective; this has a correspondence (*naẓīr*) with the *kalām al-ʿarab* ...[773]

The notion of 'correspondence' suggests that the *kalām al-ʿarab* exists parallel to and resembles what Sībawayh predominantly refers to as "your language".[774] Another citation of *kalām al-ʿarab* makes this more explicit: "the Arabs do not speak like this,

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[767] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 1:122,303,339,428;2:57,102,121,181,185,228,241,250,334,349,364,390,401,421.

[768] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 1:339,2:102,136,181,185,241,349.

[769] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 1:303;2:250.

[770] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 1:122;2:228,364,421.

[771] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 1:428.

[772] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 2:57.

[773] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 2:334. See also Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 2:401, where Sībawayh refers to "similarities" between a grammatical construction and what is heard in *kalām al-ʿarab*.

[774] Most sections begin with a description of the rule followed by the expressions: "this is like your statement (*naḥw qawlik*) ..." or "this is your statement (*dhālika qawluk*) (Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 2:5,19,22,23, 25,28).

the grammarians only derived the rule from analogy ... it is ugly amongst the Arabs ... and the Arabs say [*x*] – this is the *kalām al-ʿarab*."[775] Sībawayh does not strongly reproach grammarians for breaches of *kalām al-ʿarab*, however, and his sparse reference to *kalām al-ʿarab* and the preponderance of its citation in quantitative terms suggests that it is a reference point of permissibility, not a rigid model. If a given construction is frequent in *kalām al-ʿarab*, then it is clearly worthy of repetition, but in turn, "infrequent"/*qalīl* constructions are surely not recommended to be copied. Quite why the "Language of the Arabs" is not firmly the centre stage in *al-Kitāb* can be via closer consideration of his use of the words *ʿarab* and *ʿarabī*.

Sībawayh makes frequent reference to grammatical constructions being "good Arabic (*ʿarabī jayyid*)"[776] or just "Arabic"[777] whereby the adjective *ʿarabī* is a byword for "correct", or "permissible". The notion of permissibility thereby depicts the Arabic language as something more fluid than a clear-cut language of the Arab people. Sometimes Sībawayh deems an Arabic expression "pure" (*maḥḍ*)[778] or "mellifluous" (*muṭṭarad*)[779] which are eminently good, but the relative infrequency of these adjectives in the voluminous *al-Kitāb* indicates that 'Arabs' are marshalled as guides to the language, but not, in fact, the only source of Sībawayh's rules. Versteegh makes a similar observation in noting that the language of "Arabs" cited in *al-Kitāb* predominantly relates to poetry, and that the actual spoken vernacular was less important,[780] *i.e.* the Arabs' language was not the ultimate source for the

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[775] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 2:364.

[776] This is a common expression in *al-Kitāb*, see for examples 1:54,80;2:127,158.

[777] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 2:63,

[778] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 2:120.

[779] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 1:197.

[780] Versteegh also notes that grammarians extracted what they wanted from Bedouin via the poetry reports and paid little regard to their vernacular. Carter's work on Sībawayh's *al-Kitāb* tends to

rules of all spoken language, but rather, only evidence for specific points of grammar encountered in poetry.

A survey of *al-Kitāb* reveals the Arabs are indeed primarily cited as exceptions to the over-arching grammatical rules Sībawayh promulgates. Sībawayh usually accepts these as vernacular oddities ascribed to *baʿḍ al-ʿarab* ("one Arab").[781] He does not deny that these Arabs speak correct Arabic, but as they are cited in a singular fashion, he renders them unique specimens within a wider linguistic system. His common reference to "a trustworthy Arabic speaker",[782] also implies that not all Arabic speakers inherently embody correct Arabic. A reference to one "whose Arabic pleases",[783] implies that power remains with Sībawayh's readership to appraise the language. These examples reveal that Sībawayh does not depict 'Arabs' as unquestionable authorities for 'correct Arabic', nor the language he codifies as the sole property of ethnic Arabs.

If 'Arabs' are not *al-Kitāb*'s primary source, then what is Sībawayh's criterion of correctness? It appears that he considers his own readers to be the primary creators of language. Most sections of *al-Kitāb* contain, at their outset, the expression "you say *x*", and/or "you say *x* because you intend/mean *y*",[784] *i.e.* Sībawayh seeks to explore the logic behind how his readers speak, and he engages in an intellectual exercise to codify the proper workings of that language, or, as it

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disagree (2004) 40-42; and the issue appears unresolved. As is evident from my findings, I support Versteegh's hypothesis.

[781] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 1:47,51,70,86,169,183.

[782] The expression is usually "we heard from one of the Arabs who is trustworthy" (*baʿḍ al-ʿarab al-mawthūq bi-hi/bi-him*" 1:309,319,329,330,395,423, 2:92,329,336,337,345; or, interestingly, "the Arabs whose Arabic is trustworthy" (*al-ʿarab al-mawthūq bi-ʿarabiyyatihā*) 2:20,319.

[783] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 1:182

[784] The verb *arāda* 'to want' in the second person singular is almost ubiquitous. Reading from the beginning of *al-Kitāb* it is cited in various contexts 1:33,40,46,54,62,67,69,80,81,82,88,94). See also *al-Kitāb* 2:28 for a good example of the interaction between what "you say" and how "one Arab" says a similar construction – both are accepted as correct.

has been proposed, its ethical rules.[785] The second-person singular could be impersonal, translatable as "one says", but the personal "you" seems to better capture Sībawayh's intention since, firstly, book composition at that time was transitioning from oral lecture to written text:[786] books were still dialogical, written in a direct, personal style of address between a teacher and his audience, which, in Sībawayh's case, was a conversation between teacher and his Arabic speaking students. Secondly, the statements following Sībawayh's "you" formula are usually simple, non-controversial constructions which seem reflective of the standard idiom of his audience. And thirdly, Sībawayh adduces no other consistent standard for 'correct' language. Indeed, the ways "Arabs" speak are interspersed throughout, especially where they do not correspond to regular speech patterns, but *al-Kitāb* is not a cultural defence of Arabs. It offers no expressions of innate Arab (and certainly not Bedouin) eloquence, nor does it intimate Arab superiority via their linguistic excellence.[787] This leads to the conclusion that Sībawayh accepts that his readership constitute members of an Arabic speech community and the ways he observes that they convert their *ideas* into *speech* are roots of his grammatical rules which he proceeds to analyse with reference to "trustworthy Arabs" and their poetry in particular.

By according his reader, "you", such a prominent role in *al-Kitāb*, Sībawayh accords with the definition of ʿarabī in *al-ʿAyn* composed in the same period. We recall from Chapter 2 that *al-ʿAyn* conceptualised Arabs as a speech community and

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[785] To this extent, Levin's analysis (2004) is accurate – Sībawayh does not betray that his interest in writing Arabic grammar purely serves the purpose of interpreting the Qurʾān or recreating the old Arabic. For ethics and *al-Kitāb*, see Carter (2004) 61-65.

[786] Schoeler (2006) 40-41 describes the development towards books. He interprets Sībawayh's employment of the second-person pronoun as "address[ing] the reader directly" (2006) 49.

[787] Given Sībawayh's seeming disinterest in ethnic Arabness, it is unsurprising that Suleiman makes no reference to *al-Kitāb* in his analysis of early grammatical writings and Arab identity formation. Suleiman refers to Sībawayh as one of the two "foremost grammarians in the Arabic linguistic tradition" ((2003) 149), but he does not explain why *al-Kitāb* is otherwise absent in his analysis.

signalled out the "Arab Arabs" (*al-ʿarab al-ʿāriba*) as the "pure of them" (*al-ṣarīḥ min-hum*). It could thus be argued that, at the close of the second/eighth century, some discourses portrayed Arabs as a broad speech community of varied dialects. As grammarians codified the rules, certain Arabs, especially those who transmitted poetry from the past, emerged as embodying the purest form of the language presumably on account of their proximity to the period of the Qurʾān's revelation,[788] but while interest in old poetry reveals a special appeal of old Arabic, the absence of a homogeneous notion of *kalām al-ʿarab* as the property of those old Arabs and the 'gold standard' of *Fuṣḥā* found in later grammatical texts, reveals that in Sībawayh's system, the differences between past Arabic and the Arabic of his day did not mean his contemporaries' Arabic was inauthentic. In emphasising his own speech community's autonomy to create 'correct speech', there is also no role for the Bedouin to emerge as a cohesive group of 'superior Arabic speakers', and, as Versteegh hinted, the notion of their linguistic purity is merely a topos that post-dates Sībawayh's *al-Kitāb*.[789] The codification of language as an exercise in national identity creation, as was the case in early modern Europe, is not applicable in Sībawayh's case where language rules are not cast as the shared identity of an ethnic Arab 'imagined community'.[790]

Written a generation after Sībawayh, the second earliest extant grammatical text, al-Akhfash's *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān*, differs from *al-Kitāb* for it is not a comprehensive

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[788] Al-Jumaḥī gives a contemporary gloss to the interest in pre-Islamic Arabic, stating the philologists' required evidence specifically from shortly before the time of Muḥammad to re-construct the linguistic universe of the Qurʾān (*Ṭabaqāt* 1:18).

[789] Versteegh (1997) 50-51 supports the notion that the linguistic purity of the Bedouin was a topos along with stories of their chivalry, generosity and manliness.

[790] Anderson (1991) 13,71-84 and Hobsbawm (1990) 102-103 demonstrated the role of language ties and the codification of language in promoting European nations, and while Suleiman accepted that the Arab nationalist experience was different (2003) 34, he nonetheless reads the early Arabic grammatical tradition as an effort to forge Arab unity (38-68). Given the absence of any such markers in *al-Kitāb,* there are strong grounds to disagree with Suleiman's analysis of early grammatical motivations.

grammar of the Arabic language, but rather a commentary on the correct ways to read the Qurʾān and an exposition on its more complicated grammatical structures. But its approach to the Arabic language and the status is accords Arabs in that construct have salient similarities with *al-Kitāb*, and when read together, both texts contrast the conceptualisations of Arabic in later classical philology.

Akin to *al-Kitāb*, the Bedouin *aʿrāb* are conspicuous in *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* for their absence. Across the 593 pages of the modern edition, I only identified three express citations of *aʿrāb*,[791] and in two, the *aʿrābī* cited is described as "eloquent/correct" (*faṣīḥ*),[792] again suggesting that the early third/ninth century readership did not axiomatically assume that all *aʿrāb* were paragons of eloquence, and they needed assurance of the particular *aʿrābī*'s suitability as a source for grammar. Two of the three instances also describe the manner in which a Bedouin recited poetry,[793] supportive of Versteegh's hypothesis that the early grammarians were not so interested in the Bedouin vernacular as they were in a poetic koine.[794] Most interestingly, al-Akhfash cites each Bedouin anecdote with *isnād*. Elsewhere, al-Akhfash eschews *isnād*, and hence his employment of the device here demonstrates to his readers that he did not encounter the Bedouin himself, and relied on reports of others. Arabia was accessible during al-Akhfash's lifetime – he lived during the height of the centrally planned development of the *Darb Zubayda* that linked Iraq with Mecca and Medina – so the infrequent reference to Bedouin in his text, and the fact that each Bedouin anecdote is related second-hand, suggests

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[791] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:32,126,162.

[792] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:32,162.

[793] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:32,126.

[794] The third reference in *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* does relate a Bedouin vernacular expression (1:162), but the small sample size makes extrapolation difficult. Surely, it is more significant that any *aʿrāb* speech, verse or prose, is so markedly absent in al-Akhfash's *Maʿānī*.

that the early generations of grammarians did not make concerted efforts to explore inner Arabia's vernacular.

Compared with *al-Kitāb*, al-Akhfash's *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* makes more frequent reference to the "Language of the Arabs" (*kalām al-ʿarab*); however, when compared with later grammatical texts, al-Akhfash is more akin to Sībawayh: he only refers to *kalām al-ʿarab* six times in the first 100 pages of his text.[795] Moreover, al-Akhfash invokes the term in the same manner as Sībawayh: usually accompanied by old poetry connected to complex points of grammar,[796] illustrating that the *kalām al-ʿarab* primarily concerns a poetic koine, as opposed to Bedouin or the exclusively 'pure'/'correct' vernacular of the Arab 'nation'.

The greater citation of *kalām al-ʿarab* in *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* and its much more frequent citation of the 'Arabs' throughout the text[797] should in any event not be read as indicating that al-Akhfash embraced a more certain notion of a national Arab eloquence than Sībawayh. The many express mentions of 'Arab' point to grammatical differences, not linguistic unity: al-Akhfash usually cites Arabs in formulations such as "one of the Arabs vowels [a given word] in *x* manner [differing from 'usual' usage]",[798] or "some Arabs say/one Arab says [*x*]"[799] – again in distinction to 'usual' readings; or "one of the Arabs/some of the Arabs elide [a given letter/vowel – whereas most readers do not]".[800] These expressions will be familiar to readers of Sībawayh where "one of the Arabs" is the grammatical outlier. Hence, while al-Akhfash cites Arabs *quantitatively* more than Sībawayh, in *qualitative* terms,

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[795] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:21,25,55,61,67,81.

[796] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:21,25,55,81.

[797] Unlike Sībawayh's *al-Kitāb*, al-Akhfash expressly mentions the 'Arabs' in almost all sections of his work.

[798] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:36.

[799] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:39,37,60,80,83,99.

[800] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:28,78. See also statements such as: "there are those Arabs who pronounce a double case ending, and those who do not", and "some Arabs add a *hamza*, other Arabs do not" (Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:80,106).

both authors treat them similarly. Except in a very limited number of circumstances, the language as al-Akhfash conceptualises as spoken by 'the Arabs' is in fact divisive and indicative of variety without the semblance of one 'correct order'. As such, al-Akhfash is not codifying, but observing fluidity.

The reader of *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* will apprehend, therefore, that the text does not impose rules about the Arabic language, but instead reveals the extent of the language's variety. This should not be surprising, since al-Akhfash's aim is to justify the multiple manners in which words in the Qurʾān are read, and so allusion to a varied, unsystematic way Arabs speak (as evidenced in old poetry) enables him to accept Qurʾān readings that disagree with common speech practice. Again like Sībawayh, al-Akhfash does not imply all old poetic grammar should be axiomatically embraced, as he calls some readings "ugly"/*qabīḥ*,[801] and even notes that "some Arabs speak this way, but it is ugly and infrequent".[802] In sum, al-Akhfash draws a distinction between his group of grammarians and Qurʾān readers and the outlying 'Arabs' who provide different readings, but his emphasis on rare outliers should not be interpreted as a rigid separation of 'correct' Arab and 'incorrect' non-Arab, but rather an encyclopaedia aimed to explain the full panoply of Qurʾānic readings.

In other cases, al-Akhfash describes how "Arabs" and "Qurʾān Readers" (*al-qurrāʾ*) share common notions of correctness,[803] and also makes frequent mention of the second-person 'you' pronoun, again akin to Sībawayh. Al-Akhfash compares "your language" (*i.e.* his readers') with that of the Arabs, and notes some similarities,[804] as well as differences.[805] In refraining from upbraiding his readers where their readings do not conform to *kalām al-ʿarab* (or some versions of Arab

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[801] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:30,83,96.

[802] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 2:508.

[803] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:110.

[804] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:26,32,105.

[805] Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:49,89,91-92.

speech), al-Akhfash, like Sībawayh, entitles his readers autonomy over their communication, evidencing a paradigm that permits his readers create language depending on what *they* want to say.[806]

In the generation preceding al-Jāḥiẓ, therefore, two major extant grammatical texts both depict Arabic as a set of contemporary speech rules with awareness that some Arabs follow different rules which are either *ḥasan*/good models correctness, or *qabīḥ*/ugly phrases to be avoided. The grammarians reserve their own power to judge what is laudable and what is ugly, the language of the Qurʾān and most old Arabic poetry is good, but there is no indication that a historical reconstruction of an ancient Arabic language or the creation of an Arab imagined community around a systematised grammar is the goal of either of their texts, and the absence of any express reverence for Bedouin dialects reveals that neither grammarian felt that his readers should correct their own speech to bring it into conformity with Bedouin *kalām*. Ethnic "Arabs", at the dawn of the third/ninth century therefore do not monopolise Arabic; it seems instead to be a shared set of speech rules between the tribal elements and the *mawālī* of Muslim society. Given the rate of assimilation and spread of Arabic as the language of everyday transactions by the outset of the second/eighth century, the grammarians stance towards the language is logical. Long gone were the conditions of the first/seventh century when the conquering elites whose elite status and Arabic-like dialects differentiated them from the conquered populations and who could accordingly use the Arabic language to express the distinctiveness of their elite community. By the second/eighth century the language had become the vernacular of conqueror and conquered alike, and so it can be expected to have lost any ethnic connection as

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[806] For an express example, consider his expression "don't you see that you speak in this way" – indicating the touchstone of correctness is not a conscious copying of old Arabic, but the natural manner in which his contemporaries speak (Al-Akhfash *Maʿānī* 1:57). See also 1:52,53.

touchstone of Arabness which, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, was at that time increasingly being conceptualised around closed-ended genealogical models.

5.1(b)(ii) Arabians and Arabic at the beginning of fourth/tenth century

Al-Jāḥiẓ's notion of the Arabic language and his privileging of Arabia's linguistic superiority over urban Iraq accordingly mark a departure from earlier texts. Analysis of philological writing after the mid-third/ninth century evidences the entrenchment of al-Jāḥiẓ's discourse, indicating that classical philology entered a new phase in later Abbasid times. Two generations after al-Jāḥiẓ wrote his *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, the lengthy grammatical treatise of Ibn al-Sarrāj, *al-Uṣūl fī-l-naḥw* evidences this shift. Ibn al-Sarrāj reconfigures the second/eighth century grammarians' model of language based on the formula "you say *x* because you want to express *y*" with a statement at the outset of his text: "*al-Naḥw* [grammar] specifically refers to a speaker's copying of the *kalām al-ʿarab*, this is a science which earlier scholars derived from close reading of the *kalām al-ʿarab*".[807] He continues, "my aim in this book is to mention the grammatical causes (*ʿilla*) which, if you pursue them, will lead you to their [the Arabs'] speech".[808] Hence, while Ibn al-Sarrāj retains Sībawayh's proverbial "you" to illustrate how his readers speak, in crucial distinction to the earlier texts, the notion of the speaker's will is absent. No longer do we speak in certain ways to express our thoughts, Ibn al-Sarrāj's introduction makes it clear that we speak in those ways in order to mimic the *kalām al-ʿarab*. Ibn al-Sarrāj reorients the 'ugly' or 'irregular' (*shādhdh*) language away from Sībawayh's notion of language which does not correspond to his grammatical rules, and applies these ethical/aesthetic terms to speech which does not correspond to the way in which "they [the Arabs] use a word".[809] He places the onus on his readers to

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[807] Ibn al-Sarrāj *al-Uṣūl* 1:35.

[808] Ibn al-Sarrāj *al-Uṣūl* 1:36.

[809] Ibn al-Sarrāj *al-Uṣūl* 1:57.

memorise how the Arabs spoke,[810] and so subordinates the rules of grammar to the more or less monolithic way in which he records historical Arabic.

There is no longer indication that Arabs have incorrect speech, and review of the structure of Ibn al-Sarrāj's *al-Uṣūl* reveals a common pattern. He begins a grammatical topic with the way in which his readers speak, using the "you" similar to Sībawayh, but he denies his readers the right to forge rules themselves, and instead codifies a set of logically derived principles checked against the *kalām al-ʿarab*. Difficulties and exceptions to the rules are also supplied by the *kalām al-ʿarab*, and hence the contemporary speaker of Arabic is demoted from a speech producer to a rule follower: language cannot be formulated to accord with logic or ethics of the grammarians, Ibn al-Sarrāj merely allows the grammarians the right to *qiyās* (analogy) and posits *kalām al-ʿarab* as the arbiter.[811]

Absent too are the hints of heterogeneity in Arab speech: Ibn al-Sarrāj readily accepts that different tribes had different dialects, but he renders all as constituent parts of *kalām al-ʿarab*. He consolidates the language into a comprehensive and rationally constructed edifice and a relic of the past: this enables Arabic to be observed as a foreign object, not a living, evolving organism. Shifting from messy, multi-faceted present speech discourse to an ossified statuesque monument from the past gives Ibn al-Sarrāj's Arabic grammar an elegant simplicity which in turn enables a new conception of a historical ethnic Arab as the representative of perfect language. Ibn Al-Sarrāj transforms the Arabs from partners in a present living language to architects of a monolithic past Arabic.

The model of *al-Uṣūl fī-l-naḥw* has prompted modern scholars to identity it as one of the first codifications of Arabic grammar in terms of 'correct principles'

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[810] Ibn al-Sarrāj *al-Uṣūl* 1:57.

[811] For the importance of memorisation (*ḥifẓ*) over analogy (*qiyās*) see Ibn al-Sarrāj *al-Uṣūl* 1:76,57.

(*uṣūl*) backed by a rational framework (*ʿilal*).[812] It has also been noted that Ibn al-Sarrāj conceptualises grammar to be the language of the Bedouin Arabs, he strives to teach his readers to speak like them, and through study of the old dialects, he reveals this language to his readers.[813] These changes impinge on the depiction of Arabness, for in presenting *kalām al-ʿarab* as a certain, tangible relic, Ibn al-Sarrāj needs history more than any previous grammarian hitherto in order to present a perfect model of the past in which the Arabs can be presented as homogeneous. Ibn al-Sarrāj thus required a very different Arab past then, say, first/seventh century narrators of *ayyām al-ʿarab* for whom intra-Arab conflict is a major theme. Ibn al-Sarrāj's gravitation towards Bedouin is also noteworthy, for it switches discourse about the Arab past from kingdoms and wars to a cyclical, unchanging Bedouin ideal of language preservation across time. Ibn al-Sarrāj intensifies al-Jāḥiẓ's paradigm written 50 years earlier, and champions what, in comparison to earlier grammatical texts, is a novel discourse about the absolute correctness of historical Arabic speech. They not only homogenise and elevate the status of *kalām al-ʿarab*, but also strip all autonomy from their contemporary readers over the Arabic language, and compel them to listen to and mimic an idealised language speaking to them from a distant desert in a distant past.

The new perceptions about Bedouin Arabia are also evidenced in a statement of Ibn al-Sarrāj's near contemporary Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d.339/950) who, in positing that the most correct Arabic is that which is least corrupted by other linguistic influence, ventured a rational argument degrading Syrian and Iraqi vernaculars on account of their intermixing with non-Arabs. Similarly, he degraded the tribal dialects of ʿAbd al-Qays for their residence near the Persians in Bahrain, and Yemenis too on account of their contact with Ethiopia. Interestingly, even the

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[812] Bohas *et al* (1990) 5-6.
[813] Levin (2004) 10-11.

town-dwellers' of the Ḥijāz (ḥāḍirat al-Ḥijāz) fell short of al-Fārābī's standard, though he did not specify the cause of their impurity, remarking only that their Arabic was mixed with "members of foreign nations" (ghayrihim min al-umam).[814] His vague comment against the Ḥijāzīs is instructive: Ḥijāzī 'urbanised' Arabic was esteemed in Sībawayh's system,[815] yet al-Fārābī appears set on devaluing it, even without specific cause. To understand Ḥijāzī Arabic's downfall in al-Fārābī's opinion, we need look no further than his notion of the best Arabic: the central Arabian, Bedouin Najdī Arabic. We must contextualise al-Fārābī's praise of inner Arabia by noting that he lived at the height of the Qarāmiṭa threat when Najd was completely out-of-bounds for urban Muslims and when the Hajj itself was either outright cancelled or attempted at extreme risk.[816] Al-Fārābī's seemingly rational argument is an elaborate attempt to prove the validity of the notion that the ideal Arabic is Bedouin, and by locating this Arabic in an inaccessible void, his 'ideal Arabic' is in fact wholly 'idealised'. Texts from the later fourth/tenth century develop this discourse to its logical conclusion.

5.1(b)(iii) Arabians and Arabic at the close of the fourth/tenth century

The reverence for idealised, historic Arabian Arabic manifests with unprecedented clarity in Ibn al-Fāris' (d.375/985) al-Ṣāḥibī fī fiqh al-lugha. He raises Arabic to the status of God-given language (tawqīf),[817] he argues that the best

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[814] Cited in al-Suyūṭī al-Iqtirāḥ 56-57; discussed in Suleiman (2003) 51-52 and (2011) 7.

[815] I maintain that it is difficult to argue that Sībawayh prefers any particular version of Arabic, but in considering Sībawayh's preferences, Carter argues for of Hijazi Arabic (2004) 41. Even if this is correct, it is noteworthy that Sībawayh selects the most urban region of Arabia over pastoral/Bedouin Najd.

[816] The atrocities of the Qarāmiṭa against Mecca and Hajj pilgrims are well documented. See al-Rāshid and Webb (2014 in press) and Chapter 4.3(c) above. By the fifth/eleventh century, communication with Arabia had been more regularly re-established, but via a Syrian route, and thus travellers still largely avoided Najd.

[817] I.e. it was created perfect by God and does not develop via human agency (Ibn Fāris al-Ṣāḥibī 36-41).

speakers of Arabic are the Prophets,[818] and, by extension, insinuates that the Arabs of Muḥammad's day existed on an exalted status between ordinary speaking humans and prophethood. Ibn Fāris directly follows the logic of al-Jāḥiẓ's *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* in basing his praise of Arabic on the expressiveness of Arabic hinted in the Qurʾān, but he chooses starker words: "inasmuch as God bestowed on the Arabic language its special clarity, it was made known that all other languages lack its clarity and fall short of it".[819]

Modern scholars have commented on the fourth/tenth century debates around Arabic's *tawqīf* nature as part of the theological proofs of the Qurʾān's divine/pseudo-divine nature,[820] and the references to the inferiority of Persian in Ibn Fāris' text[821] seem to correspond to a pro-Arab, anti-*Shuʿūbī* discourse, but a pro-Islam/anti-*Shuʿūbī* agenda is unlikely Ibn Fāris' goal in *al-Ṣāḥibī*. The Qurʾān's divinity and the ethnic tension between Arab and Persian are issues that would have interested scholars since the second/eighth century if not earlier, hence we need to consider why Ibn Fāris, a later fourth/tenth century author, would engage with these issues in a fashion not evidenced so starkly before. Reading *al-Ṣāḥibī* in the context of the development of Arabic philology uncovers new explanations for his motivations.

Just as Ibn Fāris develops al-Jāḥiẓ's argument about Arabic's quality into a simplified, direct praise of the language and disparagement of other languages, Ibn Fāris also intensifies the fixedness of the grammatical framework of Ibn al-Sarrāj. We have noted that Ibn al-Sarrāj promulgated a rational system for Arabic

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[818] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 37-40; see also 49: "Only a prophet can fully know Arabic".

[819] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 44. Ibn Fāris manifestly echoes al-Jāḥiẓ's claim that Arabic is the most expressive language, but al-Jāḥiẓ did not flatly disparage non-Arabic communication as Ibn Fāris implies. For an appraisal of al-Jāḥiẓ's opinion on non-Arabic communication see Pellat (1966) 95-98, Anghelescu (1995) 55-59; and for examination of his sometimes ambivalent opinions, Webb (2012a) 35-37,46-47.

[820] Weiss (1984) 99.

[821] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 46-47.

grammar, borrowing the jurisprudential term *al-uṣūl* to portray Arabic as more coherent and historically certain than second/eighth grammarians did.[822] Ibn Fāris embraces the paradigm, but borrows further from jurisprudence. He explains that the Arabic language was the "*sunan* [customs, hence law][823] of the Arabs in their speech", the Arabic grammatical system has fundamental principles, the *uṣūl*, and also "branches" (*furūʿ* - another jurisprudential term) such as its rare vocabulary.[824] The technical terminology enables Ibn Fāris to entitle his work the "*Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) of Language*" and to elevate the Arabic language to the rank of *ʿilm* – a formal science – which he dubs the "science of the Arabs".[825] In so doing, his depictions of historical Arabs differ from their depictions in third/ninth century texts such as al-Jāḥiẓ's *al-Bayān* and Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl al-ʿarab*. Specifically Ibn Qutayba lists a range of "Arab sciences" (*ʿulūm*), including horsemanship, astrology, reading signs in nature, poetry and oratory, and while the expressiveness and breadth of Arabic vocabulary is cited as evidence of the Arabs' excellence,[826] the language itself is not counted as one of their *ʿulūm*. Similarly, al-Jāḥiẓ argued that the expressiveness of the Arabic language enabled Arabs to develop authoritative and worthwhile knowledge (*ʿilm*),[827] but his praise focused on the *aʿrāb*, not all Arabs and he stopped short of declaring the Arabic language to be a 'science' in its own right.

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[822] The term *uṣūl*, though most common in jurisprudence, had wide usage: *e.g.* Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d.c.140/757) uses it in a text defining *adab*, implying that any field of knowledge is composed of both *uṣūl* (roots – principles) and *furūʿ* (branches - specialisations) (*al-Adab* 69-71). Ibn al-Sarrāj's incorporation of *uṣūl* into grammar need not be read as a strict emulation of jurisprudence, therefore, but as part of a transformation of *al-ʿarabiyya* towards a self-contained field/*ʿilm*.

[823] *Sunan* could also be read *sanan*, implying a "way/path". I prefer *sunan* given Ibn Fāris' seeming intention to use words with legal resonances (*uṣūl*, *furūʿ*, *fiqh*) in this section of his text.

[824] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 33.

[825] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 33.

[826] See, for example, the Arabic vocabulary regarding horse husbandry and Ibn Qutayba's argument that this meant the Arabs must have possessed superior knowledge of this field than other peoples (*Faḍl* 120).

[827] Webb (2012a) 48-49.

The third/ninth century authors' refraining from calling the language an *ʿilm* seems attributable to the fact that grammarians had not yet fully codified the language nor specifically equated it with the Arab ethnos. Since they conceptualised Arabic as a living idiom shared between Abbasid Iraqis and pre-Islamic Arabians, they did not treat it as a relic of an Arab past.[828] Ibn al-Sarrāj's detailed codification of Arabic, however, facilitated the conceptualisation of Arabic as a cohesive and specifically Arab language which Ibn Fāris could then develop into an even more coherent 'Arab science' than his third/ninth century forebears could ever have imagined.

Ibn Fāris also parries the risks of fragmentation of his perfect monolithic model of *kalām al-ʿarab* posed by the varied Arabian dialects by whitewashing them. He admits that different dialects existed, and that on account of dialectical differences different Arabian groups had even chastised each other,[829] but he denies that such regional shibboleths affected the unity of Arab lineage,[830] and he deposits dialectical differences into a set of three categories.[831] This schema transforms exceptions into regularities and renders robust unity for the *kalām al-ʿarab*. To a degree unlike his philologist predecessors, Ibn Fāris can open his *al-Ṣāḥibī* with a comprehensive theoretical framework in which the Arabic language emerges as a perfect object of study, created in the past via revelation to prophets and perpetuated by generic, homogeneously eloquent Arabs.[832] By arguing that the original speakers of Arabic treated this language as their *ʿilm*, he legitimises scholarly study of Arabic, and expressly denies philologists of Islamic times the

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[828] The sharing of 'Arabic' between scholars and Bedouin served al-Jāḥiẓ's purposes by enabling him to praise both pre-Islamic Arabs and his own literary output, as I argue in Webb (2012a) 42-50.

[829] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 50-55,56-60.

[830] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 59.

[831] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 50-51.

[832] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 37.

status of intellectual trailblazers or inventors of language rules: Ibn Fāris notes they merely revived the Arabs' primordial Arabic science.[833]

By taking the Arabic language out of human hands, and declaring that no new rules of grammar can be invented by philologists,[834] Ibn Fāris in fact does himself a tremendous service of which al-Jāḥiẓ would have been proud. Ibn Fāris notes that the Arabic language is too vast for any human to know completely,[835] but at the same time, its status as the world's most expressive language and the idiom of the Qurʾān make it eminently, and even urgently learnable. In considering then, how one can learn such a difficult yet crucial language, Ibn Fāris enumerates three options: (i) by being raised by Arab parents; (ii) by 'inspiration' (*talqīn*), *i.e.* the manner in which God inspired the Prophet Ishmael to learn Arabic); and (iii) by listening to "trustworthy, honest narrators".[836] *Talqīn* is obviously not available to regular humans, and acquiring Arabic from birth is unlikely to have applied to many readers of *al-Ṣāḥibī* since, by the late fourth/tenth century, very few urban Muslims had purely Arab parents, Arabness was a relic of the impenetrable deserts of long cut-off Arabia, and very few Iraqis even identified themselves as 'Arabs'.[837] As for narration, Ibn Fāris laments that much of the Arabic language has been lost, and that only scattered reports from the past remain to learn the depths of the language.[838] In the final analysis, therefore, Ibn Fāris leaves us no option but to read the rest of his book to learn Arabic properly. He forces us to concede that only scholars like Ibn Fāris can teach us Arabic, and since Arabic is so tidily codified, the rules taught to us by the philologists appear faithful reproductions of the 'real'

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[833] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 41.

[834] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 67.

[835] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 34-35.

[836] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 64.

[837] Ahola (2004) 110-111. See note 688.

[838] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 68-71.

kalām al-ʿarab, and since different dialects no longer affect the unity of Arabness, anything we learn from the past builds our knowledge of Arabic. Scholars therefore have the ultimate power to reveal Arabic to us. Arabic teachers ever since have been revealing this knowledge and been remunerated by grateful students for the opportunity.

Ibn Fāris' contemporary philologists embraced the same model: Ibn Jinnī's (d.392/1002) *al-Khaṣāʾiṣ*, a more detailed account of the Arabic language, opens with a long discourse describing how 'real Arabs' possess 'correct Arabic' by nature, not by learning, a necessary argument to ensure that any reports from Arabs can be axiomatically *assumed* to be correct Arabic: Arabs, by their nature (according to Ibn Jinnī) cannot make grave grammatical mistakes.[839] Like Ibn Fāris, Ibn Jinnī notes that the Bedouin are the speakers of true Arabic, and he disparages 'urbanites' (*baladiyyūn*) for their inability to possess the same innate ability to create correct Arabic.[840] Whilst this resembles both al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Fārābī, Ibn Jinnī pursues the analysis of Bedouin Arabic further, arguing that only those Bedouin of the past exemplified correct Arabic, and that even his contemporary Bedouin had lost their purity.[841] Ibn Jinnī thus permanently locks Arabic away – cast into the vast and impenetrable desert, he emphasises the further distancing of pastness, and so his discourse leads to the same result as Ibn Fāris: one can only learn Arabic from trustworthy teachers (obviously, himself included).[842]

5.1(b)(iv) Arabic and Arabians: Conclusions

Reading the two centuries of grammatical writing between Sībawayh and Ibn Fāris/Ibn Jinnī diachronically indicates progressive change in the

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[839] Ibn Jinnī *al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* 110.
[840] Ibn Jinnī *al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* 169.
[841] Ibn Jinnī *al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* 816-821.
[842] Ibn Jinnī *al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* 77.

conceptualisation of Arabic and the role of the Bedouin within that construct. The homogeneity of the *kalām al-ʿarab*, the esteem for its perceived perfection, the increasing association of Bedouin with innate eloquence and the situating of the best Arabic in a distant desert past emerged gradually and were accentuated precisely during the period when Arabia's security collapsed and the region became virtually inaccessible. Whereas Sībawayh and al-Akhfash afforded ethnic Arabs an undoubted high status in the system of Arabic grammar, they left the language replete with oddities of speech that enabled their contemporaries to consider themselves, within reason, genuine Arabic speakers. They had the opportunity to explore Bedouin Arabic thanks to the security of the early Abbasid *Darb Zubayda*, but they did not do so. Ironically, it was only after desert Arabia was detached from the urban Iraqi community that it acquired the status of the unique situs of the Arabic language and Iraqis lost the right to 'native' fluency with Arabic.

The temporal congruence of Arabian security collapse, the decline of powerful Arab ethnic groups in Iraq and the change in the philological depictions of Arabic are surely not coincidental. The depiction of Arabic as a perfect, self-contained and unchanging language has manifest advantages for philologists who could promote themselves as the sole experts capable of teaching that language, and the circumstances of the mid-third/ninth century conveniently fed this agenda. Arabia's isolation meant that most Iraqis could not easily challenge the philologists' hegemony by venturing into Arabia to experience its language for themselves, and the gradual decline in Arab ethnic groups inside Iraq meant that the philologists would not face opposition to their claims of 'owning' the best Arabic. I do not argue that every philologist after 250 AH acted in a concerted manner to monopolise Arabic as a kind of scholarly mafia, but a trend is clearly perceptible, afforded by opportunities for philologists to depict Arabic as a field in which they had expert

knowledge. The desert Bedouin provided the ideal proof: Arabia offered a conceptual test-tube that shielded *kalām al-ʿarab* from the idiosyncrasies and uneven evolution inherent in spoken vernaculars and transformed it into a technically perfect archetype and definite object of study, while Bedouin lifestyle that seems so unchanging and primordial from an urban perspective provided an appropriate image of unchanging Arabian life to support the discourse that the Arabic language itself had remained unchanged since time immemorial.

The period of c.250-400 AH thus evidences the rise of new spokesmen for the Arabness idea – philologists. They did depict Arabic as a primary basis for an Arab national identity in a manner strikingly similar to the language codification enterprises in early modern Europe as discussed by Yasir Suleiman, but a crucial distinction must be drawn between the third/ninth and fourth/tenth century Iraqis and the eighteenth and nineteenth century Europeans. The Muslim philologists who argued that the *kalām al-ʿarab* was the 'property' of ethnic Arabs were not Arabs themselves. Their construction of an Arab identity is therefore completely opposite to the European nationalist model: the Iraqi philologists created an identity of an *other* people situated in an environment that was isolated and radically different from their own. I am unaware of any grammarian asserting that his own genealogical Arabness entitled him to better grammatical knowledge; grammarians from at least the time of al-Jāḥiẓ positioned themselves in a position of awe, looking and yearning towards an unattainable linguistic object. But while they debased themselves before the mightily eloquent paragon of *kalām al-ʿarab*, they left themselves in a good position to generate a perpetuating demand for their knowledge.

The manifest self-serving motivation also explains why the conceptualisation of Arabic shifted so markedly and so quickly following the mid-

third/ninth century: the gradual ethnic-Arab loss of political power in Iraq was accompanied by the sudden vacuum of Arabian insecurity during the 230s AH, and scholars rushed to the very attractive possibilities to seize mastery over 'knowing Arabness'. By the fourth/tenth century, therefore, philologists had become the most vocal advocates of the Arabness idea and took over the study of ancient *Arabica.* This accords precisely with the shifts in the narration of *ayyām al-ʿarab* and *nasab* identified at the outset of this chapter, and the 'philological turn' in the Muslim study of pre-Islamic Arabia had wide ramifications for the notion of Arabness itself. Unlike earlier generations of narrators, the philologists reconstructed pre-Islamic Arabia as the linguistic preserve of the Arabic language maintained by archetypal, unchanging Bedouin and their discourses demanded a new, coherent archetype of Arabness to support their more monolithic reconstructions of the *kalām al-ʿarab.* They had no use for a model of Arabian history as a patchwork of different vernaculars split along antagonistic lines as earlier narrators of *al-ayyām* had portrayed the region. Accordingly, one could expect (and does indeed find) that no chronological *tārīkh* of *al-Jāhiliyya* would be written in the fourth/tenth or fifth/eleventh centuries: despite the enormous cultural interest in the pre-Islamic past, scholars were more concerned to create a cyclical and undifferentiated pre-Islamic Arabness that contained essentially interchangeable details about the past which could be cited as evidence of the one model of 'original Arabness' to match the ideal of the original *kalām al-ʿarab.*

Analogous shifts are discernable in the narration of the *ayyām al-ʿarab.* I can only introduce this topic here, but comparison of a third/ninth century narrative with fourth/tenth century versions reveals interesting parallels with the fate of *kalām al-ʿarab.* Regarding the famous Dāḥis wa-l-Ghabrāʾ War between Banū ʿAbs and Banū ʿĀmir, for example, its third/ninth century narration in al-Balādhurī's

Ansāb al-ashrāf appears in his genealogy of the super-tribe Qays. Al-Balādhurī tracks the history of Qays through accounts of its prominent members arranged sequentially from its earliest generations into Islamic times, and Dāḥis wa-l-Ghabrāʾ is narrated in its place on the continuum of hereditary succession.[843] Specific dates are lacking, but its 'time' is fixed by its position in the sequence of generations; the time is therefore chronological, set within a progressive 'biological history',[844] but when the war was narrated in the fourth/tenth century *al-ʿIqd* and *Kitāb al-Aghānī* it was cleft from its chronological moorings. *Al-ʿIqd* lists it in a chapter about all the *ayyām* where a jumble of wars are related out of chronological order,[845] and in *al-Aghānī* it is narrated as part of the biography of one of the war's poetic/hero protagonists, Al-Rabīʿ ibn Ziyād, but it is sandwiched between the biography of the Umayyad/Medinan singer ʿAzza al-Maylāʾ and a short chapter on the poetry and love interest of Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiya.[846] Removed from its genealogical context, Dāḥis wa-l-Ghabrāʾ becomes difficult to qualitatively differentiate from other pre-Islamic Arabian battles: they are all equally exemplarist, consisting of heroism, bravery and fine poetry sung by standardised protagonists. It is tempting to consider the fourth/tenth century's a-chronological presentation of Dāḥis and al-Ghabrāʾ as a sort of parataxis whereby the reader is left to make sense of the apparently haphazard arrangement of the battles, and can conclude that *al-Jāhiliyya* was an era of constant ebb and flow of war and heroes; thereby engendering an impression of a cyclical, noble and virile time where wars only led to more wars, without beginning and without end – the timeless *Jāhiliyya* to go with a timeless Arabic language that

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[843] Al-Balādhurī *Ansāb* 11:90-109.

[844] For fuller discussion of the notion of genealogical time and the chronological order it bestows by presenting a biological progression of a family/dynasty see Spiegel (1997) 99-110).

[845] For example, Dāḥis wa-l-Ghabrāʾ is narrated after the battle of Shiʿb Jabala, which was a later episode (Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi *al-ʿIqd* 5:146-153).

[846] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 17:191-210. The biography of ʿAzza is 21:164-182, and Yazīd 21:211-215.

also experienced no development in that great monolith of Bedouin Arabia. It is instructive that similar changes in the definition of *al-Jāhiliyya* are observable from precisely this period, as explored in Chapter 1.

The Muslim story of Arabness metamorphosed between the second/eighth and fourth/tenth centuries from the expression of an urban/Muslim elite identity in the new towns of the Islamic Conquests to a desert/Bedouin 'pre-historical' identity championed by non-ethnic Arab philologists and literary scholars in Iraq who 'othered' the Arabic language to proclaim their mastery over a deliberately isolated language. This transplanted conceptions of ethnic Arabness from the Iraqi community and into the desert, and the next chapter engages with the othering of Arabness, but first I consider what is perhaps the most important shift in the Arabness idea wrought by the third/ninth century philological turn.

5.2 Arabness and Bedouin-ness

This section explores the emergence of the association of 'original Arabness' with Bedouin. I have noted that from the third/ninth century the role of Bedouin in the construction of *kalām al-ʿarab* was accentuated and eventually elevated to the status of the *only* group believed to speak correct Arabic. The model demanded a reconstruction of the pre-Islamic Arab past as a land of primordially eloquent Bedouin, and I argue that the philologists so emphasised Bedouin-ness as the archetypal basis of pure, original Arabness, that Arab history transformed into a literary ideal of primordial Bedouin that spread across the wider scholarly milieu and created the now familiar stereotypes of the 'desert Arab'.

At no time before the third-fourth/ninth-tenth century philological turn did Arabness 'need' Bedouin-ness. Contrarily, during the first two centuries of Islam, Bedouin and Arab were separate conceptual categories: *ʿarabī*/Arab connoted the residents of the urban centres of the Muslim world descended from the original

conquerors, whereas *aʿrābī*/Bedouin were Arabian nomads with only tenuous connection with the early Islamic state and its conquests.[847] The lexical similarity between *ʿarabī* and *aʿrābī* led Retsö to suggest the two groups were "cousins",[848] but in the first two centuries of Islam, a differentiation was rigorously maintained which reveals the real novelty of the third/ninth century depiction of Arabs as Bedouin.

5.2(a) Aʿrāb and Arabs distinguished in early Islam: (i) Terminologically

The earliest citations of *ʿarab* and *aʿrāb* reveal fundamental differences in the meaning and citation of each. "*Aʿrāb*" is attested in South Arabian Semitic languages eight centuries before Islam with the meanings "Bedouin", "Bedouin mercenaries", and/or "hill dwellers".[849] The Sabaic inscription J629 from Maʿrib cites *aʿrāb* in direct distinction to all other people (or town-dwellers).[850] The connotation of 'nomadic outliers' inherent in *aʿrāb* can also explain why Assyrian inscriptions from the eighth century BCE used the term *arba-ā* and related cognates to designate peoples in the desert beyond Assyrian central control, and why the Hebrew Bible similarly cites 'Arab' cognates to connote either a way of life practised outside

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[847] Athamina (1987) gathered anecdotes from classical Arabic literature which portray Bedouin *aʿrāb* as second-class members of the early Muslim community. Athamina contrasted them with *muhājir*, though, working under traditional conceptions, he counted both as 'Arabs'. I propose that the status division is another grounds to separate Arabness as a marker of urban Muslim identity from Bedouin in the early period; moreover Athamina treats all classical Arabic literature as a homogeneous source of historical information, and given the changes in perceptions of Arabness over time, insensitivity to genre and date of sources has attendant weaknesses. Nonetheless, there is a clear undercurrent of at least a substantial anti-Bedouin sentiment reflected even in the Qurʾān, as I presently discuss.

[848] Retsö (2003) 82-93. He primarily limits his analysis of the *aʿrāb* to their citation in the Qurʾān. Pietruschka (2001) 214 treats Bedouin and Arabs as entirely one and the same, noting (erroneously – see my discussion below) that the word 'Bedouin' is "the plural form *aʿrāb* (sing. *ʿarab*)".

[849] Beeston *et al* (1982) 19.

[850] For the original text on the inscription of Marṭadum and Dharḥān, see Jamme (1962) 128: the groups "all the people" (wkl ʾns) and the "Bedouin/*aʿrāb*" (ʾʿrb) are expressly counterposed in lns.7-8. Lns.5-6 list the various settled/agricultural communities familiar in Sabaic inscriptions. This presumably led Biella (2004) 383 to interpret ʾʿrb as the opposite to "town-dwellers".

Israel,[851] or a specific people living outside the boundaries of Israelite lands.[852] The *aʿrāb* have a long history in Semitic languages with external/desert associations.

The Qurʾān's ten citations of *aʿrāb* are consistent with the pre-Islamic evidence. The Qurʾān's *aʿrāb* have been discussed at length elsewhere,[853] but salient observations need brief repetition here. Firstly, the Qurʾān identifies the *aʿrāb* as a Bedouin people (*bādūn*),[854] expressly outside the municipal Medinan Muslim community.[855] The outside-ness of the *aʿrāb* translates into intriguing statements such as the *aʿrāb* are "are the most stubborn of all peoples in their disbelief and hypocrisy. They are the least likely to recognize the limits that God has sent down to His Messenger".[856] The Qurʾān accepts that some *aʿrāb* believe in God, but stresses that only some do,[857] and casts doubt on the sincerity and strength of their faith and their unwillingness to participate in communal actions.[858] *Aʿrāb* believers are suspect in the Qurʾānic discourse:

> [the *aʿrāb*] say, 'We have faith.' Tell them, 'You do not have faith. What you should say instead is, "We have submitted," for faith has not yet entered your hearts.' … The true believers are the ones who have faith in God and His Messenger and leave all doubt behind, the ones who have struggled with their possessions and their persons in God's way: they are the ones who are true.[859]

The *aʿrāb*'s separation from the Muslim community also facilitates a generalisation that all inhabitants of Arabia's deserts can be consolidated into a homogeneous bloc of *aʿrāb* and the Qurʾān discusses them in this spirit. In all these

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[851] Isa 13:20; Jer 3:2.

[852] Jer 25:24; Ezek 27:21; 2 Chron 9:14. See Pietruschka (2001) 214 and Dousse (2012) 44.

[853] Binay (2006) 78-89, Pietruschka (2001) 214-215.

[854] Qurʾān 33:20 states "there are those who wish they were nomads (*bādūn*) amongst the *aʿrāb*".

[855] Q9:101,120;33:20.

[856] Q9:97-98.

[857] Q9:99.

[858] Q48:11.

[859] Q49:14-15.

respects, the Qurʾān's *aʿrāb* are unlike its *ʿarabī*. As argued in Chapter 3.7-3.8, *ʿarabī* had no connection with a community, but rather described God's message which the Qurʾān specifically notes the *aʿrāb* largely failed to embrace. From the Qurʾānic perspective, therefore, the *aʿrāb* are paradigmatically non-*ʿarabī*!

5.2(a) Aʿrāb and Arabs distinguished: (ii) Legally

Before Islam, the citations of *aʿrāb* contrast the urban/inside of the world of those peoples who wrote about them. In pre-Islamic times, as I have argued, *ʿarab* did not connote a community of Arabians, but with the advent of Islam and the introduction of the term *ʿarabī* in urban Iraq, the *ʿarab/aʿrāb* distinction was invoked to separate the Bedouin Arabians from the Muslim immigrants in the *amṣār*. In the first 100-150 years of Islam, the Qurʾān's depiction of the *aʿrāb* was maintained to keep them outside the boundaries of the developing Arab ethnos, and whilst a number of 'Arabs' in the first *amṣār* were descended from formerly Bedouin communities, 'former' is a crucial word: the term *aʿrāb* connoted nomadism and tenuous Islamic faith which naturally contrasted the identity which Muslim urbanites cultivated for themselves. Their difference from *aʿrāb* logically formed the basis of *ʿarab*-ness. The 'Arabs' of early Islam could appraise the Bedouin as outsiders just as Assyrians, Hebrews and Sabaic and Himyaritic Yemenis had done in pre-Islamic times, and Arabness thus developed as axiomatic difference to Bedouin-ness, and the many anecdotes in early classical literature that denigrate and negatively stereotype the Bedouin bear witness to the rigid barrier between Arab and *aʿrāb* in the early period.[860]

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[860] See Athamina (1987). Leder (2005) 400-402 and Binay (2006) 55-59 also note the widespread denigration of the stereotyped Bedouin: Leder adds the important observation that the Bedouin stereotype is more complex than a simple denigration, and Binay enumerates positive aspects of Bedouin in *adab* literature (127-162) – I agree and develop this in the next section.

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Some of the earliest vestiges of the initial impermeability of the ʿarabī/aʿrābī boundary are evidenced in legal texts where aʿrāb are accorded a second-class at best ranking compared to urban Arabs. Fritz Steppat broached this issue in a short article examining the legal differentiation between full-fledged Muslims (who had emigrated/waged jihad) and those who "believed and did not emigrate"[861] – the aʿrāb who did not move into the towns of Islam and who did not become part of the muhājirūn/mujāhidūn Arab ethnos. Steppat argued that in mobilising warriors for the Conquests, Muslim rulers had to incorporate Bedouin who had almost no formal teaching about Islam and so constituted a lower-status group of warriors (under the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār), and that the status of those Bedouin communities who remained in Arabia after the Conquests remained degraded.[862] A legal issue arose: since the ex-Bedouin who had participated in the Conquests were entitled to state pensions of ṣadaqa and fayʾ, how would their relatives 'back in Arabia' be entitled? In the earliest extant legal texts from the first decades of the third/ninth century, the issue prejudiced Bedouin interests: the Bedouin were entitled ṣadaqa payments, but jurists reasoned that only under extreme cases of hardship were Bedouin entitled to the more lucrative fayʾ. Hence the Bedouin (if they did not join jihad armies) were denied most pension rights de facto and de jure.[863]

Steppat also notes that some jurists counted Muslim converts from the Iraqi countryside in the same category as Bedouin for the purpose of pension payments (as the new converts also did not participate in jihad), but he finds it curious that the new converts were otherwise not stigmatised, and only the Bedouin "continued

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[861] The expression "believed and did not emigrate" is from Qurʾān 8:72. Elsewhere the Qurʾān stigmatises those who do not emigrate and/or wage jihad, suggesting their lesser status and perhaps questionable faith (see Q2:218,4:89,9:20,16:41).

[862] Steppat (1989) 406-407. Donner's 1981 work on the Islamic Conquests also depicts the original conquerors as urbanites who tamed the Bedouin for the purpose of conquest, but held them as second-class citizens.

[863] Steppat (1989) 411.

to be singled out as the marginal group *per se* of Islamic society".[864] Steppat's article did not have space to explore the legal discrimination against the Bedouin beyond taxation, but it was indeed more pervasive, and Steppat uncovered a fascinating situation whereby the Bedouin at the outset of Islam were pointedly derided in urbanite legal discourses. I suggest that this can be accorded to the fact that the Bedouin lived outside of the boundaries of the early developing Arabness – Arabness was an urban phenomenon and the new elite of Islam had no reason to incorporate Bedouin within their power structure. The merger of Bedouin and Arab two centuries later, *i.e.* from the mid-third/ninth century was thus a dramatic shift, the gradual progression of which can be traced through closer scrutiny of an array of early writings.

5.2(b) Juridical Relaxation of Bedouin disparagement

Prejudice against the Bedouin in a number of legal hadith demonstrate the accuracy of Steppat's analysis of the Bedouin in various fields of law. Consider, for example, a hadith in which the Prophet reportedly decreed: "a Bedouin's (*badawī*) testimony may not be accepted against a townsman (*ṣāḥib qarya*),"[865] which rather gallingly places the Bedouin amongst the non-Muslims, convicted felons and mentally handicapped whose testimony is also not admissible. The interpretation of this hadith over time, however, demonstrates an interesting progression relevant to the analysis of the Bedouin and Arabness in classical period urban thought.

The hadith's genesis logically stems from the Qurʾān's negative depiction of the *aʿrāb/bādūn* especially vis-à-vis other Muslims. Given the clarity of the hadith's message, early third/ninth century jurists display surprising division over the interpretation of its meaning. Scholars who embraced an enhanced role of hadith in jurisprudence such as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d.241/855) reportedly accepted the

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[864] Steppat (1989) 411.

[865] Abū Dāwūd *Sunan, al-Qaḍāʾ* 17.

hadith and followed its injunction to the letter, restricting the admissibility of Bedouin testimony.[866] But other jurists whose methods were not so closely tied to hadith, such as Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Shāfiʿī, ignored this hadith and placed no restriction on Bedouin testimony.[867] Abū ʿUbayd Qāsim ibn Sallām's (d.224/838) interpretation of the hadith is even more telling: he argues that some Bedouin testimony could be boorish (*jafāʾ*) and some Bedouin are only crudely learned in Islam, hence their testimony could be unsuitable.[868] Ibn Sallām's guarded acceptance of the hadith via references to common urban literary stereotypes of Bedouin character, betrays a patronising, but not antagonistic attitude to the *aʿrāb*. The jurists' backtracking from what should be a clear cut Prophetic injunction suggests that by the third/ninth century, the axiomatic disparagement of Bedouin was becoming unfashionable and the formerly harsh attitude towards Arabian nomads had softened in the 150-200 years since the conquests, and the hadith had become counter to how jurists conceptualised Bedouin.

The process of relaxing the hadith's ruling continued in the fourth/tenth century: the Ḥanbalite jurist al-Khiraqī (d.334/945-946) interestingly avoided the hadith altogether and made no judgment against Bedouin testimony. The seventh/fourteenth century Ḥanbalite Ibn Qudāma (d.620/1223) repeats the hadith, but he reasons more graciously that the Prophet must have intended to restrict Bedouin testimony only because the Bedouin live in disparate regions and it is difficult to practically determine whether or not they are upstanding witnesses.[869] Ibn Qudāma's rationale reflects realities of Arabian insecurity that led urbanite

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[866] Ibn Qudāma *al-Mughnī* 12:31.

[867] Ibn Qudāma notes the silence of Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Shāfiʿī in this matter (*al-Mughnī* 12:31), and it is corroborated by review of earlier juridical texts: I did not find reference to the weakness of Bedouin testimony in either of al-Shāfiʿī's *al-Umm* or the main Ḥanafī text, *al-Mabsūṭ* and its commentaries.

[868] Ibn Qudāma *al-Mughnī* 12:31.

[869] Ibn Qudāma *al-Mughnī* 12:31.

scholars to perceive the desert as a distant, unknowable void, and re-interprets the hadith as not a stigma of Bedouin character, but rather as a consequence of their habitation.

Another hadith that legally 'others' the Bedouin reports that the Prophet did not require Bedouin to maintain Friday Prayers,[870] thereby differentiating Bedouin worship from rituals of the settled Muslim community. Later interpretation of this hadith also softens the text's ostensible anti-Bedouin rhetoric and again underlines the obsolescence of 'anti-Bedouin legislation'.[871] The vestiges of early separation of Bedouin and urbanite enshrined in hadith seem therefore to have been explained away by later jurists to remove the particular 'discrimination' from Islamic law which intimates a more positive notion of the Bedouin was taking hold of the Muslim urban scholarly community after the third/ninth century. This is of course contemporary with the 'philological turn' which meshed Bedouin-ness with Arabness and it logically follows that anti-Bedouin legislation would no longer suit an environment where Bedouin had been transformed into the image of the 'original' and most eloquent Arabs. I now consider how this merger took place across a broad spectrum of classical writing.

5.2(c) Bedouin 'otherness' and Arabness

It is important to observe that the *aʿrāb*, from pre-Islamic inscriptions, through the Qurʾān and to the discussions of Bedouin in urban Muslim discourses, are a people whose existence is fundamentally outside of the world of those who wrote about them. The Muslim 'othering' of the Bedouin has been discussed elsewhere,[872] but it is complex. Leder's 2005 paper "Nomadic and Sedentary Peoples

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[870] Ibn Qudāma *al-Mughnī* 2:171.

[871] Later jurists rationalised that Bedouin are not required to have Friday Prayers because their houses are impermanent and so do not satisfy the condition of *istīṭān* (settlement) which later jurists posited as one of the seven preconditions for the Friday Prayer (Ibn Qudāma *al-Mughnī* 2:171).

[872] Herzog (2005) and Binay (2006).

– a Misleading Dichotomy" notes that classical Arabic literature manifests an ambivalent idealisation and denigration of the Bedouin.[873] Herzog's study of medieval Arabic popular literature revealed that an initial aversion to Bedouin was softened; this accords with my juridical analysis above, but the status of Bedouin across a wider spectrum of Arabic literature requires further analysis to explain how they became equivalent to ʿarabī and what this meant for the Arabness idea.

Leder's insightful article revealed that literary portrayals of the Bedouin are not universally negative, though from the analysis above, I suggest that the dichotomy can be better understood when read as a process. Leder's analysis was based primarily on fourth/tenth century (and later) texts when Arabness and Bedouin-ness were already clearly interrelated, but diachronic analysis is needed to explain the genesis of this nexus and contextualise the seemingly paradoxical positive/negative impressions of the Bedouin in literature.

Two peculiarities in Arabic literary depictions of the Bedouin must also be noted. First, whether they are portrayed positively or negatively, the aʿrāb are always a polarising discourse: there are very few 'neutral', 'ordinary' Bedouin, they are either depicted as intrinsically 'better' than urbanites or much worse. Second, they are almost always referred to without names: they appear in anecdotes as "one Bedouin" (aʿrābī) which should alert us to the fact that Bedouins in Arabic literature are pervasively treated as archetypes and denied individualism. The polarised and archetypal depictions of Bedouin in Arabic literature deserve fresh consideration which I shall explore further in the last chapter of this thesis, but first I explore how Bedouin crossed the boundary into Arabness and were transformed into *the* original Arabs.

5.2(d) Bedouins and Arabness – Philological Evidence

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[873] Leder (2005) 401.

Akin to the Qurʾān's establishment of a barrier between the Muslim community and the aʿrāb outliers, the first philological texts to discuss the word aʿrāb stress its essential difference from ʿarab. In chapter 2.1 I noted that Khalīl ibn Aḥmad's *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* does not count aʿrāb amongst Arabs and asserts that the word has its own plural pattern, and is not a plural of ʿarab.[874] Sībawayh's *al-Kitāb* similarly argues that the aʿrāb collective noun is not equivalent to the ʿarab collective,[875] and Muqātil's second/eighth century exegesis also gives no indication that the aʿrāb of the Qurʾān shared a common Arabness with the Muslim Medinans.[876] Hence philological, jurisprudential and exegetical texts in early Islam all correspond in denying the aʿrāb were equivalent to, or a sub-category of ʿarab.

The early philologists' separation of aʿrāb from ʿarab may seem curious today given that aʿrāb is of the pattern afʿāl, a common plural for faʿal words like ʿarab. It is therefore not impossible that the two words could originally have been linked as a singular (ʿarab) and plural (aʿrāb) prior to the period when they were subjected to Muslim philological analysis.[877] Morphological possibility, however, is less pertinent than actual perceptions since I argued above that an identity is, at its root, a function of self-perception and changing circumstances, and in the case of Arabness, the conceivable primordial connection of ʿarab and aʿrāb is of little relevance to the words' meanings in early Islam given that no early philologists made the connection. Grounding ourselves to the task of 'correcting' classical grammarians misses the opportunity to better understand the changing uses of Arabness as it actually functioned in early Islamic social memory and ethnic

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[874] Al-Khalīl *al-ʿAyn* 2:128.

[875] Sībawayh *al-Kitāb* 3:379.

[876] Consider the multiple citations of aʿrāb in Qurʾān Chapter 9 and Muqātil's commentary (*Tafsīr* 2:189-203).

[877] Treating aʿrāb as the plural of ʿarab is not unambiguously 'correct', however. ʿArab is itself a plural: I am unaware of any citation of ʿarab to connote "one Arab" – a singular Arab is invariably ʿarabī. ʿArab and aʿrāb may, in the final analysis, have entered Arabic usage from different origins.

identity. What is clear is that at the moment when ʿarabī became, for the first time, a clear marker of self-identification, philologists dissociated it from aʿrāb, and the convergence of 'Arab' and 'Bedouin' in Muslim writing was a slow process.

The next dictionary to consider aʿrāb is al-Azharī's *Tahdhīb al-lugha*, written almost 200 years after Sībawayh's *al-Kitāb* and contemporary with Ibn Fāris and Ibn Jinnī's arguments that the pre-Islamic Bedouin embodied *the* model of correct Arabic. Al-Azharī's definition of 'ʿarab' begins with a differentiation of ʿarab from aʿrāb, but closer analysis reveals that barrier is superficial and that a significant shift from the second/eighth century had occurred. Al-Azharī identifies 'Arabs' (al-ʿarab) with those who settled in the countryside, cities or *al-qurā al-ʿarabiyya* (the 'Arab villages'), whereas those who "those who live in the desert [*bādiya*]" and lead a nomadic lifestyle – the Bedouin – he calls aʿrāb.[878] As al-Azharī continues his definition, however, he begins to break the barrier down, implying a permeability between 'Arab' and 'Bedouin' worlds. He explains that an aʿrābī Bedouin can join the ʿarab Arabs if he settles in a permanent habitation, and vice versa.[879] He ostensibly reiterates the relative superiority of the 'Arabs' in a statement that an ʿarab would become upset if one were to call him an aʿrābī, whereas the aʿrābī would be delighted to be counted as an ʿArab(!),[880] but the dichotomy al-Azharī erects between ʿarab and aʿrāb has little practical effect. Al-Azharī defined Arabs as those of Arabic lineage (*nasab*) which merges both ʿarab and aʿrāb into one collective, and he closes his entry on ʿ-R-B with a comment "all those who inhabit the Arabian Peninsula and speak Arabic are Arabs".[881] By equating Arab with Arabia (and forgetting that Arabness developed in Muslim Iraq and Syria), al-Azharī leaves little room to distinguish ʿarab

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[878] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:166-167.
[879] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:167.
[880] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:166.
[881] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 2:171. See Chapter 2 for my interpretation of his definition.

from *aʿrāb* other than by lifestyle. In al-Azharī's final analysis, all Arabic speaking Arabians are ethnically Arab irrespective of lifestyle. This is further confirmed in al-Azharī's introduction to *Tahdhīb al-lugha* where he relates a remarkable story of his long imprisonment with Arabian Bedouin of the Hawāzin tribe following his capture by the Qarāmiṭa while attempting the Hajj. Echoing the spirit of Ibn Fāris and Ibn Jinnī's philological theories of Arabic purity, al-Azharī explains how he rather enjoyed his enslavement, as such close-quarter living enabled him to experience the 'superior' Bedouin Arabic first-hand, and he remarks that their Bedouin-ness was the root of their enhanced Arabic abilities. They

> originated from the desert steppe (*al-bādiya*), they followed the rainfall in search of pasture after the springtime, then returned to the permanent waterholes. They pastured sheep and lived off their milk. They spoke with their Bedouin character and their [linguistic] genius as is their wont – in their speech there is almost no mistake or serious error. I stayed with them as a prisoner for a long time ... and benefited from addressing them and from [hearing] their conversations with each other.[882]

It is important to observe that while al-Azharī counts his Hawāzin captors as quintessential Bedouin, he never calls them *aʿrāb*, rather, he identifies them as *ʿarab*.[883] To understand why his definition of *ʿarab/aʿrāb* purports to separate the two, whereas his own prose does not apply the distinction, a consideration of the methods of classical Arabic lexicography is relevant. Modern scholars note that the dictionaries were "deliberate instruments of conservatism",[884] and classical philologists of al-Azharī's era tended to view Arabic as an ancient, unchanging language.[885] Al-Azharī's dictionary definition of *ʿarab* and *aʿrāb* conscientiously

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[882] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 1:21.

[883] Al-Azharī *Tahdhīb* 1:21.

[884] Carter (1990) 116.

[885] Weiss (1984) 99, Weiss (1992) 129.

maintains the distinction inherited from earlier generations of philologists when the ʿarab/aʿrāb distinction was more pressing (as evidenced in the Qurʾān and early legal opinions), but the fact that al-Azharī broke this distinction down both in his more detailed definition of 'Arab' and his own narrative of Arabian experience, reveals that the dichotomy no longer signified such a rigid barrier.

As further evidence, al-Jawharī's (d.c.393/1002-3) dictionary *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, nearly contemporary with al-Azharī's *Tahdhīb* defines the aʿrāb as "those of them [the Arabs] who specifically inhabit the deserts",[886] subsuming aʿrāb and ʿarab into the same ethnos/race (jīl). As a logical extension, a text from the succeeding generation, al-Wazīr al-Maghribī's (d.418/1027) *Adab al-khawāṣṣ*, makes an express statement that "aʿrāb is the plural of ʿarab".[887] This is the earliest text of which I am aware that morphologically conflates ʿarab and aʿrāb, and it is significant that this well post-dates the 'Bedouin turn' in classical Arabic philology. Al-Wazīr al-Maghribī, however, does not argue that the ʿarab/aʿrāb argument is necessarily correct: it is in fact the last section in a lengthy discourse about the origin of the word ʿarab[888] where he states that ʿarab is most likely derived from the notions of clear speech,[889] thereby linking ethnic Arabness to the Qurʾānic ʿarabī in a manner akin to my present thesis. As for the other possible derivations of ʿarabī (he enumerates 13), al-Maghribī explains that he believes they are not correct, but relates them "on account of our preference to satisfy the heart of the reader, and to leave him the choice of dissenting opinions";[890] the ʿarab/aʿrāb comparison is made at the very end of this diversion.

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[886] Al-Jawharī *al-Ṣiḥāḥ* 1:178.

[887] Al-Wazīr al-Maghribī *Adab* 1:115.

[888] Al-Wazīr al-Maghribī *Adab* 1:87-115.

[889] Al-Wazīr al-Maghribī *Adab* 1:87-88.

[890] Al-Wazīr al-Maghribī *Adab* 1:88.

The convergence of *ʿarab* and *aʿrāb* continued: a century after al-Maghribī, Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī's (d.573/1178) dictionary *Shams al-ʿulūm* includes the *aʿrāb* ("people of the steppe/desert" (*ahl al-bādiya*)) within his definition of *ʿarab* which is significant since his dictionary is arranged by word-pattern and not by root: hence his inclusion of *aʿrāb* within his definition of *ʿarab* implies he considered them parts of one category.[891] The difference is established as merely about habitat: both *ʿarab* and *aʿrāb* share the same ethnic identity. Two centuries later, the process had developed even further: Ibn Manẓūr's definition of *ʿarab* in his *Lisān al-ʿarab* notes that an Arab is a person of Arabic lineage "even if he is not a Bedouin"[892] – a complete reversal of the first dictionaries as Ibn Manẓūr's notion of Arab now implies, *prima facie*, that 'Arab' is equal to 'Bedouin'.

The lexicographers' melding of Bedouin into Arab following the early third/ninth century resonates with their scholarly companions' promotion of the Bedouin as 'best Arabic speakers', and since the philologists also argued that the best Arabic language was a vernacular outside of their urban setting, the long tradition of *aʿrāb* 'otherness' assisted the efforts to depict Arabic as an intrinsically non-native language. The broad sweep of social, demographic and political change along with the manifest efforts of philologists to project the Arabic language into the distant, inaccessible Arabian Desert all unite to offer an explanation of why, from the third/ninth century, the former division of *aʿrāb* and *ʿarab* became obsolete and forgotten as a practical consideration. The modern stereotype of Arab as Bedouin should thus be seen as a creation of the third-fourth/ninth-tenth century urban Iraqi scholarly community. The pre-Islamic Arab stereotype bears no relation to actual pre-Islamic Arabian identity; it is the legacy of later Abbasid litterateurs.

5.2(e) The convergence of Bedouin and Arabs: other evidence

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[891] Al-Ḥimyarī *Shams* 7:4456-4457.

[892] Ibn Manẓūr *Lisān* 1:586.

Paradigm shifts as substantial as the merging of Bedouin and Arab into one combined ethnos occur gradually: a readership accustomed to conceptualising *aʿrāb* and *ʿarab* as separate identities cannot suddenly forget tradition and instantly convert Arabness into Bedouin-ness and 'other' the Arabs into an Arabian isolation. Instead it should be expected to have occurred as a process, and this is perceptible via diachronic analysis of a series of extant texts in which the history and culture of the Arabs is a major component. Below I consider the depictions of Arabness in (i) al-Jāḥiẓ's (d.255/868) *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*; (ii) Ibn Qutayba's (d.276/889) *Faḍl al-ʿarab wa-l-tanbīh ʿalā ʿulūmihā*, an express cultural defence of the Arabs and detailed description of what Ibn Qutayba presents as the quintessence of Arabness;[893] (iii) al-Yaʿqūbī's (d.c.275/888 or 292/905) *Tārīkh*'s detailed section on pre-Islamic Arab history and Arab culture; and (iv) al-Masʿūdī's (d.346/957) *Murūj al-dhahab* which ostensibly follows al-Yaʿqūbī's model, but with crucial amendments that point to a complete change in the depiction of Arabness.

We have already considered al-Jāḥiẓ's linguistic theories, and, when relating these to Arabness, the stirring of a paradigm shift appears. Al-Jāḥiẓ lauds the *kalām al-ʿarab* and the *lisān ʿarabī* mentioned in the Qurʾān,[894] but he departs from the Qurʾān's *aʿrāb/ʿarabī* distinction by pervasively maintaining that the best speakers of this language are the *aʿrāb*. He refers to *aʿrāb* as *khullaṣ* (pure),[895] implying that they best embody the speech of the *ʿarab*, and in the section of *al-Bayān* which most clearly musters a defence of 'Arabs' against their detractors – the *Kitāb al-ʿaṣā* – al-Jāḥiẓ specifically cites the *aʿrāb* as the living proof of the Arabs' linguistic

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[893] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 35,51-55.

[894] *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* opens with this praise 1:8-12. Note in this passage al-Jāḥiẓ deftly shifts the Qurʾānic indefinite "an Arabic tongue" into definite Arabness via his discussion of the language of "the Arabs" and "the Quraysh tribe".

[895] *Al-Bayān* 2:7;3:29.

superiority.[896] His invitation to his contemporaries to visit the *aʿrāb* and experience their eloquence is hollow – the Peninsula was cut off by virtue of its insecurity and we are left to rely on al-Jāḥiẓ to teach us the bountiful *bayān* of the Arabic language, but howsoever idealised and self-serving al-Jāḥiẓ's discourse may have been, it critically relies on *aʿrāb* and *ʿarab* being related in a manner contrary to the earlier distinction of 'backward' and 'un-Islamic' *aʿrāb* from the Muslim, urban *ʿarab* tribesmen who controlled the Muslim world in the first two centuries of Islam.

Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn evidences that al-Jāḥiẓ was aware of the crucial need to link *aʿrāb* and *ʿarab*. Towards the end of the text, when summarising notions of culture, his contemporary world and Arabness , he praises Arabness and specifically the Arabness of the past:

> the Arabs better retain what they hear and better memorise what is narrated; and they have poets which register their glories and immortalises their merits. They followed in their Islam the practices from their *Jāhiliyya*. And on the basis of that [the Umayyads] established great honour and glory [as opposed to the Abbasids].[897]

He then chides the Abbasids and his scholarly predecessors of the late second/eighth century, by noting that their turn from Arab ways of scholarship condemned their enterprises to "remember only a little of what used to be much".[898] Once again, the disparagement of the present leaves al-Jāḥiẓ in the powerful position of 'expert' – for he has learned as much as is still possible of the knowledge of the 'better period' – and regarding his ideas of Arabness, al-Jāḥiẓ ascribes the scholarly prowess of the Umayyads to the fact that they were a "*dawla ʿarabiyya aʿrābiyya*" (an Arab Bedouin state).[899] This is an exceptional development from the prior use of the word *aʿrāb*: in joining both adjectives, *ʿarabī* and *aʿrābī* together, al-

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[896] *Al-Bayān* 3:29.

[897] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 3:366.

[898] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 3:366.

[899] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 3:366.

Jāḥiẓ defines Umayyads in a way the Umayyad Caliphs themselves could not have accepted: he makes them pure Arabs (which they doubtless would have liked to hear), but also *aʿrāb* (an association which would have surprised if not outright offended their sensibilities). History is written by the present, and the third/ninth century al-Jāḥiẓ conceptualised Arabness as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon most purely exhibited by Arabian Bedouin. Hence he needed the Umayyads of 100-150 years before to appear as a Bedouin state, and he described their history as such, deconstructing the conceptual/theological/legal barrier erected in the Umayyad era between the Arab elite and the *aʿrāb* underclass in the process.[900]

Al-Jāḥiẓ's rewriting of Arab history into a Bedouin guise did not completely reverse the older discourses: al-Jāḥiẓ does not express *ʿarab* and *aʿrāb* as exactly synonymous (otherwise why would he use both terms?), but in positing that the *aʿrāb* are the purest Arabs and in using the words in tandem he breaks down the barrier of difference and prompts readers to reconceptualise Arabness via the desert. Texts about Arabness in the generation after al-Jāḥiẓ reveal the further development whereby Arabs became increasingly enveloped in a Bedouin ideal, rendering the *ʿarab* and *aʿrāb* increasingly obsolete such that the word *ʿarab* would take over the semantic connotations of *aʿrāb* and become a new byword for 'Bedouin' within two or three generations of al-Jāḥiẓ.

Ibn Qutayba's *Faḍl al-ʿarab wa-l-tanbīh ʿalā ʿulūmiha* echoes al-Jāḥiẓ's nexus of Arabness with Bedouin-ness. Ibn Qutayba relies on anecdotes about the Bedouin to praise Arabs, and so both (i) rehabilitates *aʿrāb* from the Qurʾānic disparagement into a worthy nation; and (ii) merges *aʿrāb* and *ʿarab* into one united heritage. This is most evident in the *Tanbīh*, the second section of Ibn Qutayba's work which argues for the Arabs' cultural achievement by enumerating the 'sciences' in which the

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[900] Note in *al-Bayān* 1:91, al-Jāḥiẓ similarly groups "orators of Banū Hāshim [the Umayyads]" with "eloquent tribesmen [*qabāʾil* – i.e. the *aʿrāb*]".

Arabs excelled over all other nations of the world.[901] These sciences are horse husbandry, observation of the stars and clouds, physiognomy (*al-firāsa*), chiromancy (*al-qiyāfa*), augury (*al-ʿiyāfa*), geomancy (*al-khaṭṭ*), divination (*al-kihāna*), poetry and oratory. All of these 'sciences' are skills of oral cultures and nomads and pertain to the observation of natural phenomena. The knowledge of stars and clouds is expressly noted as skills the Arabs needed for their seasonal movements in search of pasture;[902] the sciences of prediction involve the close observation of natural phenomenon; *al-khaṭṭ* is a specific desert science involving the drawing of lines in the sand;[903] and poetry and oratory are skills of oral literature, not sedentary, literate civilisations. Ibn Qutayba's list thus shifts the cultural superiority of the Arabs *away* from the Fertile Crescent and the *amṣār* (where Arabs developed into an ethnos over the previous two centuries) and into the desert. In so doing, Ibn Qutayba separates Arabs from the established cultures of the Middle East such as Persia, and spares Arabs from like-for-like competition in which the relatively new Arab ethnos and culture lacked a strong hand of ancient cultural achievement. Ibn Qutayba's shift permits him to construct an image of the Arab as eloquent, observant and intelligent nomads possessing a unique knowledge unlike any other world culture. Shifting Arabs into the desert accordingly had uses beyond strict philology, and the value of these secondary benefits emerging from the philological discourses can explain why the Arab qua Bedouin ideal gained such wide popularity.

Not all readers of Ibn Qutayba were moved by his argument – the Eastern Iranian al-Bīrūnī expressed his disagreement and notes that any nomadic people possess the kinds of knowledge which Ibn Qutayba considered exclusively 'Arab'.[904]

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[901] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 119.
[902] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 131-133.
[903] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 143.
[904] Al-Bīrūnī *al-Athār* 238-239.

But Ibn Qutayba's discourse offers an elegant means to extol Arabness and the Islamic culture wrought by the conquests by shifting them from direct competition with other, more established civilisations. To establish this argument, it was essential that Arabness adopt axiomatic Bedouin-ness, and that quintessential Arabness be removed from the very cities where it had actually developed, and be transplanted into a historical desert where, ironically, no pre-Islamic peoples had ever called themselves Arabs. It seems that Ibn Qutayba affects this in order to protect Arab heritage (and the honour of his own civilisation) by creating a more ancient past for the Arabs.[905] Given the strict division of *ʿarab* and *aʿrāb* in the first centuries of Islam, ethnic Arabs could be expected to reject the Bedouinisation of their heritage,[906] but since Arabs had long lost all political influence and demographic distinctiveness in the cities of Ibn Qutayba's world, he and likeminded scholars were relatively free to reconstruct the ideas of Arabness to suit their own discourses without competition from expressions of Arab self-identity.

Ibn Qutayba's argument that Arab sciences are Bedouin and his reliance on pre-Islamic Arabian desert anecdotes to support his cultural defence of the Arab people leaves a reader wondering how *ʿarab* and *aʿrāb* can be distinguished. The logical result is for the two terms to merge, but the persistence of the word *aʿrāb* in Ibn Qutayba's text suggests that he is situated at the beginning of the process. Nonetheless, the lexical terms he selects evidence effort to reduce citation of *aʿrāb* in favour of *ʿarab*. For example, in a limited number of instances, we find reference to *aʿrāb*, and in at least one case Ibn Qutayba refers to *aʿrāb* as a despised collective

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[905] McCants's 2011 model of the construction of Muslim civilisation crucially overlooks the notion of Arabness and the identity of the producers of early Islamic culture: in assuming that they were Arabs by virtue of the fact that they spoke Arabic, McCants does not recognise that Iraqi Muslim authors, when discussing Arabness, are not describing themselves, but are constructing more nuanced discourses about the past and a *foreign* group – the Arabs.

[906] I explore resistance to the Arab/Bedouin philological archetype in Chapter 6.1.

in the manner of earlier authors when he cites a statement ascribed to Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās, the Abbasid spiritual leader prior to the Abbasid overthrow of the Umayyads, which states "*aʿrāb* are riffraff (*ʿilāj*)".[907] But when speaking in his own voice, Ibn Qutayba is (unsurprisingly) more positive and notes, for instance, that "the *aʿrāb* are the most observant of people regarding trifling, insignificant things".[908] By this he does not intend that they are a miserable people whose gaze is forever lowered into the sand, but rather that they are supremely observant of all things, great and small.[909] He also cites individual Bedouin (*aʿrābī*) informants for examples of eloquent Arabic,[910] though in another case, he cites a settled Arab from Medina alongside a Bedouin *aʿrābī* as joint examples of eloquence,[911] and herein we perceive an important aspect of *al-Faḍl*'s terminology: despite the persistence of *aʿrāb* as a reference to Bedouin, they are accorded a place within the wider Arab collective. Ibn Qutayba more often prefers to count the Bedouin as simply *ʿarab* and adjusts his terminology accordingly. We therefore find reference to Bedouin as "*Arabs* from the desert steppe" (*al-bādūn min al-ʿarab*)[912] or an "*Arab* king of the desert steppe" (*malik al-ʿarab bi-l-bādiya*),[913] and Ibn Qutayba calls all of Arabia "the land of the Arabs" (*arḍ al-ʿarab*).[914] Moreover, the nomadic skills of travelling about the desert are ascribed to *ʿarab* and not *aʿrāb*,[915] and in his

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[907] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 99.

[908] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 40.

[909] The statement occurs in the story of Jirān al-ʿAwd whose lovers stole his toothpick (*Faḍl* 39-40). Ibn Qutayba intimates that opponents of Arabs claimed that only a miserable people indeed would lament the loss of a toothpick, but Ibn Qutayba offers a different interpretation which portrays the Arabs as able to perceive subtle differences in toothpick wood by which they could identify as coming from specific regions. Ibn Qutayba elevates toothpick-knowledge to a venerable Arab equivalent of Western wine or whiskey tasting today.

[910] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 61,78.

[911] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 78.

[912] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 66.

[913] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 86.

[914] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 105. Contrast this with al-Jāḥiẓ's "*Bilād al-Aʿrāb*" (*al-Bayān* 3:29).

[915] Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 125,131.

analysis of individual sciences in the *Tanbīh* section of *al-Faḍl*, Ibn Qutayba makes no reference to *aʿrāb* at all, referring to each nomadic science exclusively in terms of Arab knowledge.

I noted in Chapter 1 that Ibn Qutayba's *Faḍl* praises both *al-Jāhiliyya* and Islam to create a positive impression of the entire Arab past. Much like al-Jāḥiẓ, the period before the Abbasids emerges as the prime of Arabness, and therefore Ibn Qutayba's discourse requires a positive impression of both pre-Islamic past and Bedouin Arabs. The term *aʿrāb* with its potentially derogatory Qurʾānic connotations is accordingly nearly purged in favour of a new notion of Arabness inclusive of desert dwellers.

Al-Yaʿqūbī's *Tārīkh*, contemporary with Ibn Qutayba's *Faḍl* contains a detailed treatment of pre-Islamic Arab history also reflecting the discourses in Ibn Qutayba's *Faḍl*. Al-Yaʿqūbī makes no reference to *aʿrāb* in pre-Islamic history,[916] and melds both settled-ness and nomadism in his account of Arab history. He promulgates a two-fold division of Arab history dividing the "Arab kingdoms" from central Arabians. The division reflects a divide between settled and nomad, but the "kingdoms" also include the more nomadic Kinda from the deserts of south-central Arabia,[917] and his account of the central Arabians includes a long section on the settled population of Mecca.[918] He completes the section with references to Arab religion, poetry, customs and seasonal nomad fairs – each without reference to *aʿrāb*.[919] By refraining from reference to disreputable *aʿrāb* in pre-Islamic history and by promoting the culture of a monolithic ethnos of "Arabs" in *al-Jāhiliyya*, al-Yaʿqūbī

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[916] Though al-Yaʿqūbī does retain the term as a byword for intractable, disorganised and violent Bedouins who upset security in Arabia during Islamic times (*Tārīkh* 2:488,498). Gordon (2001) 87,n147 considers the third/ninth century associations of 'Arab troops' with "vagabonds", "street-thugs" and "outlaws".

[917] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:216-220.

[918] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:221-253.

[919] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:254-271.

mirrors what appears to a comprehensive praise of Arabs accompanied by an unequivocal shift of Arab culture into the desert where its 'original' history is reconstructed as a period of long habitation and empire-building in Arabia.

Two generations following al-Yaʿqūbī, al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab* written, according to the text itself, in 332/943-4,[920] presents another world history, ostensibly on al-Yaʿqūbī's model,[921] but with key differences in the presentation of Arab history. Mirroring al-Yaʿqūbī, al-Masʿūdī also divides Arab history into the division of 'kingdoms' and 'Arabians', but his section on the 'Arabians' begins with a long excursus on nomadism. The Arabs are depicted as the quintessential people of the desert steppe (*al-bawādī*) and al-Masʿūdī considers them akin to other world peoples such as the Kurds,[922] Turks, Eastern Iranian Sijistānīs,[923] Berbers,[924] and Ethiopic Africans.[925] When relating Arab Bedouin-ness, al-Masʿūdī makes no reference to *aʿrāb* – only a collective *ʿarab*. By the expression "Bedouin Arabs" (*al-ʿarab al-badw*), al-Masʿūdī implies that Arabs are not necessarily all Bedouins, but closer reading of his chapter reveals that he conceptualises the Arabs as *originally* all Bedouin. Al-Masʿūdī peels the layers of history back to the Flood and notes that certain peoples chose the desert over settlements for a homeland.[926] The Arabs were one of these people, al-Masʿūdī ascribes to these ancient Arabs a statement that "we were skilled in travelling the earth and we live where we want, that is more salubrious than other lifestyles", and accordingly al-Masʿūdī explains that they

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[920] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1136.

[921] Both al-Yaʿqūbī's *Tārīkh* and al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj* begin with an expansive history of all peoples of the world since Creation, including the pre-Islamic Arabs, following which they narrate the history of Islam organised by Caliphal reign.

[922] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1118.

[923] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1117.

[924] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1104.

[925] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1105.

[926] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1102.

chose to live as desert nomads.[927] Al-Masʿūdī offers an alternative explanation that "the ancient Arabs" (*al-qudamāʾ min al-ʿarab*) chose desert life because they saw in urban settlement "shame and shortcomings", and "the knowledgeable amongst them (*dhawū al-maʿrifa*) declared that the desert was more healthy and more conducive to a strong, salubrious life".[928] Nomadism is thus expressed as the Arab (and not *aʿrāb*) way of life since the dawn of Arab history.

Following these anecdotes, al-Masʿūdī asserts that "all of the Arabs (*jamīʿ al-ʿarab*) gather around waterholes"[929] (the quintessence of nomadic existence), and when narrating the history of the peoples he identifies as the first Arabs (*al-ʿarab al-ʿāriba*) as "all Bedouins who spread through the land",[930] and reports that "a group of experts of history (*ahl al-siyar wa-l-akhbār*) note that all of the [first Arab] tribes … were people of tents, nomads living in temporary settlements across the land".[931] Al-Masʿūdī concludes that Arabs did not construct cities and settlements until later in their history – and not once does he refer to any of the Bedouin as *aʿrāb*. Al-Masʿūdī shifts the discourse of nomadism towards primitivism, with his emphasis on Arab Bedouin-ness leading him to posit that Islam was the catalyst that brought Arabs out of the desert for the first time. In this vein, he relates an anecdote attributed to the second Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb in which the Caliph reportedly asked "a wise man" upon the Muslim armies' conquest of the Near East:

> we are an Arab people [*unās ʿarab*]; God granted us conquest over the lands, and we want to settle them and live in walled towns [*amṣār*]; so tell us about cities [*mudun*],

[927] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1108.

[928] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1109.

[929] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1112.

[930] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1150.

[931] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1166.

their climates and settlements, and how their earth and climate affects their inhabitants.[932]

Arabness even at the dawn of Islam is cast as a manifestation of ancient, primordial Bedouin-ness.

Al-Masʿūdī continues, relating a story about the pre-Islamic Sasanian Persian emperor 'Kisrā' and "one of the Arab orators" in which the Persian asks the Arab why Arabs live in *al-bādiya* and why they chose to be Bedouin (*al-badw*).[933] In accordance with each anecdote in this chapter of *al-Murūj*, the 'Arab' describes the salutary desert environment and the nobility and courage which is fosters on its inhabitants.[934] Al-Masʿūdī's emphasis on the physically salubrious primitivism downplays the scope for Bedouin intellectual heritage made by Ibn Qutayba; the ramifications of al-Masʿūdī's notion of Arabness will be considered in the next section. As regards Arabness *qua* Bedouin-ness, *Murūj al-dhahab* is a pivotal marker in the history of the word *aʿrāb*. In contrast to earlier writings, al-Masʿūdī's lengthy chapter on Bedouin-ness and Arabness is devoid of mention of *aʿrāb* – for him, the term *ʿarab* suffices to convey essential Bedouin-ness. Tracing backwards 75 years through al-Yaʿqūbī, Ibn Qutayba and al-Jāḥiẓ we can perceive what, in retrospect, is an inexorable decline in the citation of *aʿrāb* accompanied by an emphatic shift of Arabness into the desert. It is likely not co-incidental that the beginning of clear discourses about the single, uniform *kalām al-ʿarab* in philological writings coincides with the emergence of *al-ʿarab* in historical narratives as the cohesive, uniform inhabitants of Arabia who, like the language itself, were most intimately associated with the desert, evidencing a fourth/tenth century watershed for the

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[932] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §973.

[933] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1111.

[934] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1111.

Bedouinisation of the Arab that broke down the spatial barrier formerly separating ʿarab and aʿrāb, and rendered the term aʿrāb obsolete in discourses about Arabness.

As further evidence that 'Arab' alone became a signifier of Bedouin-ness and supplanted the term aʿrāb after the third/ninth century, consider the tradition of exegesis for Qurʾān 81:4. The verse describes the terror of Judgment Day and warns that: "heavily pregnant camels (sawālif) will be abandoned". Exegetes have interpreted this reference to mean that people will be so frightened that they will forget everything, including their most prized possessions. The first extant *mufassir,* Muqātil ibn Sulaymān explains that the reference to pregnant camels proves the verse was addressed to Arabians, since "nothing is more beloved to the aʿrāb than a pregnant camel".[935] The later *tafsīr*s make precisely the same point, but mark a crucial change in terminology: al-Qurṭubī (d.671/1272) relates the pregnant camel is the thing "most dear to the ʿarab",[936] and similarly, al-Biqāʿī's (d.885/1480) *Naẓm al-Durar* explains, "they are the most beloved of the possessions of the ʿarab".[937] I have proposed that ʿarab was a designator of urban Muslims in the second/eighth century and had no connotation of Bedouin-ness: Muqātil's choice of aʿrāb to describe camel herders is in keeping with the early notion of ʿarab as urbanite Muslims; whilst the replacement of aʿrāb with ʿarab in later exegesis corresponds to my argument that by the later classical period, ʿarab replaced this term. The 'Bedouinisation' of the Arab was complete.[938]

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[935] Muqātil *Tafsīr* 4:601.

[936] Al-Qurṭubī *Jāmiʿ* 19:149.

[937] Al-Biqāʿī *Naẓm* 8:337.

[938] References to aʿrāb occur in post-fourth/tenth century literature, but as a technical term related to the Qurʾānic citations of aʿrāb – *e.g.* al-Bīrūnī's *al-Athār* (238-239) considers the negative stereotypes of the Qurʾānic aʿrāb and Ibn Ḥazm's *al-Fiṣal* (3:28-29) uses the term aʿrāb as the technical marker of Arabian nomads at the time of Muḥammad, again citing the Qurʾān. When both these authors consider the ancient Arabians in general, however, they exclusively use the term al-ʿarab like the authors detailed above.

Examples of the late-classical convergence of *ʿarab* and *aʿrāb* extend even to political titulature and material culture. A brass basin from Mosul dated 1275-1300 CE (c.670-700 AH) (Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst I.6581) refers to its courtly owner as ruler of *al-aʿrāb wa-l-ʿajam*, whereas a brass plate from Shiraz dated 1345-1350 CE (745-760 AH) refers to rule over *al-ʿarab wa-l-ʿajam*.[939] The shared message of the 'world domination' enjoyed by their Il-Khanid patrons is clear, the interchangability of *ʿarab* and *aʿrāb* is instructive.

5.3 Bedouin Arabness and the emergence of a *Jāhiliyya* archetype

As hinted in the foregoing, the conceptual merging of Arab and Bedouin which naturally accorded with the philologists' agenda to cast the *kalām al-ʿarab* as an ancient desert language had wide-ranging ramifications for fourth/tenth century conceptions of Arabness and depictions of Arab history. This section shall survey salient changes that illustrate how, in later classical Arabic literature, we encounter a new narrative about Bedouin-ness that created a novel notion of pre-Islamic Arabian Arabness crafted not to uncover the 'true past', but instead to serve urban Iraqi, Muslim-era discourses.

5.3(a) Rewriting Arab history: al-Masʿūdī's Murūj al-dhahab

As noted in Chapter 1, *akhbārī* narrators of the third/ninth century, such as *al-Muḥabbar* and *Tārīkh al-Yaʿqūbī* narrate Arab history as a succession of kingdoms and Arabian noblemen from the pre-Islamic past that carried into Islam's noble *jihād* warriors. The texts also depict Arab religious beliefs as a long history of monotheism, traceable to their prophet/father figures Abraham/Ishmael and/or Hūd. In this respect, Ibn Ḥabīb and al-Yaʿqūbī's narratives accord with the slightly earlier account of pre-Islamic Yemeni history, *Waṣāyā al-mulūk*, attributed to the

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[939] See Ward (2014) 133-135, 142-144 for images of the objects.

Yamānī partisan and poet Diʿbil al-Khuzāʿī (d.246/860).[940] *Waṣāyā* narrates pre-Islamic Yemeni history as a tale of Muslim Yemeni kings who perpetuated Islamic belief from their prophet/father Hūd. For modern readers, the notion of pre-Muḥammadic Arabian Islam is bizarre, and both al-Yaʿqūbī and Diʿbil's texts are vague as to why Muḥammad's mission was even needed, since they both intimate that the Islamic faith was strong in Arabia until only shortly before Muḥammad[941] – *i.e.* the Arabians (or Arabs, as they are described in the texts) strayed only for a brief period before being set back on the Muslim path by Muḥammad's mission.

In the context of the power politics of early Islam, the narratives of pre-Muḥammadic Islam in Arabia seem reflective of Arab Muslims in early Islamic Iraq narrating their own story of origins. Arabness and Islam were, as I have argued, closely interrelated, and as Arab identity connoted the people of Islam, it is logical that ethnic Arabs would embed Islamic belief into their myths of origins; there is conversely no logic to presume that self-styled Arabs (*i.e.* the Islamic Empire's elite) would chastise their own idolatrous past or cast their history as a tale of miserable nomads awaiting Muḥammad's mission. Arabs could tell their history as a reflection of their present elite status in early Islam, and narrate tales of ancient nobility and monotheism. This is precisely the shape of the stories of Arabness told before the fourth/tenth century: al-Yaʿqūbī, Diʿbil al-Khuzāʿī, al-Balādhurī's genealogy of the Arabs *Ansāb al-ashrāf* (note how the title casts the Arab tribes as collective nobility – *ashrāf*) and even the pre-Islamic Yemeni sections included in the Prophet's biography preserved in Ibn Hishām's *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*. Each text bestows prophecy on both Northern and Southern Arabs and depicts a unity between Arabs

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[940] See Note 153 on this text's authorship.

[941] The Islamic faith of the pre-Muḥammadic 'Yemeni Arabs' was said to have been partly corrupted by Judaism during the reign of Dhū Nuwās shortly before Muḥammad, and the 'Northern Arabs' faith corrupted the erection of idols in the Kaʿba. The details for both are vague, and pre-Muḥammadic Arabian pagandom is not emphasized.

in terms of place of common origins and common religious belief, *i.e.* the same criteria by which Arab unity was expressed in the cities of second/eighth century Iraq.

The Arab *qua* Bedouin model of the third/ninth century when ethnic Arabs declined politically and philologists filled the Arabness vacuum with their own ideas represents the polar opposite of how earlier Arab elites described their past, especially given the Qur'ān's negative stigma of *aʿrāb* compared with its exalted status of *ʿarabī*). But in the absence of an Arab elite to defend their notion of Arabness, the new, non-Arab cultural producers turned Arabness into an object, a signifier of 'others' external to the Iraqi scholarly milieu. From a mirror image of early Muslim elite, pre-Islamic Arab history became the binary opposite of the fourth/tenth century *adīb*'s world. Al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab* illustrates this shift, maintaining the form of Arab history as al-Yaʿqūbī presented it, but amending the content in at least three salient respects.

5.3(a)(i) Pre-Muḥammadic Arabian Islam

Al-Masʿūdī tempers the narratives of pre-Muḥammadic Islam in Arabia. He accepts the older narrative that Northern Arabs descend from Abraham through Ishmael and that Southern Arabs have a connection to the prophetic mission of Hūd from Noah, but in both cases, al-Masʿūdī declares Arabia's early Islam was fleeting. In the case of Hūd's people ʿĀd, "confusions [*shubah*] entered their minds after that since they stopped reasoning and considering religion, and they turned to inactivity and followed pleasure and tradition ... and they worshipped statues".[942] Al-Masʿūdī records Hūd's escape with "those believers who followed him",[943] but we hear nothing more about them and al-Masʿūdī ends the passage with a poem describing the total destruction of ʿĀd, leaving little scope to imagine that Yemeni kings

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[942] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1171.
[943] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1175.

continued Hūd's mission.[944] In conformity with this notion of Hūd's unheeded message, al-Masʿūdī makes no mention of Hūd in his chapter on pre-Islamic Yemeni kings,[945] and accepts that only one Yemeni king, Abū Karib al-Ḥimyarī was a believer "seven hundred years before Muḥammad's mission".[946] While al-Masʿūdī cites two poems also recorded in Diʿbil's history of Muslim pre-Islamic Yemeni kings, al-Masʿūdī does not situate Abū Karib within a line of Muslim Yemeni kings as Diʿbil's narrative does, and he gives no explanation for Abū Karib's apparent Islam, nor indication that monotheistic belief continued after him. The glue which held together Diʿbil's history of pre-Islamic Yemen – the passing down of Hūd's Prophetic message – is erased in al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj*.

As for the Northern Arabians, al-Masʿūdī only accepts that a small number espoused monotheistic belief before Muḥammad, naming Khuss ibn Sāʿida al-Iyādī and two members of the ʿAbd al-Qays tribe (Baḥīrā al-Rāhib and Riʾāb al-Shannī) amongst five other Arab tribal "believers of the period between Jesus and Muḥammad".[947] Otherwise, al-Masʿūdī does not connect Arab descent from Ishmael and the presence of the Holy Kaʿba in Mecca with the maintenance of Arabian monotheism before Muḥammad. Interestingly, al-Masʿūdī does narrate a long biography of Muḥammad's uncle, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib which portrays him as a pious and perhaps *almost* Muslim inhabitant of *al-Jāhiliyya*.[948] Earlier historians also comment on ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib's pre-Muḥammadic piety in the wider context of lingering Abrahamic faith in Mecca,[949] but al-Masʿūdī takes an opposite track. He implies ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib was a maverick against prevailing idolatrous polytheism,

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[944] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1175.

[945] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §§1000-1035.

[946] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §134.

[947] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §§130-151,1122.

[948] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §§1126-1140.

[949] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Munammaq* 86-96, Ibn Hishām *al-Sīra* 1:137-155.

one of the few who "left tradition and espoused monotheism".[950] Understanding al-Masʿūdī's reworking of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib into a lone paragon of monotheism is understandable in the context of Abbasid rule: the Abbasids claimed descent from the Hāshim clan of which ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib was a major ancestor figure, hence a nod to his piety upheld the propriety of the Caliphate, the growing power of Twelver Shiʾa Islam and even the dignity of the Turkic generals whose legitimacy during al-Masʿūdī's time relied on their ostensible 'protection' of the Caliph. Al-Masʿūdī's notion of pre-Muḥammadic faith thus (i) incorporates some salient names so celebrated across earlier texts that al-Masʿūdī could not obliterate their memory, and (ii) props his contemporary political scene, but otherwise he expunges the notions of pre-Muḥammadic Arab monotheism.

5.3(a)(ii) Arabs as the people of Jāhiliyya

Restricting pre-Muḥammadic Arabian monotheism, al-Masʿūdī fills his reconstruction of the pre-Islamic Arab world with pervasive *Jāhiliyya* in the form of idolatrous polytheism as it is commonly understood today. He renders *Jāhiliyya* an innate trait of the pre-Islamic Arabs: he begins a chapter on pre-Islamic Arabian religion with the telling statement: "The Arabs, in *their Jāhiliyya* were divided into sects" (each non-Islamic).[951] When considering Arab notions of the soul, al-Masʿūdī similarly begins his chapter "The Arabs had several schools of thought in the *Jāhiliyya ...*",[952] and he dismisses them along with a host of other supernatural beliefs: "The Arabs had, before the rise of Islam, opinions and schools of thought regarding the soul, ghouls, wraiths and jinn ..."[953] With a sceptical air (accompanied by the incredulous phrase "one alleged" (*zaʿama*)), al-Masʿūdī proceeds to explain the pre-

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[950] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1126.

[951] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1122.

[952] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1190.

[953] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1189.

Islamic Arabs' belief in supernatural beings,[954] and then narrates their skills in *qīyāfa*, *ʿiyāfa*, *zajr* and *kihāna*.[955] Herein lie two crucial departures from earlier writing. First, al-Masʿūdī separates *al-Jāhiliyya* from Islam, denying the continuity expressed by Ibn Ḥabīb and Ibn Qutayba. Second, he reverses Ibn Qutayba's analysis of pre-Islamic Arab sciences by taking the arts, which Ibn Qutayba enumerated as sciences to praise Arabs, and narrates them instead as part of a disparaging and sceptical review of pre-Islamic belief in the supernatural, demoting the sciences to superstitions. Again, al-Masʿūdī turns material about pre-Islamic Arabs narrated by his third/ninth century predecessors on its head and constructs a new discourse of Arab *Jāhiliyya* as irrational pagandom before Islam.

5.3(a)(iii) Arab nobility before Muḥammad

Comparing the sections of pre-Islamic Arab history in al-Yaʿqūbī and al-Masʿūdī also reveals a tempering of pre-Islamic Arab nobility. Al-Masʿūdī mentions the great conquests of the ancient Yemeni Arabians which earlier generations of Yamānī authors emphasised with fabulous tales of conquest,[956] but al-Yaʿqūbī's lexicon of *sharaf* and *majd* is absent. Al-Masʿūdī's emphasis on pre-Islamic Arabian *Jāhiliyya* would seem to explain his less than generous attitude towards pre-Islamic Arabs. Moreover, al-Masʿūdī's emphasis on the Arabs' innate Bedouin-ness also restricts scope for praising ancient Arab kingdoms. He makes brief note in one paragraph to the Yemeni kings who "constructed buildings", "took to large-scale settlement" and even "constructed Samarqand" – all claims earlier made by Yamānī partisans such as Diʿbil al-Khuzāʿī whom al-Masʿūdī expressly mentions.[957] But these succinct 'admissions' occur at the opening of al-Masʿūdī's chapter on the Arabs'

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[954] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §§1196-1216.

[955] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §§1217-1249.

[956] See al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §§927,1000-1016. The complex genesis of the Yamānī narratives is beyond the scope of this thesis.

[957] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1086.

primordial Bedouin nature, and so appear more as exceptions to what al-Masʿūdī argues over the next 30 paragraphs to be the real essence of Arabness. His emphasis on Bedouin-ness leads towards contradiction – as he cites an anecdote that argues all Arabs before Umaym al-Khayr lived in tents and that Umaym was the first to construct roofed buildings.[958] According to al-Masʿūdī's genealogical scheme, Umaym lived after Hūd, but Qurʾān 89:7-8 notes that Hūd's people lived in fabulous buildings, so al-Masʿūdī has problems with chronology. This can be expected if we recognise that al-Masʿūdī converted older material into new discourses where old memories did not entirely fit new visions. His turn to Bedouin primitivism converted Arabs into primordial, pre-historical peoples whose role in history is no longer to prop the nobility of Muslim elites, but instead to displays the antithetical precursor of Islam.

5.3(b) Arabness as archetype

Al-Masʿūdī's reorientations of the pre-Islamic Arab past are significant, not only for their departure from earlier models, but for their longevity. As opposed to al-Yaʿqūbī's model of pre-Islamic nobility and monotheism, subsequent Arabic writers across a wide array of genres would copy al-Masʿūdī's model of Bedouin paganism. As examples, al-Bakrī's (d.487/1094) world geography's section on Arabia and the Arabs copies almost verbatim from al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj*, sometimes acknowledging the earlier source, and sometimes not.[959] Al-Bakrī's depiction of the Arabs accordingly focuses on their pagan superstitions and their wild Bedouin life before Islam, making no reference to widespread monotheism or the nobility of pre-Islamic Arab ancestors. Al-Masʿūdī's model of the Arab past also spread to the field of heresiography where al-Shahristānī's *al-Milal wa-l-Niḥal* cites abbreviated, but

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[958] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1166.

[959] Al-Bakrī's frequent borrowings from al-Masʿūdī are discussed in the introduction to *al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik* 1:18-19.

largely identical examples of pre-Islamic Arabness, describing their pre-Islamic superstitions, polytheism and atheism in the same terms familiar to readers of the *Murūj*.[960] Al-Shahristānī lists the same Arab 'superstitions' (formerly sciences),[961] and also like al-Masʿūdī, he classifies the vast majority of Arabs as atheists and polytheists, reducing reference to pre-Muḥammadic Arabian monotheism to exactly the same list as found in *Murūj al-dhahab* with emphasis on ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib.[962]

In the field of history, al-Maqdisī's (d.507/1112) *al-Badʾ wa-l-Tārīkh* depicts the pre-Islamic Arabs within the same conceptual categories of al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj*. His Arab history section opens with a nod to Bedouinism and names ʿAkk ibn ʿAdnān as the "first Arab who took to nomadic life".[963] The Arab past is called the "blind *Jāhiliyya*" (*al-Jāhiliyya al-ʿamyāʾ*),[964] and this reference colours the portrayal of Arabian society. It allows al-Maqdisī to depict pre-Islamic glory (*majd*) as vainglorious boasting about supernatural magic – a pointed reversal of al-Yaʿqūbī's stress on Arab nobility and Ibn Qutayba's 'Arab sciences'.[965] In another reversal, al-Maqdisī re-interprets Meccan history: whereas al-Yaʿqūbī's references to each passage of control over Mecca's sanctum in pre-Islamic time depict it as a handover of the noble office (with reference to *sharaf* – inherited glory), al-Maqdisī refers to it with the neutral phrase "*x* then took over the affair" (*qāma bi-l-amr*).[966] This is a consequence of al-Maqdisī's narrative that the prophetic legacy established in Mecca via Abraham and Ishmael was lost after a few generations, when the right religion (*dīn*) was replaced with whimsy (*wahm*) and the Meccans made un-lawful

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[960] Al-Shahristānī *al-Milal* 3:248-261.

[961] Al-Shahristānī *al-Milal* 3:272-275.

[962] Al-Shahristānī *al-Milal* 3:276-288.

[963] Al-Maqdisī *al-Badʾ* 4:107.

[964] Al-Maqdisī *al-Badʾ* 4:122.

[965] Al-Maqdisī *al-Badʾ* 4:122.

[966] Al-Maqdisī *al-Badʾ* 4:111,113,129.

acts lawful and became wicked people (*istaḥallū ḥarāman ... fā-ẓalamū*).[967] Accordingly, al-Maqdisī does not count the Arabs' descent from Ishmael as monotheistic heritage,[968] and he makes no mention of Hūd's prophetic mission being perpetuated by pre-Muḥammadic Yemeni kings.[969] Like al-Masʿūdī, al-Maqdisī leaves his readers with the impression that pre-Islamic Arabs primarily excelled in sorcery and magic.[970]

A fifth/eleventh century reader thus would have encountered a consistent impression of pre-Islamic Arabness across history, geography, and heresiography, and it is perhaps at this period that we can begin to speak of a standardisation of *Jāhiliyya* history and Arabness in classical literature. The modern stereotype of pre-Islamic Arabs as Arabian Bedouin pagans must derive from somewhere, and I suggest that its genesis can be traced to this later classical period when such a variety of authors, embracing a range of agendas, all depicted the Arabs with essential uniformity.

5.4 Conclusions

The fourth-fifth/tenth-eleventh century creation of the Arab *Jāhiliyya* archetype can be understood as a logical progression from the third-fourth/ninth-tenth century philological discourses. By casting Arabs into the sand and othering their language as a vernacular of a past, distant place, the philologists separated Arabness from Islam. Their *ʿarab* were conceptually much closer to the Qurʾān's *aʿrāb* – a desert people outside of Islam and ethnically distinct from the Muslims who wrote about them. Such a depiction of Arabs, abetted by the disappearance of ethnic Arab power centres at the same time, meant that the Arabs could be viewed

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[967] Al-Maqdisī *al-Badʾ* 4:124.
[968] Al-Maqdisī *al-Badʾ* 4:113.
[969] Al-Maqdisī *al-Badʾ* 3:174-176;4:116-118.
[970] Al-Maqdisī *al-Badʾ* 4:114,116,122.

as the people who were saved by the mission of Islam and who brought Islam to the Fertile Crescent after their Arabian conversion. Such a discourse had to purge the notion that early Islam and pre-Islamic Arabia shared any continuities, and converted positive memories of pre-Islamic Arabness into a reprobate state to underscore Islam's mission of light and salvation.

The resultant depiction of Arabness is beset with a difficult contradiction: on the one hand, the perfection of the Bedouin vernacular led philologists to praise the pre-Islamic Arabs (and so do a good service to their value of their own 'expertise'), but the development of the pre-Islamic *Jāhiliyya* paradigm involved a comprehensive degrading of Arab culture before Islam to highlight the supreme salvation offered by Islam. As the notion of pre-Islamic Arabic was synthesised, each of the conflicting notions of past-Arabness had to be placed in the literary reconstruction of the Arab story. The next chapter studies the resulting paradoxes.

The difference between the third/ninth century histories of the Arabs and those written in the subsequent centuries can be epitomised as the change from an Arab 'national' history to a Muslim 'world' history. The narratives in al-Yaʿqūbī and Diʿbil depict Arabs as the champions of monotheism since the earliest times where Arab nobles perpetuate tribal glory, whereas al-Masʿūdī converts them to a precursor in the global story of Islam where the focus becomes the succession of failed prophecy in the world before Muḥammad. Other historians from the fourth/tenth century such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Jawzī make this explicit, narrating world history without substantial material on pre-Islamic Arabs, instead focusing on predominantly non-Arab prophets, diluting the Arabs' share in pre-Muḥammadic monotheism and portraying Islam as a more expressly global phenomenon.

The crux of the fourth/tenth century discourses is the comprehensive othering of Arabness. Whereas the *aʿrāb* Bedouin were, since the earliest Arabic

writings, depicted on the outside of the Muslim community, in contrast to the Arabs on the inside, the merging of Bedouin with Arab did not bring the Bedouin inside, but rather cast the Arabs outside too. The Arab ethnos thus inherited Bedouin otherness, no doubt augmented by Arabian insecurity and the disappearance of Arab communities in Iraq. I have stressed that this enabled urbanite Iraqi litterateurs to promote themselves as 'experts', but the model had additional advantages, which can explain why it became so universally adopted in Muslim cultures. By drawing such a rigid line between pre-Islamic and Islamic, and by portraying Islam's roots in primordial desert Arabness, Muslim writers detached their civilisation from those of the Near East. As opposed to a continuity of millennia of urban development in the Fertile Crescent, Islam could be projected as a phenomenon from the outside, brought by the swords of desert Arabs. Since the later Abbasid writers stressed no ethnic connection with those Arabs, the denigration of Arab primitivism had no affect on their self-image: they were merely Islam's inheritors.

Although Arabness clearly developed within the urban Near East, the Muslim discourse which eventually placed Arabness on the outside is perhaps why Islam is considered such a historical and cultural break in the region's history, why Islamic Arts are accorded their own room in museums and galleries, and why 'Islam' so commonly over-determines analysis of the Middle East historically and today. Muslims wanted to believe that they had inherited a new world order, and their portrayal of the Arabs helped them achieve that goal. Modern students, however, must be very careful: neither tales from Arabia nor modern Bedouin anthropology take us back to Islam's real origins: rather, Bedouin-ness takes us back to the urban imagination of fourth/tenth century writers who reconstructed their past so

comprehensively. The 'othering' of the Arab to make Islam's myth of origins is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Creating *Jāhiliyya*: the Reconstruction of Arab Origins

Whilst portrayals of pre-Islamic Arab life as wild, cyclical, pagan Bedouinism manifestly helped urban Muslim narrators create an anarchical *Jāhiliyya* that could be shown to have been replaced by Islam, and whilst the casting of pre-Islamic Arab stories into a distant and harsh desert strengthened the *Jāhiliyya*/*Islām* narrative, the resultant 'othering' of the Arab in Muslim writing after the mid-third/ninth century necessitated an about-face in the earlier conceptions of Arabness. The repackaging of Arab ethnic identity that had originally developed inside the Caliphate's principal cities into a binary opposite of urban, Iraqi Muslim society had to forget Arab origins in Islam's *amṣār* and transport Arabs to an outside space and backwards in time to the pre-Islamic desert. The forgetting and rewriting of memories on such a massive scale cannot occur without dramatic shifts in the power to remember the past, and two important question emerge: did the Iraqi reading public accept the radical re-definition of Arabness, and to what extent did the later Abbasid scholarly community actually create new 'memories' for pre-Islamic Arabian *Jāhiliyya*?

I have argued that the decline of Arab political groups and Arab ethnic self-awareness in Iraqi urban centres during the third/ninth century crucially enabled scholars to monopolise the power to define Arabness, and that the socio-political circumstances of the later third/ninth century transformed the Arabian desert into a violent void that offered an opportune model for urban scholars to shape their imagined historical *Jāhilī* community. But the mere loss of political power within Arab groups did not mean Arab history simply could be seamlessly transformed overnight into an 'other', and as this chapter details, there was indeed resistance, and analysis of the recording of pre-Islamic poetry during the third-fourth/ninth-tenth centuries reveals in more detail how scholars nudged their *Jāhiliyya* archetype

forward against some critique to eventually create the now familiar literary emblems of desert pagandom.

6.1 Resistance to the Arabness archetype

6.1(a) Critique of Grammarians

As explored in the last chapter, the classical grammatical texts' claims to empirically record the pre-Islamic Arabic language are problematic, and the gushing idealisations of Arabic in Ibn Fāris' *al-Ṣāḥibī*, which were further accentuated in the fifth/eleventh century,[971] should arouse even more suspicion that the community of philologists and belles-lettrists were intent on elevating their specific vision of Arabic to the highest standard of communication. The general congruence of classical grammatical writing about the basics of *Fuṣḥā* implies that their constructions were not pure fictions, but the grammarians' prescriptive and normative discourse did allow them to assume a position of power to instruct their contemporaries, including ethnic Arabs, how they 'should' speak. Though the grammarians succeeded in monopolising the *kalām al-ʿarab*, there was a contemporary backlash, evidenced in poetry and prose, that suggests the reading public did not accept outright the professed coherence and purity of the language the grammarians were codifying, and greeted it with a degree of derision and suspicion.

Geert Jan van Gelder's 2011 "Against the Arabic Grammarians: Some Poems" uncovers a number of verses across classical literature written primarily by frustrated grammar students and sardonic litterateurs which chide grammarians and the convolutions they built into the *kalām al-ʿarab* to finesse difficulties in applying their rules to all old poetry and the Qurʾān. One classical poet threatens to

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[971] See al-Khafājī's *Sirr al-Faṣāḥa* (d.460/1067-1068), and al-Thaʿālibī's (d.430/1038-9) *Fiqh al-lugha*: "The Arabs are the world's best people and Arabic the best language" (al-Thaʿālibī *Fiqh* 3).

defecate in a grammar book;[972] there is also caustic invective against Zayd and ʿAmr, the two names most commonly used in grammarians' example sentences.[973] Ibn Qutayba relates one student's lament addressed to his teacher:

> I've thought grammar through until boredom,
>
> I exhausted my body and soul.
>
> It has clear, self-evident points,
>
> But others are murky and obscured.
>
> The obvious I learned
>
> And I became astute in the obscure,
>
> But for a section on the particle *fāʾ* (fie on it!)
>
> Oh were it never created!
>
> And a section on *wāw*,
>
> So hateful that it must have been cursed[974]

A second group of poems is particularly relevant to this thesis for their comments on the relationship between Bedouin and grammarians. While the grammarians presented themselves in their texts as urban spokesmen for Bedouin Arabic, poetry offered a medium for Bedouin fight-back. One poem ascribed to a Bedouin reads:

> I did not come to you for grammar
>
> No, nor do I want any of it.
>
> Let Zayd free!
>
> Let him go where he wants!

Van Gelder identified this poem narrated by the early sixth/twelfth century Abū-l-Barakāt Kamāl al-Dīn Ibn al-Anbārī in *Nuzhat al-Alibbāʾ* as directed against the late second/eighth century grammarian Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī (d.214/829). But the

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[972] Van Gelder (2011) 260-261.
[973] Van Gelder (2011) 256.
[974] Ibn Qutayba ʿ*Uyūn* 2:156-157.

eighth/fourteenth century Ibn Khallikān relates the same poem in an exchange between a Bedouin and the Moroccan grammarian al-Jazūlī (d.c.600-610/1204-1213),[975] implying that these poetic critiques may have originated as specific incidents of Bedouin/grammarian interaction, but became literary tropes sarcastically repeated in urbanite literature to critique the grammarians' conceit for their alleged mastery of Bedouin Arabic.

The trope is variously repeated in fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth century texts, for example, the story of an encounter between the grammarian Ibn Jinnī and a Bedouin ʿAmr (or ʿAmmār)[976] al-Kalbī. Ibn Jinnī is reported as asking to hear a poem, which, when the Bedouin recited it, Ibn Jinnī corrected him. The dismayed Bedouin allegedly responded:

> What is this we encounter from the made-up Arabs (*mustaʿribīn*)
>
> And the grammatical analogies that they concoct?
>
> If I recite an extraordinary poem,[977] a line of which
>
> Contradicts their rules,
>
> They say: "You've made a slip of the tongue"
>
> "That's not accusative, this's genitive, and that's not nominative."
>
> …
>
> Not all of what I say is explainable for you:
>
> Take what you know, and leave what you don't![978]

The dubbing of grammarians as *mustaʿribūn* and the versified objections to their assertion of control over poetry underline a changing of the guard from the poets'

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[975] Ibn Khallikān *Wafayāt* 3:490.

[976] The story is repeated in five different sources and between them two versions of the Bedouin's name are given (van Gelder (2011) 253).

[977] He describes his poem as *bikr*, "the first of anything" (Ibn Manẓūr *Lisān* 4:78). He seems to intend a splendid poem no grammarian had heard before.

[978] Yāqūt *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ* 3:475.

status as spokesmen and masters of a special, even mystical poetic koine,[979] to mere objects, subject to the scrutiny of grammarians. The grammarians would ultimately succeed, but the existence of these poems and their repetition in *adab* compendiums demonstrate that contemporary readership must have harboured at least some doubts as to the faithfulness of the new rules of Arabic, and mocked grammarians for their seemingly arcane efforts to create a "Bedouin language" which the Bedouin did not actually use. Ibn Jinnī defended grammarians against this critique by retorting that his contemporary Bedouin had 'lost' the axiomatic correctness of their forebears,[980] and the political insecurity of the desert prevented most urbanites from making their own investigations, so the grammarians' status as experts was secured as a practical matter, but the repetition of these poems illustrate a lingering parody against philologists and their 'invention' of *Fuṣḥā*.

In addition to the above poems, classical literature also contains prose anecdotes describing flummoxed Bedouin in the face of questions put to them by philologists. The history of these anecdotes reveals a development between the second half of the third/ninth century and the later fourth/tenth century – *i.e.* from

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[979] The status of the poet as tribal spokesman in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times is often remarked in classical (Ibn Qutayba *ʿUyūn* 2:185) and modern (Ouyang (1997) 61 and Allen (1994) 103-113) writing. The Qurʾān also hints to the elevated and esoteric status of poetry in Arabia, as it makes several references that it is not poetry and that Muḥammad's revelation must not be confused as the inspiration of poets. Muslim exegesis afterwards discussed the notion that poets were inspired by Jinn, an attribute which even the Umayyad-era poet Jarīr was associated in the fourth/tenth century *al-Aghānī* (8:34-35).

[980] Ibn Jinnī *al-Khaṣāʾiṣ* 816-820. Levin (2004) 2-3 notes the apparent disappearance of *faṣīḥ* Bedouins by the later fourth/tenth century. Other grammarians, however, maintained a belief in Bedouin linguistic purity even in that relatively late period: in Chapter 5, I noted al-Azharī's enjoyment of his captivity with Bedouin from a philological perspective, and Yāqūt remarks that the grammarian and lexicographer al-Jawharī (d.386/996) "travelled into the land of al-Ḥijāz and spoke directly with (*shāfaha*) the language of the pure Arabs (*al-ʿarab al-ʿāriba*) … and he travelled around the lands of Rabīʿa and Muḍar" (*Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ* 2:206). Yāqūt may have embellished the philological advantages of desert travel when he wrote this account almost 250 years after al-Jawharī died, but like his contemporary al-Azharī, al-Jawharī's anecdote suggests Ibn Jinnī's self-defensive argument that no *faṣīḥ* Arabs remained may not have been shared by all grammarians.

the first generations of grammarians who rigorously advocated the Bedouin-Arabic purity nexus to the maturity of the paradigm – by which philologists sought to reduce the stigma of Bedouin mockery and the power of the anecdotes to undermine their construction of *kalām al-ʿarab*.

The first anecdotes of this trope of which I am aware are recorded in al-Jāḥiẓ's *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*. We recall from Chapter 5.1 that al-Jāḥiẓ was keen to belittle his own urbanite speech community in favour of a Bedouin ideal vernacular, and to support the dichotomy, he relates anecdotes that depict urban grammarians falling short of the Bedouin standard.[981] Al-Jāḥiẓ, as I have argued, strove to erect a rigid barrier between eloquent desert Arabia and the grammatically impure towns of Islam, and hence he flips these anecdotes that ostensibly mock grammarians into corroborations of his broader theory of the shortcomings of city speech. As a logical extension of this discourse, al-Jāḥiẓ adds that Bedouin speech could itself be corrupted if they intermixed with urbanites, and he instructs his readers that Bedouin *aʿrāb* who understand grammatical terminology should not be counted as pure Arabic speakers since the specialist linguistic terms were city inventions, hence any Bedouin who knew them must have mixed with urbanites and lost their Arabic purity.[982]

In so conceptualising "pure" ('proper') Bedouin as those able to understand only grammatically perfect Arabic, al-Jāḥiẓ supports his depiction of *aʿrāb* as the polar opposite of the urbanite who only understands ungrammatical speech because of what al-Jāḥiẓ considers a "defect within himself".[983] Accordingly, al-Jāḥiẓ's discourse leads him to portray pure Bedouin as completely unable to

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[981] In particular, al-Jāḥiẓ relates anecdotes about the non-Arab *mawlā* Kūfan grammarian al-Kisāʾī's (d.185/809) misadventures with the *aʿrāb* (*al-Bayān* 1:164).

[982] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:162. Al-Jāḥiẓ expressly notes the purity of inner Arabian Arabic when describing the Bedouin as "*al-aʿrāb al-khullaṣ*" (*al-Bayān* 2:7;3:29).

[983] Al-Jāḥiẓ al-*Bayān* 1:162.

understand even the simplest sentences of urbanites on account of the slightest slips of vocalisation. Al-Jāḥiẓ relates that when an urbanite asked a Bedouin "how is your family", instead of saying the correct "*kayfa ahluk*", he said "*kayfa ahlik*", which means "how do I die". Al-Jāḥiẓ gives his Bedouin no logical ability to deduce what the urbanite meant to say; the archetypal *aʿrābī* only has overriding grammatical exactitude, and so answered the question strictly as it was vocalised, saying: "By crucifixion!"[984] This and a number of related anecdotes in *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn* ostensibly chide philologists for their inaccurate language, but like the rest of al-Jāḥiẓ's self-deprecating discourse, the anecdotes ultimately leave an open window of opportunity for specialist philologists like al-Jāḥiẓ to establish their own status as (nearly) surrogate Bedouin for the mass of lesser educated urbanites. Al-Jāḥiẓ co-opts parodies of Bedouin non-comprehension of urbanite speech to use them as evidence for his theories about the inherent faults of urban speech.

Ibn Qutayba's *ʿUyūn al-Akhbār* repeats al-Jāḥiẓ's examples of Bedouin misunderstandings of urban vernacular, but changes the emphasis away from al-Jāḥiẓ's direct derision of urbanite speech towards a more inspiring discourse. He narrates the anecdotes in a chapter entitled *al-ʿilm wa-l-bayān* (Knowledge and Expressiveness) which emphasises the role of good language in paving the way to knowledge. He associates grammar with the quality of one's character,[985] asserts that good grammar and good character should accompany one another (though it does not always work this way as a practical matter!),[986] and illustrates the grave pitfalls of reading the Qurʾān with grammatical mistakes.[987] Ibn Qutayba depicts

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[984] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:163.

[985] Ibn Qutayba relates an error-filled sentene of a litigant who complained of losing his inheritance to his brother which was met by the sharp rebuke: "You've lost more of yourself than you have money", referring to the grammatical errors (*ʿUyūn* 2:159).

[986] Ibn Qutayba *ʿUyūn* 2:159.

[987] Ibn Qutayba *ʿUyūn* 2:160.

correctness as the goal for all to aspire: "*i'rāb* is the adornment and beautification of speech", "grammar is to knowledge what salt is to the dish in the pot", and "correct *Fuṣḥā* is the best attribute of men".[988] He thus leaves scope for urbanites to achieve correct speech (provided that they follow the advice of scholars, as Ibn Qutayba particularly stresses),[989] and so he omits al-Jāḥiẓ's comments about the inherent shortcomings of urbanites, and repeats just anecdotes,[990] leaving readers to laugh at grammatical mistakes and mispronunciations without expressly enduring the condemnatory diatribes about their own shortcomings implied in *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*. In this context, the anecdotes become amusing *nawādir* and the deeper critiques of the grammarians' inability to mimic Bedouin vernacular is concealed. The express bawdy nature of a number of the anecdotes, for example a *mawlā*'s mispronunciation of *'ayr* (wild donkey) with *'ayr* (!), on account of Persian inability to pronounce the letter *'ayn*,[991] also implies a Bakhtinian carnivalesque critique of the rigid propriety of the grammarians, though in Ibn Qutayba's text this too is downplayed within his wider, and more serious discourse about the importance of good language as the path to knowledge.

In the late fourth/tenth century, al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba's anecdotes about the *a'rāb*'s unusual responses to sentences containing specialised grammatical terminology[992] appear in Ibn Fāris's *al-Ṣāḥibī*, a text we recall from Chapter 5 that argues for their divine origin of Bedouin Arabic. Ibn Fāris changes their emphasis

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[988] Ibn Qutayba *'Uyūn* 2:157.

[989] Ibn Qutayba *'Uyūn* 2:117-118.

[990] For example, al-Jāḥiẓ relates a story in which the Umayyad governor of Iraq al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf had difficulty understanding the broken Arabic of a Persian Iraqi, and proceeds to note that our ability to understand the Persian, notwithstanding his grammatical errors, is evidence of our own linguistic impurity (*al-Bayān* 1:162), whereas Ibn Qutayba merely records the anecdote (*'Uyūn* 2:160).

[991] Ibn Qutayba *'Uyūn* 2:159. See also the poem narrated at 2:160.

[992] A Bedouin was reportedly asked: "Do you pronounce a *hamza* (*tahmiz*) in the word 'mouse' (*fa'ra*)?" Outside of grammatical terminology, the verb *hamaza* means 'to prick/nip', and the Bedouin, ostensibly unaware of the grammarians' technical meaning of *hamaza*, responds: "cats nip (*tahmiz*) mice!" (Ibn Qutayba *'Uyūn* 2:157).

yet again, for his theories about Arabic cannot accept that urban grammarians invented Arabic words, and so he argued that ancient Bedouin intrinsically knew even all the specialised vocabulary.[993] In response to the tradition of anecdotes that depict Bedouin ignorance of such terminology, Ibn Fāris responds that we cannot expect *all* Bedouin to know *every* Arabic word, and therefore the particular cases of Bedouin ignorance do not prove that Muslim-era grammarians ever invented new words.[994] Ibn Fāris thus completely neuters the effect of the stories of Bedouin inabilities to understand grammarians, and rigorously protects his idealised Arabic/Bedouin grammatical edifice.

The complex history of prose accounts of Bedouins misunderstanding grammarians reveals that what started as parodies of grammarians' shortcomings were co-opted by grammarians for their own purposes and eviscerated of all sarcastic critique. Since the anecdotes only survive in texts written by grammarians and copied by succeeding generations of their students, identifying a more acerbic anti-grammarian sub-culture may be difficult,[995] but the presence of these anecdotes coupled with the subversive poetry evidences sceptical reaction to the philologists' invention and monopoly over Arabic. Direct resistance to urban Iraqi self-professed 'expertise' about the Arabs and Arabia appears in historical texts too.

6.1(b) Critique of history and genealogy

Chapter 5 described how, in tandem with the philologists' homogenisation of the *kalām al-ʿarab*, fourth/tenth century adab litterateurs created an encyclopaedic, and systematised way of 'knowing' the Arabs, codifying Arab genealogy and

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[993] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 41.

[994] Ibn Fāris *al-Ṣāḥibī* 41.

[995] More work on the anti-grammarian prose anecdotes is necessary. Perhaps research should explore the *fuḥsh* writing of the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh century such as *al-Risāla al-Baghdādiyya* and even the more gentle *Maqāmāt*?

dissecting the most minute details of Arab culture such as their horse husbandry,[996] obscure terminology about camels,[997] and a whole raft of behavioural traits and customs which they posited in monolithic formulae such as "the Arabs do *x*" or "the Arabs say *y*". Like the grammarians, the 'experts' of ancient *Arabica* created an ultimately prescriptive archetype of Arabness that purports to 'know' the Arabs completely, and quite contrary to the experience of modern anthropological research, the more urbanite authors wrote about desert Arabs (against the backdrop of Arabian insecurity which increasingly prevented them from visiting Arabia), the more they seemed to 'know' the Arabs; unity was assumed *a priori* and pre-Islamic Arabian Arab culture was portrayed as uniform, cohesive and impervious to both variations across space and development over time.

I have identified Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d.204/206) at the forefront of the urban, Muslim legislation on Arabness; al-Jāḥiẓ counts him in the first rank of scholars of ancient *Arabica*,[998] al-Nadīm remarks upon his pre-eminence and accords him the most extensive list of works written by *akhbāriyyūn*,[999] and classical philological works commonly cite Ibn al-Kalbī as a primary source for knowledge of the Arabs and their language.[1000] Ibn al-Kalbī was in the vanguard of book-writing movement and hence the creation of literary narratives of pre-Islamic Arab tribal history.[1001] He became the grandfather of classical *Arabica*. His knowledge

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[996] Al-Anbārī *Sharḥ* 1:49 and Ibn Qutayba *Faḍl* 120-127.

[997] See al-Aṣmaʿī *al-Ibil* and *al-Khayl*, and the range of similarly entitled books written by philologists over the following three centuries.

[998] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 3:366.

[999] Al-Nadīm *al-Fihrist* 108-111.

[1000] See Ibn Durayd's (d.321/933) *Waṣf al-Maṭar* and his *al-Ishtiqāq* for frequent citation of Ibn al-Kalbī in anecdotes about ancient *Arabica* and Arabic language. For example, in *Waṣf al-Maṭar* (45), Ibn al-Kalbī is cited in the *isnād* as the ultimate primary source for a story about the daughter of Khuss al-Iyādī, a pre-Islamic figure who lived two centuries before Ibn al-Kalbī.

[1001] Until the close of the second/eighth century, scholars appear (anecdotally) to have been most praised for their ability to memorise (Cook (1997)), though Schoeler notes the use of notebooks (*hypomnemata*) from early times ((2006) 114–12). Books in the modern sense began to be 'published'

also connected with contemporary centres of power: Yāqūt records that he wrote genealogical texts for both the powerful Vizier Jaʿfar ibn Yaḥyā al-Barmakī and the Caliph al-Maʾmūn.[1002]

Notwithstanding Ibn al-Kalbī's iconic scholarly status in Iraq, the fourth/tenth century Yemeni historian, genealogist and geographer al-Ḥasan ibn Aḥmad al-Hamdānī (d.c.334/945 or 360/971) attacked Ibn al-Kalbī and his Iraqi peers' authority to reconstruct Arab history and culture. Al-Hamdānī opens his multi-volume history and genealogy of Yemen, *al-Iklīl*, with a remarkable chiding of the "*Kalbiyyīn*" (a reference to Ibn al-Kalbī and his father Muḥammad ibn al-Sāʾib, another genealogist and scholar) who "only seldom visited those who live in Yemen and did not meet those with knowledge, but relied on the descendants of those who had departed [Yemen] ... and so produced disjointed genealogies".[1003] Al-Hamdānī extends his attack to other Iraqi-domiciled scholars (including Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq, author of the famous biography of the Prophet composed for the Caliph al-Manṣūr in Baghdad) and argues that indigenous Yemeni historians possess more authoritative knowledge on account of their local domicile, possession of local books and their ability to read pre-Islamic Yemeni inscriptions (*masānid*) and languages (*lughāt*) of which the Iraqi writers had no knowledge.[1004] On this basis, al-Hamdānī justifies his attempt to revise the Iraqi-established version of Yemeni history and commences *al-Iklīl*.

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in the late second/eighth century (Schoeler (2009) 88-89, Abbott (1949) 147-149). By the mid-third/ninth century scholars began to express positive sentiments of books as repositories of definitive knowledge (Günther (2006) 139-149, citing Ghersetti "L'utilità della scrittura e la lode del libro"). The rise of books is complex (Webb (2012a) 28-32), but late second/eighth and early third/ninth century scholars appear to be the vanguard of book-writers in Arabic.

[1002] Yāqūt *Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ* 5:598.

[1003] Al-Hamdānī *al-Iklīl* 1:60-61.

[1004] Al-Hamdānī *al-Iklīl* 1:61. He praises the Yemeni historian Abū Naṣr over several Iraqis including Ibn al-Kalbī and Daghfal al-Nassāba (1:66-68).

Against the backdrop of Iraqi legislation about Arabness, al-Hamdānī's critique of the two most powerful authors on pre-Islamic *Arabica* is fascinating. Al-Hamdānī was from the Peninsula and as such, was one of those whom contemporary Iraqi texts claimed to 'know'; yet he denies the Iraqi claims. *Al-Iklīl* interrupts the self-assured Iraqi monologue of Arabness with the lone voice of a 'local Arabian' offering to tell the 'true history'. The relationship draws an interesting parallel with Gramsci's theory of the tension between subaltern and hegemonic discourses: al-Hamdānī's Yemeni home was geographically peripheralised (over 1,000 miles from the centre of contemporary cultural production in Iraq), and his *al-Iklīl*, of which only four of its original ten volumes survive, is a fractured record from the Peninsula, a unique spokesman for a tradition not commonly copied outside of Yemen and almost entirely overwhelmed by the wealth of reconstructions of pre-Islamic Arabia produced in Iraq in the same period.[1005] Al-Hamdānī's resistance is a classic case of a subaltern discourse written by a people whose life and culture had been cut, dried and recorded by a hegemonic discourse authored by outsiders living a great distance away.

Yemenis would continue to write their own history, as evidenced from the sixth/twelfth century Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī's (d.573/1178) poem *Mulūk Ḥimyar* and its subsequent commentaries. Al-Hamdānī and al-Ḥimyarī's texts extol the prophetic and glorious past of the Yemeni kings familiar from the earlier narratives of Yamānī partisans in second/eighth century Iraq, but as noted in the previous chapter, Iraqis from the fourth/tenth century eschewed those memories of pre-Islamic Yemen in favour of a monolithic pan-Arabian *Jāhiliyya*, and the new

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[1005] It is instructive that al-Hamdānī's *Ṣifat Jazīrat al-ʿArab*, a geographical text, was evidently well known outside of Yemen as the sixth/twelfth century writer Yāqūt cited it frequently in his geography *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, whereas the historical material from al-Hamdānī's *al-Iklīl* was not regularly cited in Iraqi/Iranian writing.

Arabness reconstruction had little room for Yemeni memories. Akin to Gramscian hegemons, Iraqi writers marginalised the Yemeni material by not copying it, and, in the case of the Iraqi/Iranian writer Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (d.350/961), by levelling harsh critique. Al-Iṣfahānī acerbically comments

> there is nothing in all of history that is more corrupted and erroneous that the history of the governors and kings of Ḥimyar [*i.e.* Yemeni history from the beginning to shortly before Muḥammad], for it lasts such a long time and so few of their kings are mentioned.[1006]

Al-Iṣfahānī also doubts the Yemeni origin stories and explains "these are the stories as they are told by the Yamānīs",[1007] while declaring himself "innocent" of the narration of other aspects claimed for their history.[1008] Other Iraqi/Iranian historians give only brief accounts of Yemeni kingship, downplaying their stories of pre-Islamic empires and links with ancient prophecy as noted in Chapter 5.3, and so we perceive the strength of the new paradigm that all pre-Islamic Arabians lived a Bedouin *Jāhiliyya*.

While the powerful and productive Iraqi 'hegemonic discourse' largely obliterated the 'subaltern' Yemenis, al-Hamdānī's early fourth/tenth century resistance is of vital importance to this thesis' argument that Iraqi Muslims from the third/ninth century engaged in a comprehensive rewriting of Arab history according to a model they devised, and that they did so on their own, without communication with the Arabs who they portrayed. The sarcastic critiques against philologists and historians are helpful in showing the obstacles Iraqi scholars faced within Iraq when promoting their new paradigms of Arabness, but the scholars succeeded in radically changing the depiction of Arab history which can be

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[1006] Al-Iṣfahānī *Tārīkh* 106.
[1007] Al-Iṣfahānī *Tārīkh* 97.
[1008] Al-Iṣfahānī *Tārīkh* 98.

demonstrated via analysis of what appears to be a wide-scale fabrication of pre-Islamic memories and a tampering with the source material itself.

6.2 Pre-Islamic poetry and the creation of *al-Jāhiliyya*

From at least the early third/ninth century, poetry was accorded the status of *dīwān al-ʿarab* – the register of Arab culture and history.[1009] In order, therefore, for third/ninth and fourth/tenth century Muslim scholars to reconstruct the Arab past as primitive, pagan Bedouin *Jāhiliyya*, they would have to present the image through poetry. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the historic pre-Islamic Arabians themselves could not have been aware that scholars 300 to 500 years later would call them all Arabs and depict them as wild pagans locked in cyclical violent Bedouinism, and so Muslim scholars would need to accentuate (and perhaps invent) verses of old poetry to tell that story. I trace this process through the depictions of pre-Islamic *ṣaʿālīk* poets.

6.2(a) The ṣaʿālīk: *characters of varied uses*

Modern scholarly writing on pre-Islamic Arabic poetry accords unique status to the *ṣaʿālīk*. Their poems are considered a "special vein of pre-Islamic poetry",[1010] they are believed to have challenged the norms of tribal life,[1011] and they are often depicted as a distinct social and economic group in pre-Islamic Arabia.[1012] Accordingly, *ṣaʿālīk* are the subject of monographs and stand-alone chapters in

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[1009] Heinrichs (1997) 250 argues the expression first appears in the early third/ninth century with al-Jumaḥī's *Ṭabaqāt* (1:22). It became a popular notion of Arab identity: al-Jāḥiẓ remarks on the special role Arabs' ascribed to poetry (*al-Ḥayawān* 1:51), and Ibn Qutayba also speaks of the *dīwān* when describing the role of poetry in Arab culture (*ʿUyūn* 2:185).

[1010] Jones (1992) 1:27. See also S.Stetkevych (1993), Jacobi "al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt", *EI²* 7:308.

[1011] Khulayyif even refers to an 'anarchical society' (*mujtamaʿ fawḍawi*) in which he proposes the *ṣaʿālīk* lived apart from the pre-Islamic tribal communities (1959) 114, see 78-119 for his discussion of the tribalist, decentralised politics of the era he posited set the stage for *ṣaʿālīk* 'society'.

[1012] See Khulayyif (1959) 55. Muruwwa (1990) 34-35 and Bayhi (2006) 117-127 particularly perceive the lifestyle of the *ṣuʿlūk* in terms of economic and class relations in a somewhat Marxist inspired impression of pre-Islamic society's dialectical relationship between tribal nobles and the poor.

surveys of pre-Islamic poetry,[1013] and the widespread reference to 'ṣaʿālīk' today conjures impressions of a readily identifiable and cohesive poet-type. Closer inspection, however, reveals incongruity and divergence. To some scholars, the ṣaʿālīk represent 'brigand poets':[1014] impoverished outcasts in remote desert wastelands who pursued lives of dogged raiding. But, conversely, others believe the ṣaʿālīk were Robin Hood-like thieves whose "humanity and nobility"[1015] contrasted the purportedly unjust pre-Islamic tribal social order. According to the first conception, the ṣaʿālīk were 'liminal' characters whose failure to fulfil tribal rites of passage rendered them pariahs,[1016] whereas the second camp reads them as heroes committed to redressing social wrongs and redistributing wealth![1017] This heroic or anti-heroic 'archetype' for the ṣaʿālīk is a salient illustration of what Jones described as "horrid problems"[1018] bedevilling appraisal of these poets. Jones hints that this confusion is traceable to the Arabic primary sources upon which modern scholars rely for evidence about the ṣaʿālīk, for no comprehensive accounts of these poets or poetry anthologies were produced and information is scattered in writings

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[1013] See the monographs of Khulayyif (1959), Muruwwa (1990), Jones (1992) 1:127-242, and S.Stetkevych (1993) Chapters 3 and 4; and Nicholson (1907) 78-86.

[1014] The term 'brigand' in this context appears to have been coined by Lyall (1918) 218 in rendering the description of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as "liṣṣ". 'Brigand' has remained popular in English scholarship. Arabic adjectives commonly encountered in modern literature include faqīr (poor), hazīl, ḍāmir (skinny, emaciated), khalīʿ (outcast) and shujāʿ (brave) and they are associated with nahb and ighāra (plunder and raiding). This view has predominated Western scholarship, most recently manifested in S.Stetkevych (1993) and Jones (1992). The earliest Arabic dictionary defines ṣuʿlūk as "a group [qawm] who have neither possessions [māl] nor means of support [iʿtimād]" (al-Khalīl al-ʿAyn 2:303). The later Lisān al-ʿarab adds a more 'brigand-like' aspect to the definition, identifying the ṣaʿālīk al-ʿarab by the predatory association, "the wolves of the Arabs" (Ibn Manẓūr Lisān 10:456).

[1015] Muruwwa (1990) 36.

[1016] S.Stetkevych (1993) 87-88.

[1017] Khulayyif (1959) 37-47, echoed in Bayhī (2006) 117,121 and Muruwwa (1990) 32-33 where they are described as 'aṣḥāb mabādiʾ rafīʿa wa karīma' (men of high and noble principles) who sought to "establish social justice and an economic balance between the people".

[1018] Jones (1992) 1:28.

compiled between the late second/eighth and fifth/eleventh centuries, i.e. at least 200 years after the last of the pre-Islamic ṣaʿālīk died.[1019]

Although the problematic primary material certainly contributes to the confusing interpretations of the ṣaʿālīk, the "horrid problems" are in fact exacerbated by the modern scholarly approach to those sources. Firstly, scholars have tacitly and pervasively adopted two hitherto unproblematized assumptions that (i) the label 'ṣaʿālīk' is an appropriate term to identify this group of poets; and (ii) those poets were 'real' persons whose 'true' historicity can be reconstructed. Scholars therefore hold fast to a fixed conception of ṣaʿlaka (the way of being a ṣuʿlūk), apply the term 'ṣuʿlūk' to approximately eleven poets (who, ironically, are not consistently labelled ṣaʿālīk in the primary sources),[1020] and they compel these poets into correspondence with the archetypes noted above.[1021] The scholarly belief that the "true nature",[1022] "peculiar ethos"[1023] and "original intention"[1024] of 'the

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[1019] During this period, it does not appear that Arabic writers attempted an encyclopaedic biographical dictionary of ṣaʿālīk or composed any text dedicated to this 'group'. Neither did they collect stand-alone dīwāns for any individual ṣuʿlūk, with the exception of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran and ʿUrwa ibn al-Ward – and even these two dīwāns were non-exhaustive and only emerged in the later fourth/tenth century, i.e. at end of the period during which the canonical portrayals of the ṣaʿālīk were made.

[1020] Jones enumerates the ṣaʿālīk (1992) 1:27-28. Also consider Khulayyif (1959) 55-58, whose observation that the ṣaʿālīk can be divided into three categories seems not to have caused him to question the prima facie appropriateness of the generic label. For issues with the classical usage of ṣuʿlūk, see below.

[1021] This is achieved via selective use of primary sources to highlight one archetypal conception of the ṣaʿālīk to the exclusion of the other (see S.Stetkevych (1993), an advocate of the 'anti-heroic' camp who ignored positive anecdotes about Taʾabbaṭa Sharran in order to paint him as a liminal outcast, whereas Bayḥī (2006), advocated the 'heroic' camp, overlooking the ṣaʿālīk's ghūl-hunting and murderous tendencies). Less dogmatic surveys fare little better: Khulayyif's division of the ṣaʿālīk into three categories (1959) 55-58 merely asserts new archetypes: his categories are also subject to selection of anecdote; not all 'ṣaʿālīk' fit neatly and some poets, never identified as ṣaʿālīk in classical sources, would appear to qualify into these categories (particularly ʿAntara ibn Shaddād who should become a second category ṣuʿlūk under Khulayyif's conception).

[1022] S.Stetkevych (1993) 96.

[1023] S.Stetkevych (1993) 109.

[1024] Jones (1992) 1:224.

ṣaʿālīk' can be uncovered has guided research towards 'resolving' their 'true identity' which fails to distinguish between the historical individual poets and their literary persona as preserved in Muslim-era literature. This reduces the ṣaʿālīk towards concrete archetypes and reads their poetry and stories as more or less genuine historical happenings, duly reflective of the poets' lives and 'realities' of pre-Islamic Arabian society.[1025]

At the root of these interpretations of the ṣaʿālīk is the absence of a diachronic analysis of classical writing about the poets in the context of the wider Muslim-era discourses about Arabness and pre-Islamic history. In looking straight through the Arabic primary texts to 'reach' pre-Islamic history,[1026] scholars treat the sources as a seamless continuity and deem texts ranging from the second/eighth to fifth/eleventh centuries as a homogeneous well of extractable data. As a result, the differences between the primary texts in terms of genre, scholarly agenda, date of writing and their "significance"[1027] have been overlooked. Inasmuch as no non-textual evidence survives to illuminate the characters of the ṣaʿālīk,[1028] I reiterate

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[1025] See Jones (1992) 1:224 where he tackles the 'chronology' of the ṣuʿlūk Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, proposing that the Nūniyya poem in which Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's description of killing a ghūl likely predates and perhaps even presages the poet's 'departure' from his tribe described in the Qāfiyya qaṣīda recorded in al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt. See also Abu Khadra's description of the circumstances of an adventure recounted in a poem attributed to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran which Abu Khadra matter-of-factly proposes must have been composed "some time" after the event described (1988) 315.

[1026] Jones accepts the difficulties of reconstructing pre-Islamic history through Islamic-era texts, particularly al-Aghānī (1992) 1:224, however, his use of the term 'ṣuʾlūk' to unite all the so-called ṣaʿālīk poets and his interest in sifting fact from legend in the accounts of their lives leaves little room for discussion of the effect of the sources in shaping our understanding of these poets.

[1027] To borrow a term from Barthes who takes as the object of textual analysis the exploration of how a text "explodes and disseminates" (1977) 127, that is, an understanding of text as the production of significance, and not as a philological object which contains a 'true' reading awaiting discovery (1977) 126-127,136-137.

[1028] Some suggest that certain outcast poets of twentieth century Saudi Arabia parallel pre-Islamic ṣaʿālīk (Kurpershoek (1999) 57-58, Holes (2000) 223). While poets such as al-Dindān and Nābit ibn Dāfir were peripheral figures in Saudi tribal society, their poetry of bitter memories of love (al-Dindān, Kurpershoek (1999) 215-245) and pious mediations on the ravages of old age (Nābit, Kurpershoek (1999) 246-251) bear nothing in common with pre-Islamic ṣaʿālīk poetry in terms of

that our knowledge of the poets is entirely mediated through Muslim-era writings and I propose to re-open the study by identifying the changing meanings Muslim authors associated with the ṣaʿālīk within their wider visions of al-Jāhiliyya. I leave the ṣuʿlūk's "*significance* fully open"[1029] to expose the fluidity of portrayal of these poets and to appreciate the multiple, evolving interpretations of the ṣaʿālīk's function in narratives of pre-Islamic Arabia.

I shall test this approach via a case study of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, a poet widely accepted as a prototypical ṣuʿlūk,[1030] even one of the '*aghribat al-ʿarab*' and/or '*raʾabīl al-ʿarab*' ('Ravens of the Arabs' / 'Lions of the Arabs' – bywords associated with categories of the most brazen ṣaʿālīk)[1031] who also epitomises the contemporary ṣaʿālīk paradox, having been declared a social hero, an outcast and even both simultaneously![1032] Sources from the second/eighth to fifth/eleventh centuries provide ample material about him that facilitate exploration of the development of his portrayal and the consideration of how and why classical Arabic writings bequeathed such complex conceptions of the ṣaʿālīk and attributed such a varied poetic corpus to them. This approach brings us to analyse texts written during the

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language, style or subject matter. Kurpershoek based his analogy solely on the outcast status of these modern poets, but to presume that such poets can 'take us back' to pre-Islamic Arabia romantically assumes a seamless continuity of 'Arabian character' and the 'desert' from pre-history until the discovery of oil. Instead of showing us the ancient ṣaʿālīk or Imruʾ al-Qays, I submit this approach rather equates us with Imruʾ al-Qays himself, nostalgically weeping over imagined desert traces.

[1029] Barthes (1977) 141.

[1030] Ḍayf (1960) 377. Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is one of the primary examples of the ṣaʿālīk presented by Jones (1992) and analysed by S.Stetkevych (1993) 87-118.

[1031] The 'Ravens' was a term occasionally used to describe a set of fearsome warriors of the pre-Islamic period who were of mixed Arabian and African stock. For the inclusion of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran in this category, see Lyall (1918-1921) 1:2, Ḍayf (1960) 377. The 'Lions' referred to a different category of ṣaʿālīk whose reputation for giving chase on foot reached legendary proportions (al-Marzūqī *Sharḥ* 370-371).

[1032] For the heroic, see al-Bayḥī (2006) 123-124, the anti-heroic, S.Stetkevych (1993) *passim*. As for the compromise, Arazi *EI²* "Taʾabbaṭa Sharran" 10:2 convolutedly states that he was "a brigand, but despite his activities...he was one of the very few ṣaʿālīk who managed to remain integrated within his own tribe".

period which I have shown in previous chapters witnessed seminal developments in the notion of Arabness and Arab history. These trends in historical reconstruction must be a crucial context against which Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry should be studied. My diachronic approach will explore each text that narrates Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry individually with a view to understanding the differences in a poet's portrayal through the expanding array of poems attributed to him as they were recorded over time. Such a "scrupulous attention to the *textual* tradition"[1033] of pre-Islamic poetry has been advocated, and must now be duly prosecuted. In tandem, I also consider the wealth of prose anecdotes that grew around the persona of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran. Unlike poetry, anecdotes are not usually purported to be the 'original' work of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, they more often reflect the opinion of later narrators and poetry scholars and they exhibit more substantial variation across the sources. Consider, for instance the seven (at least) anecdotal explanations for how Taʾabbaṭa Sharran earned his unusual sobriquet – 'he who carries evil under his arm'[1034] which led Lyall to conclude that its true origin is unknown;[1035] and consider also the multiple versions of some of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's adventure stories.[1036] The poet is posited to have lived in the late sixth century CE,[1037] i.e.

[1033] Montgomery (1997) 40 (my emphasis).

[1034] The sources suggest that he earned the nickname when a child on account of either (a) carrying a sword at a young age; (b) carrying snakes which he collected in the desert; (c) bringing snakes to his mother when she sent him to collect truffles; (d) having a pugnacious nature; (e) being an ill-omened child; or (f) on account of capturing a ram in the desert which he carried back to the village under his arm which turned into a *ghūl* (al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:138; al-Balādhurī *Ansāb* 12:247). Alternatively, a fragmentary line of poetry contains the phrase "*Taʾabbaṭa Sharran*" which has also been proposed as his sobriquet's origin (*Dīwān* 191, al-Balādhurī 12:247).

[1035] Lyall (1918-1921) 2:1.

[1036] See Abu-Khadra (1988) 313-315 where he lists three separate versions of a story cited in classical literature to explain the background to one poem attributed to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran. Al-Tabrīzī (d.502/1108-1109) reports that even more variants existed (*Sharḥ* 1:166).

[1037] Lyall (1918-1921) 2:1 dates Taʾabbaṭa Sharran to Muḥammad's early years, *i.e.* the very end of the sixth century CE, although this estimate is based on precarious and imprecise evidence which Lyall willingly concedes. Lyall's guess, made almost a century ago, is supported in the (then unpublished)

almost 300 years before the first *anecdotes* about his life were committed to writing, and the connection between the prose stories and the moment in which the poems were originally composed is often unclear.[1038] Hence I shall consider each collection of anecdotes separately via the same chronological path to illuminate how the expanding array of stories built Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's character.

6.2(b) Taʾabbaṭa Sharran and his Desert in Kitāb al-Aghānī

The ṣaʿālīk are ideal characters to fill a *Jāhiliyya* world of pagan barbarism. They are violent lone rangers on the outside of their tribal society who battle not only all other Arabian tribesmen but also supernatural beings such as *ghūl* and *jinn*. I have remarked that the portrayals of *Jāhiliyya* paganism in fourth/tenth century literature depicted Arabian Bedouin groups as othered from the urban Muslim world of the stories' narrators, and the ṣuʿlūk who are depicted leading an even more violent and difficult life, interacting with supernatural forces in the furthest reaches of the desert, are doubly-othered from an urbanite perspective. Such is the world of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as described in his most detailed classical biography in Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's (d.356/967) *Kitāb al-Aghānī*.

Al-Iṣfahānī carefully constructs a depiction of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's desert as a place where only the brave or foolhardy venture. It primarily consists of difficult mountain passes where the poet hides amongst high cliffs, preparing to ambush

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Ansāb al-ashrāf which connects Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's father to the ʿām al-fīl, c.570 CE and the year traditionally noted as Muḥammad's birth year. Al-Balādhurī is also not particularly clear in this respect, and Taʾabbaṭa Sharran will likely remain only approximately datable.

[1038] See Abu-Khadra's discussion of what he considers the manifestly later date of anecdotes which were concocted "after what was probably a long search [in imaginations of the poetry narrators]" to explain one of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poems (1988) 313. Khulayyif gives an opposing view, considering the prose anecdote necessary to understand the poem, and thus tacitly accepts the authenticity of both anecdote and poem, which outright overlooks the discrepancy in the story's details preserved in the classical sources (1959) 186.

unsuspecting members of rival tribes, and vast empty deserts where, alone,[1039] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran races accompanied only by emaciated carnivores and sometimes evil spirits. Lexically, the remoteness is highlighted by rare vocabulary such as *fayf* (waterless empty place);[1040] *sahb* (remote flatland);[1041] *ṣaḥṣaḥān* (empty desert, devoid of plants).[1042] The specialised 'wasteland' vocabulary is not uncommon in accounts of other pre-Islamic poets, but in the case of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, the words dominate his environment and set a stage suitably unfamiliar to urban audiences for the poet's terrifying and awesome adventures.

His desert is also horrific: it is the setting for supernatural meetings, such as the pitch-dark, thunderous night where, after running to far away Raḥā Biṭān our poet fought a *ghūl*:

> Oh who will tell the men of Fahm
>
> What I met at Raḥā Biṭān?
>
> There I met the *ghūl*, racing
>
> Over blank sheet of desert plain...[1043]

But the desert has a certain nobility too: the wastelands embody purity of spirit into which the poet can escape the corruption of his society, a trait common to pre-Islamic heroes,[1044] and *al-Aghānī* portrays Taʾabbaṭa Sharran in this desert as a shunner of corrupt society.[1045]

[1039] We do often read of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as a leader of a band of *ṣaʿālīk*, but *al-Aghānī* frequently alludes to his solitary raids, noting that this was his signature *modus operandi* (21:163).

[1040] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:148

[1041] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:161.

[1042] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:140.

[1043] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:145-146.

[1044] E.g. ʿAntara refers to a similar space in his *Muʿallaqa* and the isolation of this desert space and its solace seems to have been a key topos of the *nasīb* much appreciated by Iraqi urban readers of the Abbasid era and discussed in Jaroslav Stetkevych (1993).

[1045] See lns 21-26 of the *Qāfiyya* poem, his *ṣawt* in *al-Aghānī*.

Also frequent are references to impenetrable and wild desert mountains, once again set at an extreme separation from the settlements of pre-Islamic Arabia. *Al-Aghānī*'s narratives graphically describe these places as so remote that birds' nests are undisturbed and they have "never before known people".[1046] We encounter specialised vocabulary too, focusing on dangers, such as the *liṣb* (narrow mountain pass)[1047] and *ḥarḍ rajīl mudayyam* (terrifically steep and rain-drenched path of descent).[1048] Through anecdotal comments, *al-Aghānī* marshals mountain paths to set the scenes of ambushes between Taʾabbaṭa Sharran and his enemies;[1049] the narrative tension created as we read the poet's entrance into forbidding mountain paths is terrifying, and his escape after doing battle, sublime:[1050]

> In a narrow mountain pass,
>
> Its mouth blocked by Bajīla's men
>
> And to its rear, difficult heights and roaming camels;
>
> I steadied the nerves of my companion, Murra;
>
> Though between us and escape, traps had been set.[1051]

Beyond the descriptions of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's environment, *al-Aghānī* also embellishes the excitement temporally. His exploits are often set during darker than 'usual' nights: moonless, cloudy, star-less, complete blackouts.[1052] In these poems, we read Taʾabbaṭa Sharran referring to himself as an inveterate night

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[1046] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:167.

[1047] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:151.

[1048] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:153.

[1049] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:157,158,167-168.

[1050] Setting battles in narrow passes or wādīs is fairly common in *ayyām* literature (see for example, how Banū ʿĀmir hacked their way out of a blocked Wādī at Yawm al-Raqm (al-Anbārī, *Sharḥ* 1:62). It adds excitement to those narratives, however, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's desert couples these mountain passes with vast wastelands and dangerous and seldom visited cliffs, highlighting the greater sublimity of his natural environment than the 'average' Bedouin of classical literature.

[1051] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:168.

[1052] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 136,160,164,208.

traveller, "wearing the cloak of night",[1053] and *al-Aghānī* repeats the theme of action in darkness throughout Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's biography.[1054]

Night travel is a regular motif in Arabic narratives of *al-Jāhiliyya*, and heroes such as Labīd, ʿAntara and even Muḥammad (in the context of his *Isrāʾ* and *Miʿrāj* night journey) wage their adventures at night,[1055] and the night is a typical setting for momentous events (for example, ʿAntara was deprived of his beloved ʿAbla as her clan stole away in the night).[1056] However, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran outstrips these heroes: he is *the* quintessential night traveller, both impervious to the potential dangers of the night,[1057] and, when on the lookout for booty or blood revenge, he is also part of the night's hazards. Even more than other characters of *al-Aghānī*'s *al-Jāhiliyya*, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, warring in sublime darkness, conjures both the extremes of bravery and terror:

> Even light dozes he takes but few – his true concern:
>
> Blood revenge, or battling helmeted braves.[1058]

The temperature of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's desert is exaggerated too. His adventures, if not waged during the dead of moon-less nights, are depicted under the blazing desert sun during the hottest parts of the year.[1059] Thoughts of crippling temperatures enhance readers' esteem for those who can bear them, and combating the heat, the *hawājir*, is a common trait of pre-Islamic heroes: ʿAntara rode through

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[1053] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:155.

[1054] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:142-143,160,161,163,168.

[1055] I consider the night journey motif of pre-Islamic lore and Muḥammad's *Isrāʾ wa-l-Miʿrāj* in Webb (2012b) 10-11.

[1056] "You're set on departing; I know it from saddling of your camels in the dark night" (*Muʿallaqat* ʿAntara, ln10).

[1057] His remarkable ability to survive night travel without being poisoned to death by snakes is noted (al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:141).

[1058] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:156.

[1059] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 98,135,168.

it all day before taking a well deserved draught of wine,[1060] and al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza boasts of his habitual rides in the sun as a prelude to verses describing his tribe's intrepidness.[1061] Once again, however, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran exceeds even these heroes for he is usually portrayed running, without a mount,[1062] and ṣaʿālīk poetry makes mention of al-Shiʿrā stars which appear at the end of June and hearken the hottest period of the year.[1063] It is a time when, according to desert lore collected by Ibn Qutayba in *Kitāb al-Anwāʾ*, the Bedouin beat a retreat to their wells,[1064] gazelles hide in the crevices,[1065] and even locusts cannot settle on the land.[1066] The star is also mentioned in the Qurʾān as a special object of pagan worship (53:49). I have not found references to these special stars in non-ṣaʿālīk pre-Islamic poetry.[1067] The accounts of ṣaʿālīk adventures under these stars thus further emphasise their separation from the Bedouin community, reinforcing the doubly 'othered' creation of 'bandit space'.

The unusualness and unfamiliarity of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's desert shapes the understanding of the poet's persona: it is impossible to imagine a 'normal' man surviving in, let alone thriving in such a space. The extreme othering of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's environment therefore conjures an extremely othered figure in the

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[1060] *Muʿallaqa* ln37.

[1061] *Muʿallaqa* ln14.

[1062] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:140.

[1063] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 95, al-Shanfarā *Dīwān* 46.

[1064] Ibn Qutayba *al-Anwāʾ* 47.

[1065] Ibn Qutayba *al-Anwāʾ* 43.

[1066] Ibn Qutayba *al-Anwāʾ* 44.

[1067] *Al-Shiʿrā* is part of the starts of *al-Jawzāʾ*, and I have found references to *al-Jawzāʾ* in several pre-Islamic poems; such references, however, are made to the setting of *al-Jawzāʾ* (in December) when the weather is coldest and the rains are bitter. This is the circumstance described by Al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī (*Dīwān* 18), and, in any event, he does not boast of his own travels, the star occurs in the wretchedly (and indeed sublime) narrative description of a bull as part of a long *waṣf* of the poet's camel. *Al-Shiʿrā* is referred to by a number of Islamic poets such as Dhū al-Rumma and al-Farazdaq, but the ṣaʿālīk appear to monopolise it in pre-Islamic verse. See Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 95, al-Shanfarā *Dīwān* 43, 46)

imagination, and from the perspective of fourth/tenth century urban readers, the poet exemplified the types of dangers they would have associated with Arabia during the height of the Qarāmiṭa chaos. He is, in short, the epitome of general urban trepidation towards the desert, and specifically a fourth/tenth century fear of an insecure and violent world they associated with contemporary Arabia and hence the Arabian *al-Jāhiliyya.*

The extremes of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's desert that place him at the very edge of pre-Islamic society have led the major modern study of the poet to propose that he was a liminal character along with the other ṣaʿālīk in the pre-Islamic ethical code and in pre-Islamic Arabian mythology.[1068] But I question whether we should accept the Taʾabbaṭa Sharran story as it is presented to us in *al-Aghānī.* The desert described is too extreme, it beggars belief that the poet could survive on an exposed mountain summit for days without water, outrun horses across the desert plain, or chase down gazelles for food without weapons or a mount; or, in the case of al-Shanfarā, another ṣuʿlūk, share his food with wolves and jackals far from human settlement.[1069] The world of the ṣaʿālīk is a myth, a literary creation, so whose literary imagination conjured the myth? Stetkevych and earlier scholars assume Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is part of pre-Islamic Arabian mythology, but we ought to pay closer attention to the specific circumstances of *al-Aghānī.* It was written precisely in the period when notions of violent and pagan *Jāhiliyya* became expressed in wider literature on Arab origins, and at the time when Arabia's remoteness and insecurity fuelled new conceptions of pre-Islamic Arab history. Did Taʾabbaṭa Sharran always inhabit a doubly-othered desert as a ṣuʿlūk since his earliest surviving portrayals in classical literature, or was this image of the poet a product of the wider changes in the Muslim notions of Arabness explored in this thesis? A diachronic analysis of

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[1068] The basis of S.Stetkevych's (1993) analysis of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran.

[1069] See the opening to his famous poem, *Lāmiyyat al-ʿArab.*

Arabic literature between the second/eighth and fourth/tenth centuries is necessary.

6.2(c) Taʾabbaṭa Sharran: a posthumous ṣuʿlūk?

As a practical introduction to the utility of chronological analysis, consider the designation of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as one of the 'ṣaʿālīk'. I am unaware of any modern commentator who denies this appellation for Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, but the first Classical Period text to explicitly describe our poet as 'ṣuʿlūk' is *Kitāb al-Aghānī*.[1070] Otherwise, biographical descriptions from earlier, third/ninth century sources lack reference to ṣuʿlūk, and instead Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is described by the *adab* and poetry collectors Ibn Ḥabīb (d.245/859) as *shujāʾ* (brave) and one of the *futtāk* (headstrong, belligerents);[1071] by al-Sukkarī (d.275/888) as *nahd*, *jarīʾ* and *fātik* (strapping, daring and bellicose);[1072] by Ibn Qutayba (d.276/889) as *baʾīs* (tough, brave)[1073] and by the genealogist/historian al-Balādhurī (d.c.279/892) as *shirrīr* (very vicious).[1074] Such adjectives are not as radically different from the descriptions of other pre-Islamic hero-poets and do not connote a ṣuʿlūk outcast brigand. The omission of the term 'ṣuʿlūk' is also particularly revealing in the case of Ibn Qutayba who did use the term elsewhere, for instance, to describe the poet al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka.[1075] Furthermore, unlike other famous 'ṣaʿālīk' such as al-Shanfarā and ʿUrwa ibn al-Ward, words derived from the root *ṣ-ʿ-l-k* are absent in the extant verses of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran and the primary source for Ibn Jinni's (d.392/1002) anthology of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry appears to have been the anthology of Taʾabbaṭa

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[1070] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:152,167.

[1071] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 196.

[1072] Al-Sukkarī *Sharḥ* 843.

[1073] Ibn Qutayba *al-Shiʿr* 1:318.

[1074] Al-Balādhurī *Ansāb* 12:250.

[1075] Ibn Qutayba *al-Shiʿr* 1:353.

Sharran's tribe Fahm which also sits uneasily with the current conception of the ṣaʿālīk as liminal characters outside of tribal society.

Labelling Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as a ṣuʿlūk thereby accepts the narrative of *al-Aghānī*, but may not faithfully reflect opinions held by earlier generations of Arabic scholars. As shall be detailed below, the attachment of the designation 'ṣuʿlūk' to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is only one of many developments in his portrayal between the late second/eighth and mid-fourth/tenth centuries. The nature and interpretation of the poetry attributed to him along with the tenor of anecdotes which eventually coalesced into his lengthy biography in *al-Aghānī* further illustrate the changing fortunes of our poet and his gradual fashioning into a prototypical *Jāhiliyya* ṣuʿlūk over time.

6.2(d)(i) Taʾabbaṭa Sharran in the second/eighth century

Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry makes its first recorded appearance in the *Dīwān al-Mukhtārāt*, better known, at least by the fourth/tenth century, as *Dīwān al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*[1076] attributed to the literary scholar al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (d.c.164-170/781-787).[1077] The collection opens with a *qaṣīda* attributed to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran which Stetkevych chose to demonstrate the paradigmatic 'liminal' archetype of the ṣuʿlūk. While she concludes that "[w]ith remarkable consistency, the ṣuʿlūk thus appears, in both the *akhbār* concerning him and the poetry attributed to him, to be

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[1076] Al-Nadim *al-Fihrist* 82.

[1077] Debate surrounds the attribution of the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* anthology to al-Mufaḍḍal himself. Of the 126 poems in the current edition, some classical sources suggest that al-Mufaḍḍal only collected 80 (or 70) and that the remainder were added by his younger contemporary al-Aṣmaʿī (d.213/828) (Jacobi "al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt", *EI²* 7:306). The fourth/tenth century al-Iṣfahānī even reported that the selection of the poems was made by the Shiʿa leader Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbd Allāh who was fleeing the Abbasid authorities and sought refuge with al-Mufaḍḍal (al-Iṣfahānī *Maqātil* 373). This has been considered in more detail by S.M. Yusuf and Jacobi considers the latter story the least likely ("al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt", *EI²* 7:307). Whatever the case, all sources date the collection to the end of the second/eighth century, whether by al-Mufaḍḍal himself, or augmented shortly after his death.

the perfect model of the passenger manqué [i.e. liminal outcast, 'anti-hero']",[1078] her methods epitomize the extractive, historical approach outlined above whereby fourth/tenth century anecdote and poetry from the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* and commentary of al-Anbārī are marshalled to support conclusions about Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's supposed 'real character'.

While Stetkevych's analysis of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran has been broadly accepted,[1079] her selective approach to the primary material both ignores *akhbār* and *ashʿār* from other primary sources which portray Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as an integrated tribal brave like many other pre-Islamic poets,[1080] and more substantively, her anachronistic use of later Classical writings to explain *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* forces us to interpret Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry strictly in accordance with the fourth/tenth century predilections of al-Iṣfahānī, and surrenders the opportunity to analyse the poetry with a view more sensitive to the significance of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran in earlier periods. Reading Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's *qaṣīda* solely in the context of *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* reveals a poet whose difference from the other poets of the collection is apparent, but not to the extent of full-fledged liminality of a 'brigand'.

Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's *qaṣīda*, unlike many others in *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, refrains from citing the tribal 'we', the common element in pre-Islamic tribal boating poems

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[1078] S. Stetkevych (1993) 118.

[1079] See Jacobi "al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt", *EI²* 7:308.

[1080] For example, S.Stetkevych (1993) 94-95 places considerable weight on one anecdote regarding how Taʾabbaṭa Sharran received his name in building her theory of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as Oedipus, however, she ignores other explanations for his sobriquet which do not bear such interpretation. She claims that Taʾabbaṭa Sharran lived perpetually outside of the tribal order and was thus 'liminal' (111-114), but his boasts of survival alone in the desert, could alternatively be interpreted as explorations on morality and society, and additionally many poems in Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's *Dīwān* closely parallel the tribalism, *fakhr* and a form of pre-Islamic 'family life' (Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 72,75,91,148,190,193-194). She also notes that the reference to his barefootedness denotes a certain perpetual ritual impurity, however, this is cited in *al-Aghānī* as testament to his strength and endurance (21:240-242) and is elsewhere cited by pre-Islamic poets as emblematic of warrior leaders (al-Aʿshā *Dīwān* 109).

(*fakhr*), and the poet describes his own speed in *running* across the desert instead of the more usual praise of a she-camel or horse in most other pre-Islamic *qaṣīdas*. But while this leads Stetkevych to propose that Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is the archetypal liminal *ṣuʿlūk* in the pre-Islamic pantheon, the poet's description of his past love at the opening of the poem, his glorification of the warrior band ethic and his praise of an unnamed ideal leader are very close to the themes we associate with mainstream poet heroes of *al-Jāhiliyya* and are a far cry from the liminal brigand notion of *ṣaʿlaka*.[1081] Crucially, the poem makes no reference to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's life of robbing and *ghūl* hunting, and so the true archetypal characteristics of a *ṣuʿlūk* are distinctly lacking at the moment the poet emerges into recorded history.

While Stetkevych argues that the opening of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's *qaṣīda* and its short *nasīb* established "a fundamental difference between the *ṣuʿlūk* qasidah and the classical heroic one",[1082] representing a reiterative as opposed to linear progression (i.e. the *ṣuʿlūk* is trapped in a never-ending life of banditry), and conjuring imagery typical of the lone-ranging bandit at night, its opening in fact is not so dissimilar from other poets of *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* in terms of length, language and imagery. For instance, al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza, composer of the famous tribal *fakhr Muʿallaqa*, opens his *qaṣīda* in *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* with "Ṭaraqa al-khayālu wa-lā ka-layalti mudlijī" ("the apparition came at night; what a dark night for the traveller");[1083] mirroring Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's opening: "The lover's spirit comes across the fears of the night".

[1081] For instance, when chastised for wasting money, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's retort is that his truthfulness, leadership qualities and honour remain (46-47), in a similar vein to ʿAntara's boast in his *Muʿallaqa*: "When I drink, I exhaust all my money, though my honour remains, in profusion and abundance" (ln 40).

[1082] S.Stetkevych (1993) 107-108.

[1083] *Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* 2:53.

The *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* poem does contain allusions to night travel (Lns.1,12,17), far-flung empty spaces (Lns.14,15) and difficult desert mountains (Lns.16-18) which were to become fixtures of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's wild desert in later writing, but when read in the context of *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* alone, these descriptions are not unusual. Their reference in this poem should perhaps be better read as the kernel upon which Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's wild desert would be later exaggerated, but since the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* poem otherwise does not substantially diverge from other pre-Islamic verses, we should not assume that by the end of the second/eighth century the Taʾabbaṭa Sharran myth had already been created.

Another of our earliest extant sources supports the notion that the 'brigand poet' topos did not enter Arabic literature fully formed. Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī's *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ*, the earliest extant biographical dictionary of poets makes no mention of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, nor any other of the later famous *ṣaʿālīk*, even though, according to al-Jumaḥī's introduction, its aim was to list those "Arab poets, warriors and heroes...which any knowledgeable person ought to know".[1084] One would presume that had the *ṣaʿālīk* been a fixture in pre-Islamic mythology, some mention in either *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* or *Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ* would have appeared.

6.2(d)(ii) Poetry and anecdote in the third/ninth century

During the course of the third century, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's persona witnessed new developments and his desert was steadily distanced from the depictions of the rest of the pre-Islamic Bedouin community. However, we shall see that this process was gradual and multifaceted, and over the course of this century different 'Taʾabbaṭa Sharrans' emerged, each rather colourful, but illustrating different facets imagined to be emblematic of pre-Islamic life. These features were

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[1084] Al-Jumaḥī *Ṭabaqāt* 1.3.

not yet synthesised and likely form the basis of the ambiguous portrayals of the poet in later sources.

In al-Aṣmaʿī's (d.213/828) *al-Aṣmaʿiyyāt*, we find a beautiful poem attributed to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran describing a night journey to a remote desert location.[1085] Echoing the natural images of the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt qaṣīda*, this poem expressly emphasises the utter remoteness of the destination[1086] and the natural perils of the journey, further distancing the poet's space. While remote deserts are a common motif in pre-Islamic poetry generally, witness the pasture described by ʿAntara in his ode (lns 15-17), Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poem is different: the other poets usually only describe these locations, while Taʾabbaṭa Sharran boasts of actually travelling there (and during the hottest part of the year). The association of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran with personal adventures into these far-away reaches at this early period indicates his environment was already approaching the second-degree removed sublimation, though, as yet, the 'barbarian' character is still undeveloped: his action here is merely travel, not raiding or *ghūl* hunting. It must be noted as well that this poem could in fact be an elaborate metaphorical description (*waṣf*) of the lips of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's lover, and the choice to read it as a wild desert adventure may be an anachronistic interpretation based on the more certain depictions of the poet's desert in later writing. The *Aṣmaʿiyyāt* poem, therefore, may be entirely typical of the 'mainstream' corpus of pre-Islamic poetry and connotes no *ṣaʿlaka*. The meaning is difficult to resolve as the lines in question have survived as a fragment from an originally longer poem, and thus lack any context.[1087]

[1085] Al-Aṣmaʿī *al-Aṣmaʿiyyāt* 140-141.

[1086] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran informs us that he travelled alone, with no guide because the location was so absolutely secluded that no guide exists who knows about this 'never-before-seen' part of the desert.

[1087] The lips metaphor was apparently proposed by Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ, though al-Tabrīzī rejected it (see *Dīwān* 94, note 1).

Clearer indications of the dramatization of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's character in the guise of a headstrong, sometimes lone-ranging warrior appear in Abū Tammām's (d.231/845) *al-Ḥamāsa* and *al-Waḥshiyyāt*. The relish of combat and willingness to fight alone, later cornerstones of the *ṣuʿlūk* persona, are evident in five poems ascribed to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran in those collections, however, the poet still appears integrated within the Bedouin tribal community as a particularly adventurous warrior brave actively participating in inter-tribal feuds: thus he still retains traits common to 'mainstream' pre-Islamic hero poets.[1088]

Al-Waḥshiyyāt contains Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's elegy of al-Shanfarā.[1089] The two poets would later be intimately linked as partners in crime within the *ṣaʿālīk* community, however, the poem gives no indication that the either of the two were bandits, and reads more like the elegy from one warrior hero to another, not at all different from the tenor of the many elegies recorded in the *rithāʾ* section of Abū Tammām's *Ḥamāsa*. Like Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* poem, this poem paints al-Shanfarā within the framework of a pre-Islamic hero and all the seminal traits now synonymous with the *ṣaʿālīk*, such as their shunning of society, relations with desert carnivores, emaciation and savage spirits, are absent.

On the other hand, the four poems in *al-Ḥamāsa* do hint a kernel of separation of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran from the mainstream. Further emphasis on remote desertscapes, darkness and oppressive heat continue the development towards the 'doubly removed' space of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's desert, and the addition of the terror of violent raids in these poems increases the violence of that space (now dangerous

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[1088] See for instance the poem "*Inna bi al-shiʿb...*" (al-Marzūqī *al-Sharḥ* 2:827), which, although modern scholars generally dismiss it as a later fabrication of the poetry transmitter Khalaf al-Aḥmar, follows the traditional warrior image encountered in the *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt qaṣīda*: combat in a mountain pass, nobility of character, generous, valiant, wine-drinking, travelling the desert alone, at night, a Yamānī blade as his only companion.

[1089] Abū Tammām *al-Waḥshiyyāt* 131-132.

both for its remoteness *and* warring). Also, his persona begins to follow the depiction of his environment. Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's verses in *al-Ḥamāsa* stress how he is headstrong and self-possessed, how he invites more danger upon himself than the ordinary tribesman, and his combats are not portrayed as being solely for tribal honour, but for personal vendetta which betrays a certain extra belligerence of character.

The sources considered until now were poetry anthologies which contain neither anecdote nor comment on the verses they record. Al-Jāḥiẓ's (d.255/868) *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* is the first extant prose text citation of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry, and supports our argument that the poet's sublimation into the quintessential 'barbarian' had not, by the mid-third/ninth century, yet occurred. Al-Jāḥiẓ gives Taʾabbaṭa Sharran little special treatment, esteeming him as a pre-Islamic poet worth multiple citations, though making no indication of either the specifically heroic or anti-heroic aspect of the poet's character. In keeping with the emphasis on Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's 'doubly remote' desert, however, al-Jāḥiẓ does cite him in a section on descriptions of lonely wastelands.[1090] Whilst Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's space may thus have shifted towards the fantastic, his persona evidently not yet followed.

In this respect, it is important to note that Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is entirely absent from al-Jāḥiẓ's long discussion of *jinn* and *ghūls*. Al-Jāḥiẓ does narrate a poem describing a fight with a *ghūl* which today is attributed to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran,[1091] however, al-Jāḥiẓ attributes it to Abū al-Bilād al-Ṭuhawī and gives no indication that this verse may be Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's.[1092] Furthermore, al-Jāḥiẓ makes no mention of the poet in his discussions of the supernatural, madness,[1093] or brigandry –

[1090] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Ḥayawān* 3:402.

[1091] The first attribution of this poem to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran occurs in *al-Aghānī* 21:140.

[1092] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Ḥayawān* 3:438.

[1093] Al-Jāḥiẓ does cite a verse from al-Shanfarā in connection with madness, although in the context of madness induced by beauty, not the unrestrained madness of desert fighters (*al-Bayān* 3:224).

subjects where we would expect more reference to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran had his truly barbaric ṣuʿlūk persona been popular at the time.

The ambiguity of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's persona in the early period of historical reconstruction is further evidenced in both al-Buḥturī's (d.284/897) *Ḥamāsa* and al-Sukkarī's (d.275/888) *Sharḥ ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn*. In Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poems in these collections, the poet appears as a prominent tribal brave, not at all a lone brigand in remote deserts. Even reference to the remote desert is limited, instead our poet is firmly within the traditional tribal structure and his poetry comprises fairly standard *hijāʾ* invectives against his enemies,[1094] and boastful threats of revenge for dead kinsmen cited in a traditional tribal register.

The poetry does have a remarkable effect, but not on account of wild and lonely deserts, but rather because of its violence: the violence endemic in the fabric of warring pre-Islamic society,[1095] which is distinctly separate from the disorganised brigandry with which Taʾabbaṭa Sharran would later be more closely associated in the guise of a ṣuʿlūk. Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry in al-Sukkarī's *Sharḥ ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn* portrays him as both hero and anti-hero: an awe-inspiring defender of

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[1094] Arazi (*EI*² 10:3) notes the general prevalence of first person singular "me" in the context of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry which is different from the 'standard' tribal poet's preference of the plural "us". This is certainly the case for much of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry and supports the construction of a lone-ranger type persona. However, the plural pronoun is referred to in ln.14 of his poem "*alā ʿajiba al-fityānu min ummi mālikin*" (*ṭawīl*) (*Dīwān* 103). The poem, wherein Taʾabbaṭa Sharran alludes to his life of ease in the tribal community which he contrasts to his exertions in battle, was reported in al-Sukkarī's tribal *Dīwān* (*Sharḥ* 844) and Ibn Jinnī's *Dīwān* of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, also collected from tribal sources (Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 98). In other poems in al-Sukkarī's anthology, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran praises his fearsome warrior band (*Sharḥ* 844,847), depicting the poet in the familiar form of pre-Islamic tribal brave. In this respect, his poetry in al-Sukkarī's *Sharḥ* differs from that in other sources.

[1095] The poetry is significantly augmented, explained and sublimated even further by anecdotes collected by Al-Sukkarī. As in the poetry, nature is not the source of the terror, but rather the uncontrolled violence of the pre-Islamic Arabs is frightening, and Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, a tribal warrior leader, is at the centre of constant and senseless violence (e.g. al-Sukkarī *Sharḥ* 843).

his tribe, but also a 'barbarian' whose use of violence could not always be controlled.[1096]

Al-Sukkarī is also the first author to provide us extensive prose anecdotes associated with Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry. In keeping with the tenor of the poems, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is not described as a ṣuʿlūk, nor do we find supernatural ghūl fighting or other embellished traits now synonymous with al-Jāhiliyya. Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is described as "nahd, jarīʾ and fātik"[1097] (strapping, daring and bellicose[1098]), he leads raiding parties of his tribe Fahm and partakes in violent military practices which al-Sukkarī describes as being "typical of al-Jāhiliyya".[1099] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's death is connected to his breaking the rules of pre-Islamic conflict where he murders two rival tribesmen at their dwelling during one of the holy months during which killing was forbidden. In the aftermath, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is tricked by a youth who, in revenge for the earlier murders, mortally wounds him.[1100] While Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's 'unlawful killings' may appear a typical trait of a ṣuʿlūk brigand, the breaking of the rules of truce months are not an uncommon motif in the Ayyām literature (and are often portrayed as the cause for larger-scale wars of revenge), and the elegies of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran sung by his mother which follow this anecdote revert to the typical elegy of pre-Islamic tribal heroes where Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is

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[1096] In one anecdote Taʾabbaṭa Sharran and his band of Fahm braves are about to rob and murder a wealthy member of a rival tribe, though seeing one of their own tribesmen in his company, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's troop refuse to complete the raid, despite Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's orders (al-Sukkarī 844).

[1097] Al-Sukkarī Sharḥ 843.

[1098] I discuss Ibn Ḥabīb/al-Sukkarī's notions of futtāk above, pages 46-47.

[1099] Al-Sukkarī specifically notes how, after planning an ambush in which his men became unwilling to participate, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran shot an arrow at the intended targets (who were unaware of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran and his band), to alert them to his presence and the fact that he had been watching them, as if to say that their lives were in the balance, and only Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's decision to retreat saved them. The shooting of the arrow in this circumstance is described by al-Sukkarī as "the way people did things during al-Jāhiliyya" (Sharḥ 843-844).

[1100] Al-Sukkarī Sharḥ 845-846.

even referred to as "*fatā Fahm*" (the (head)-brave of the Fahm tribe).[1101] The fact that his rule-breaking is counted as the cause of his death also underlines the poet's status within the tribal moral code.

In short, al-Sukkarī's anecdotes characterise Taʾabbaṭa Sharran firmly within the tribal order. He is characterised as bellicose, bloodthirsty and untamed, but these traits are portrayed as typical of the warring tribes of pre-Islamic times. As al-Sukkarī's work is a tribal collection, such an emphasis is not surprising, but for the modern reader, it demonstrates that Taʾabbaṭa Sharran was not universally cast as a long-ranging bandit during the third/ninth century and had an important role to play as one of Fahm's foot-soldiers in the collected tribal lore of *al-Jāhiliyya*. The depiction of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran within the tribal order in these two mid-third/ninth century collections accords with the contemporary historical writing about *al-Jāhiliyya* examined earlier in this thesis. The legacy of inter-tribal conflict in early Islam had perpetuated an image of warring factions in the pre-Islamic past within which Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is portrayed as an important participant. His wild and successful fighting are an honour for the tribe Fahm, though the depictions of his character do extend beyond what was strictly necessary to defend the tribe, and evince a sense of anarchy which blends the stories of tribal fighting with the more terrifying contemporary anarchy of Arabia during the mid-third/ninth century. It is tempting to read the depiction of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran at this period as a development to reflect the realities of the Arabian desert, and to stress that the memories of him had only just begun to move towards their later synthesis as a *ṣuʿlūk*.

6.2(d)(iii) Mid-Late third/ninth century: biographies and developing paradoxes

The earliest biography for our poet is contained in Ibn Ḥabīb's (d.245/859) *al-Muḥabbar*, although since the extant version of this book has come down to us via

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[1101] Al-Sukkarī *Sharḥ* 846.

the narration of al-Sukkarī (d.275/888), it may be prudent to treat it as a mid-third/ninth century relic.[1102] Paralleling the anecdotes from *Sharḥ ashʿār al-Hudhaliyyīn*, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is accorded a short biography within a chapter of the *Futtāk al-Jāhiliyya* in *al-Muḥabbar* which is followed by a chapter on the *futtāk* of Islam. Taken together, these *futtāk* (the plural of *fātik*) are not at all portrayed as liminal characters or failures in the compliance with societal norms, but rather as proud, headstrong combatants who resorted to violence as a primary means of either asserting themselves, upholding the moral code or punishing criminals. I noted in Chapter 1.6 that *al-Muḥabbar* portrays a continuity of Arabness from pre-Islamic to Umayyad times, and Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's inclusion in this work thus presents him not as a reprehensible *ṣuʿlūk* outsider to the Arab community (and the term is not recorded in *al-Muḥabbar*), but instead as the epitome of the Arab brave.[1103] The Islamic era *futtāk* include warriors on *jihād* and, particularly, men who used violence to defend the honour of women, and each of the pre-Islamic and Islamic characters share a trait of fighting alone, but they are perhaps better compared with the vigilante crime-fighter Batman in modern urban mythology than to outcast anti-heroes. The stories are racy, entertaining and improbable: in the case of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, we are informed how, after being surrounded by a large band of his enemies, he affected his escape down a mountainside, sliding on honey![1104]

To compare the accounts of the *futtāk* in *al-Muḥabbar* with the Arabic literary tradition, these stories have close resonance with the characterisation of ʿAntara in

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[1102] See Note 115.

[1103] The portrayal of our poet as tribal brave is also imparted in Ibn Ḥabīb's *Kitāb al-Mughtālīn* where he describes Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as "one of the poets and *futtāk* of the Arabs" and narrates his final (and fatal) raid which he did not lead alone, but rather with a "group of his tribe" (Hārūn *Nawādir* 2:233).

[1104] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 197-198.

his eponymous *Sīra* or Jundaba ibn al-Ḥārith of *Sīrat al-Amīra Dhāt al-Himma.* The parallels with popular storytelling are also suggested through Ibn Ḥabīb's statement that there are "many bizarre/wondrous stories about [Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's] raids".[1105] The gradual construction of Bedouin *aʿrāb* as heroes in medieval Arabic popular literature have been noted,[1106] and the mention of *ʿajab* (wonderment) and the multitude of incredible stories in *al-Muḥabbar* suggests that we could date this process to the mid-ninth century. The hypothesis that mid-third/ninth century narrators were beginning to rework the stories of tribal fighters from the old tribal memories (such as Fahm as recorded by al-Sukkarī) into a topic of embellished storytelling accords with the changes I have identified in the transformation of the wider Arabness idea into desert Bedouin, and the changes to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's persona and environment should be read against this backdrop.

The further development of the 'savage' Taʾabbaṭa Sharran appears in Ibn Qutayba's (d.276/889) *al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*, the first biographical entry of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran in a book devoted to poets. Ibn Qutayba describes him as '*baʾīs*' (tough, brave), a raider who would fight on foot (alone?).[1107] This echoes *al-Muḥabbar*;[1108] however, Ibn Qutayba is the first author to record supernatural elements with Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, telling us how the poet's mother could predict the outcome of his raids by performing magic tricks with his urine.[1109] Most importantly, it is Ibn

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[1105] Ibn Ḥabīb *al-Muḥabbar* 197.

[1106] Herzog (2004).

[1107] Ibn Qutayba *al-Shiʿr* 1:318. The word 'alone'/*waḥdahu* is inserted in parenthesis in the printed editions of *al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*, and it is unclear whether this word was originally in the manuscript or whether it has been added later. Unfortunately, the editor gives no indication of why the word has been placed in parenthesis. The slightly later Ibn Durayd (d.321/933) reports only that "he would raid on foot" (*al-Ishtiqāq* 266) – Taʿabbaṭa Sharran's 'lone ranger' persona would be developed during the fourth/tenth century, hence the *waḥdahu* in the current edition of *al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ* may be an anachronistic addition inserted in later manuscripts.

[1108] In *al-Muḥabbar* he is described as being "brave, he would raid on foot, horses could not catch him, he feared nothing" (196).

[1109] Ibn Qutayba *al-Shiʿr* 1:318.

Qutayba who provides us with the first anecdote (and related poem) in which Taʾabbaṭa Sharran met and killed a *ghūl* at night in the desert.[1110]

With the addition of the supernatural and *ghūl* fighting and the stress on the raiding in the desert alone, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's persona undergoes a perceptible shift since the earliest recordings of his poetry a century earlier. Towards a wild barbarism, both awe-inspiring and scary, and the poet now begins to more equally mirror the sublime of his desert stomping grounds. His persona at the end of the third/ninth century, however, remains ambiguous and lacks important facets which would be added later. Evidence for this can be drawn from al-Balādhurī's (d.c.279/892) *Ansāb al-ashrāf*. According with the aims of the *Ansāb*, al-Balādhurī considers Taʾabbaṭa Sharran within his tribal context and so bolsters the persona of the poet as a tribal warrior akin to the memories recorded by al-Sukkarī. Al-Balādhurī also sheds light on the composition of the sources for Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, noting various accounts of his death (two similar to that reported by al-Sukkarī), but a third, related on the authority of the "Hudhalīs" (collective tribal memories), recounts Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's death in battle against rival braves – a more glorious, and entirely mainstream mode of death in pre-Islamic storytelling.[1111]

Seemingly deriving his material from tribal narrators, it is noteworthy that al-Balādhurī focuses on Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's warring spirit, and makes no mention of the supernatural when discussing the origin of his unusual sobriquet.[1112] But at the very end of the entry on Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, al-Balādhurī appends a laconic quotation from "Abū al-Yaqẓān" who reports that the poet "met and killed the *ghūl*".[1113] This is followed by a line of poetry mentioning various obscure place-

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[1110] Ibn Qutayba *al-Shiʿr* 1:319.
[1111] Al-Balādhurī *Ansāb* 12:251-253.
[1112] Al-Balādhurī *Ansāb* 12:247.
[1113] Al-Balādhurī *Ansāb* 12:254.

names, but the poem itself gives no indication of *ghūl* fighting and when it was incorporated into Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's *Dīwān*, it was placed in a different context, unconnected with *ghūls*.[1114] Al-Balādhurī's account thus promotes the image of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as a tribal brave involved in the warring political relations of the pre-Islamic age, however a degree of embellishment via lusty narrative and introduction of the supernatural appears to be looming in the anecdotes coalescing around our poet.

The third/ninth century, in sum, presents us with a varied picture. First, the synthesis of (a) the tribal warrior of al-Sukkarī/Ibn Ḥabīb and (b) the savage lone-warrior meeting *ghūls* of Ibn Qutayba had not yet occurred. They seem to represent separate traditions for Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, one derived from tribal *ayyām* sources and the other from a different imagination about pre-Islamic Arabia. Second, there is as yet no concrete reference to banditry or the *ṣaʿālīk* – Ibn Qutayba did not name Taʾabbaṭa Sharran a "*ṣuʿlūk*". And lastly, it appears that Taʾabbaṭa Sharran was not, even by the latter half of the third/ninth century, famous for his wild nature: al-Yaʿqūbī's (d.c.284-292/897-905) list of pre-Islamic poets in his *Tārīkh* includes Taʾabbaṭa Sharran,[1115] and mentions no other brigand poets, rather he lists Taʾabbaṭa Sharran with Imruʾ al-Qays and al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī. The poet's fame thus seems related to the quality of his poetry, not to his status as a ruthless *ghūl* fighting bandit.[1116]

6.2(d)(iv) Fourth/Tenth Century Synthesis

It is during the fourth/tenth century that the persona of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran which is familiar to us today begins to emerge, although the process was

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[1114] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 177.

[1115] Al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* 1:265.

[1116] Al-Yaʿqūbī provides no details about Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, but the nature of this chapter in his *Tārīkh* states that he selected for mention those poets whom "narrators and experts of poetry" count amongst the best of the art (*Tārīkh* 1:262).

nonetheless gradual. The focus on banditry is first expressed in al-Anbārī's (d.304/916) commentary on the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* (which adds numerous hitherto unreported anecdotes to the poem first related in the second/eighth century). Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's tribal connections are basically ignored (only his direct lineage is mentioned) in favour of emphasis on his links with al-Shanfarā and other *ṣaʿālīk*.[1117] The commentary accentuates Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's warrior abilities, great speed and cunning in the context of the desperate life of a warrior band in the desert which thus breaks from the *ayyām* mould presenting our poet now as the outlaw anti-hero: a villain, but one whose character possesses an incredible and raw masculinity, bravado and skill which cannot but garner some admiration. Unlike later representations of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, however, al-Anbārī's commentary makes no mention of the supernatural.

Ibn al-Anbārī's (d.327/940) commentary on the Seven Odes of the *Jāhiliyya* alludes again to the *ṣaʿālīk* trope by discussion of the attribution to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran of several lines of poetry which describe remote deserts, lone-raiding and affinities between the bandit and hungry wolves and which had hitherto been ascribed to Imruʾ al-Qays.[1118] The initial attribution of these lines to Imruʾ al-Qays emphasises how this extreme desert setting was common in representations of pre-Islamic Arabia in general, but now, as Taʾabbaṭa Sharran becomes more closely identified within the parameters of the *ṣuʿlūk* (*i.e.* hardship, co-habitation with carnivores), scholars began to change the attribution of these verses to him. Later compilations continue this belief in Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's authorship, such as Ibn Jinnī in his *Dīwān*[1119] and al-Baghdādī's *Khizānat al-adab*.[1120]

[1117] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran and al-Shanfarā are described as raiding and robbing together (al-Anbārī *Sharḥ* 1:29-30), and the poems of al-Shanfarā and Taʾabbaṭa Sharran appear in tandem to gloss each other. (1:262, 267, 275)

[1118] Ibn al-Anbārī *Sharḥ* 70.

[1119] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 168.

Heretofore, whilst notions of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's wild character, his treacherous desert, his ṣuʿlūk status and his supernatural encounters have been developing, they have lacked synthesis and express characterisation. This finally occurs in *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (c.350/960), which contains the most lengthy biography of our poet to date, and brings all the disparate facets of his several personae together, combining and exaggerating them, and adding new material that produces a character at the extremes of heroism, banditry and the supernatural in a pure 'state of nature'.

Al-Iṣfahānī's work particularly augments Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's characterisation by adding suggestive anecdotes and glosses to the poetry. For instance, the poem in which Taʾabbaṭa Sharran describes fighting the *ghūl* at Raḥā Biṭān does not lay emphasis on the fact that the adventure occurred at night,[1121] but the hands of al-Iṣfahānī, the sublime horrors of the night are exaggerated via a short prose preamble: "he spent a pitch-black night of thunder and lightening in a depression known as Raḥā Biṭān…"[1122] Quite where al-Iṣfahānī derived this 'dark and stormy night' motif is unclear and unprecedented, but he deftly slips it into our impression of the poem and generates a sublime mood to the poet's oeuvre.

Al-Aghānī is also the first text to offer a supernatural explanation for Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's unusual sobriquet, "He who carries Evil under his armpit". While the third/ninth century accounts in al-Balādhurī attribute the nickname to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's bellicose personality, *al-Aghānī* repeats these but also introduces a new story, relating that the 'evil' which Taʾabbaṭa Sharran carried was

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[1120] Al-Baghdādī *Khizāna* 1:148. Though attribution to Imruʾ al-Qays also persisted: see the citation of one line in *Lisān al-ʿarab*'s definition of *jawf* (9:36).

[1121] Only the word '*muṣbiḥan*'/'on daybreak' at the end of the poem gives any indication that the event happened at night.

[1122] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:145.

in fact a *ghūl*.[1123]   The new explanations included into the mix suggests the increasingly supernatural leanings in Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's persona, and such emphasis on the supernatural pervades *al-Aghānī*: al-Iṣfahānī states that Taʾabbaṭa Sharran mentions *ghūls* in his poetry "often"[1124] (though *al-Aghānī* is the first book which cites more than one example of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's relations with *ghūls*!), and changes the attribution of the Raḥā Biṭān poem to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran.[1125]

It is noteworthy that only from the mid-fourth/tenth century do we find Arabic writers associating Taʾabbaṭa Sharran with *ghūls*. Whilst references in the third/ninth century were slight, less than a decade before *al-Aghānī*, al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab* mentions Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as a *ghūl* fighter,[1126] and by the end of the fourth/tenth century, in al-Bāqillānī's (d.403/1012-1013) *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*, Taʾabbaṭa Sharran is mentioned as *the* archetypal pre-Islamic poet known to have communicated with *ghūls*.[1127] In the 150 years since early commentators made no mention of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran and the supernatural, and in contrast to the fact that al-Jāḥiẓ saw fit to make no mention of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran in his chapter on *ghūls* and actually attributed poetry about *ghūls* to another poet, that poem became ascribed to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran and he was transformed into the primary example of a *ghūl* fighter of pre-Islamic Arabia!

Al-Aghānī, also more than any text hitherto, stresses the wild environment of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as noted above and accordingly paints our poet as a barbaric brigand. It is the first text to report that Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's reputation as a fierce warrior was famous in his day, the mere mention of his name being enough to strike

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[1123] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:138-139.

[1124] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:139.

[1125] We recall that al-Jāḥiẓ in the mid-third/ninth century attributed the poem to al-Ṭuhawī.

[1126] Al-Masʿūdī *Murūj* §1125.

[1127] Al-Bāqillānī *Iʿjāz* 39-40. See also al-Bakrī's mention of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as the quintessential *ghūl* fighter (*Masālik* §202) in a passage copied from al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj*.

fear into the hearts of the desert Arabs.[1128] It expressly mentions him as a robber (*liṣṣ*),[1129] a belligerent (*fātik*)[1130] and, importantly, it is the first to call him a *ṣuʿlūk*.[1131] *Al-Aghānī* also closely associates Taʾabbaṭa Sharran with al-Shanfarā and other brigands, suggesting he was a leader of *ad hoc* groups of desert bandits, outside of the usual tribal order. However, the tribal warrior persona of al-Sukkarī's text is simultaneously incorporated, and *al-Aghānī* frequently mentions the poet's role as an important bellicose leader of tribal war parties to avenge dead kinsmen.[1132] As an encyclopaedic work, it is perhaps not surprising that *al-Aghānī* brings together the various Taʾabbaṭa Sharrans so far encountered: each of the 'tribal hero', the robber 'boss'; the 'lone, *ghūl* killing bandit' and the defender of tribal honour. But the overall effect renders Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, his desert and persona as wilder than ever.

The characterisation continued with further developments towards the supernatural and brigand persona even after *al-Aghānī*. At the end of the fourth/tenth century, Ibn Jinnī (d.392/1002) (compiler of the first complete *Dīwān* of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry)[1133] developed these notions through narrating a poem hitherto not encountered in which Taʾabbaṭa Sharran recounts his killing of another *ghūl*,[1134] and in a separate new verse Taʾabbaṭa Sharran shows off his greatly emaciated physique:

[1128] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:140.

[1129] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:149.

[1130] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:145.

[1131] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:152,167.

[1132] Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* 21:149,152,166,169.

[1133] Ibn Jinnī's notes on the *dīwān* imply that he based his compilation on a previous *dīwān*, but, as has been persuasively argued by Dhū-l-Fiqār Shākir (Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 33-35), the older anthology to which Ibn Jinnī refers was most likely *Dīwān Fahm*, the collection of the Fahm tribe's pre-Islamic verse (Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's tribe). Ibn Jinnī was thus the first to devote an entire book to the poet and his compilation adds a further 7 poems to the oeuvre

[1134] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 228-229.

I see you so haggard

Your collar bone sticks out, your ribs protrude.[1135]

Physical emaciation, which is a quintessential characteristic of the ṣaʿālīk, only appears in Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poetry in the fourth/tenth century. Turning back to the description of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran in al-Sukkarī's third/ninth century anthology, we found Taʾabbaṭa Sharran described as *nahd* ('strapping/sturdy'). However, emaciation had become the *sine qua non* of the lone-ranging ṣuʿlūk, subsisting on meagre supplies in the empty quarters of the desert. Ibn Jinnī's verse, added at the end of the fourth/tenth century, is perhaps the most graphic example regarding the 'newly' introduced ṣuʿlūk Taʾabbaṭa Sharran. Fascinatingly, another line of poetry illustrating Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's emaciation (it describes him as "*laṭīf al-ḥawāyā*" (of lean innards)) was *added* during the fourth/tenth century to one of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poems recorded in the third/ninth century *Ḥamāsa* where the line was initially absent.[1136] The late appearance of these attributes in Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's oeuvre further demonstrates the gradual construction of ṣaʿlaka traits in his literary persona.

Other 'new' poems in Ibn Jinnī's Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* do, however, focus on the portrayal of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as a tribal warrior hero. He praises his tribe,[1137] leads raids, and exacts blood revenge.[1138] Clearly, the efforts to sublime him as a *ghūl* killing bandit did not take over his persona entirely and his role as a tribal

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[1135] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 120.

[1136] The line is not recorded in *al-Ḥamāsa* and the earliest addition of it is in al-Qayrawānī's *Zahr al-Ādāb* (d.305/917), Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar's (d.310/922) *Naqd* 42 and Ibn ʿAbd al-Rabbihi's (d.328/940) *al-ʿIqd* 1:139. But not every early fourth/tenth century accepted the new line, c.f. al-Qālī's *Amālī* (2:138).

[1137] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 75.

[1138] Taʾabbaṭa Sharran *Dīwān* 161.

fighter of the *Jāhiliyya* continued to be remembered.[1139] And perhaps this is the basis for the contradictory impressions of the poet today: notwithstanding the substantial transformation of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran into an embodiment of the wildest aspects of *al-Jāhiliyya*, the old memories of his 'life' as a more ordinary tribal warrior were not completely effaced.

6.2(d)(v) Final Developments – the Fifth/Eleventh Century

Fifth/Eleventh century writers furthered the outlandish heroic and anti-heroic aspects of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's character. Al-Marzūqī's (d.421/1030) commentary of the *Ḥamāsa* adds editorial comments about the poet's character to guide the interpretation of his poetry, such as "he had committed crimes in every land", [1140] and "his greatest concern was to seek blood-revenge or attack guardsmen". [1141] Al-Marzūqī expressly emphasises how the poet harassed caravans,[1142] and how dangerous his night travels were,[1143] and al-Marzūqī's prose adds relish to the glory and honour of pre-Islamic hero warriors,[1144] and explains how Taʾabbaṭa Sharran epitomises the unsentimental pre-Islamic hero who, as an aspect of his heroic character, was able to escape the pangs of love lost.[1145] A reader can sense al-Marzūqī's manifest excitement in conjuring the formidable persona of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran from the verses of *al-Ḥamāsa*.

The final poem to be added to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's oeuvre appears in the poet al-Maʿarrī's (d.449/1057) *Risālat al-Ghufrān*.[1146] The poem is insightful for its

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[1139] Ibn Jinnī also narrates an anecdote about Taʾabbaṭa Sharran in commentary on a poem of Qays ibn al-ʿAyzāra (*al-Tamām* 14). Here he notes the poet's nickname "*shaʿl*", abetting the perception of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran as a tribal warrior engaged in 'heroic' inter-tribal strife.

[1140] Al-Marzūqī *Sharḥ* 2:491.

[1141] Al-Marzūqī *Sharḥ* 2:492.

[1142] Al-Marzūqī *Sharḥ* 2:497.

[1143] Al-Marzūqī *Sharḥ* 2:497.

[1144] Al-Marzūqī *Sharḥ* 2:493.

[1145] Al-Marzūqī *Sharḥ* 2:492.

[1146] Al-Maʿarrī *Risālat al-Ghufrān* 359.

even further development towards the supernatural: it not only describes the poet's encounter with *ghūls* in remote deserts, but adds they were of a sexual nature![1147] Certainly the most outlandish of all Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's poems, the poem is a fitting last addition to the body of his work, showing how the fairly traditional heroic warrior poet of the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* in little over 250 years had developed a taste for ravishing *ghūls* in impossibly distant deserts. By inexorable addition and shifts in emphasis over time, the wild projection of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran reached its logical conclusion where it settled, and he has been understood as an archetypal *ṣuʿlūk* – an emaciated, lone-ranging, *ghūl* fighting robber ever since.[1148]

6.2(d)(vi) Conclusions

Taʾabbaṭa Sharran made good on his threat to his under-appreciative kinsmen:

The tribe will ask about me

From the people of distant lands

Seeking my whereabouts;

…

But there will be none to report:

No one will have met *Thābit*[1149]

The historical Taʾabbaṭa Sharran has indeed escaped us, though the literary Taʾabbaṭa Sharran preserved in Arabic writing provides interesting evidence of a

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[1147] The attribution of the poem to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran rests on a lexical similarity between the unusual *tihibbād* in line two and the equally unusual *tifirrāq* recorded in the poet's best-known poem from *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* (al-Maʿarrī *Risālat al-Ghufrān* 359-360). While al-Maʿarrī never himself asserts the *ghūl*-ravaging poem is by Taʾabbaṭa Sharran, the context of the story requires that readers have an opinion that Taʾabbaṭa Sharran and his 'fellow' *ṣuʾlūk* al-Shanfarā (they are discussed consecutively (358-360)) were deservedly relegated to Hell for their *Jāhiliyya* lifestyles. The well-established *ghūl*-interacting persona of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran by this time would have made the story easy to accept.

[1148] See al-Baghdādī's (d.1093/1682) *Khizānat al-adab* 1:148 for a later biography which expressly follows *al-Aghānī*'s lead in portraying Taʾabbaṭa Sharran.

[1149] *Dīwān* 142. Thābit is the poet's real name.

gradual development of both character and space to evoke notions of desolation, environmental perils, anarchical warring and supernatural threats. The transformation mirrors the wider changes in the representations of Arabness explored in earlier chapters of this thesis, whereby the beginning of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's transformation in the mid-third/ninth century corresponds with a period when Arabs were beginning to be cast as a race of ancient Bedouin, yet the full effect of the 'othering' of Arabs took almost a century to complete, and in that same century, so did the transformation of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran into an epitome of the violent, pagan Arabian *Jāhiliyya* which, as demonstrated in Chapter 1, also begins to appear in dictionaries and Qurʾān commentaries at the same time.

6.3 Conclusions: *Jāhiliyya*, wonderment and Islamic origin myth

With the advantage of hindsight and diachronic analysis of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's persona and oeuvre during the Muslim-era we can better appreciate several statements al-Jāḥiẓ made about the recording of Arabic literature and the Arabian Desert. In *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, al-Jāḥiẓ considers the pre-Islamic poetic references to holes in which gazelles, wolves and hyenas reportedly sought refuge from the desert heat. Al-Jāḥiẓ remarks

> A wondrously strange thing is that despite all the travels I have made in the wilds and across the lands, and all my journeys in the deserts of Arabia, Rūm [central Anatolia?], al-Shām [the Syrian Desert], al-Jazīra [northern Iraq] and others, I do not think that I have ever seen in the midst the roads and tracks, in the surrounding paths, or to the sides of the roads – and I have paid close attention to the countryside and I have trekked through wild lands – one single hole that is big enough for a hyena or a male gazelle or any such animal to enter. I have seen a great many holes, but they would barely fit a fox or jackal, let alone the bigger animals so described [in poetry and Arabian lore] as entering them.[1150]

[1150] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Ḥayawān* 4:24.

Al-Jāḥiẓ's incredulity reveals his recognition that the relish for descriptions of incredible heat of the Arabian Desert recorded in Arabic poetry, so fierce that it sends wild animals into crevices and holes, was a literary trope that al-Jāḥiẓ was unable to corroborate in reality. We have noted such embellishment in the representation of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's desert, and the disjoint between the reality of actual Arabia and the literary Arabia of the mid-third/ninth century urban imagination is even more directly expressed in another quotation from *al-Ḥayawān.* Here, al-Jāḥiẓ pointedly critiques his contemporaries' collection of pre-Islamic poetry about supernatural Arabian phenomenon:

> Whenever the *aʿrābī* is more outlandish in the poetry [he relates], the [poetry] narrator considers him more curious/admirable, and hence more frequently narrates from him, and hence the absurdities of his narrations grow, and accordingly some began to claim the sighting of a *ghūl*, or killing a *ghūl*, accompanying a *ghūl* or even marrying one, while another alleges that he accompanied a panther in the desert wastelands.[1151]

Al-Jāḥiẓ's statement describes the process patently discernable in the case of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran.[1152] Regarding the mechanics of poetry collection, al-Jāḥiẓ's anecdote and our analysis of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran demonstrate that from the early to mid-third/ninth century, urban poetry narrators became increasingly interested in 'wild Arabia', and Arabian narrators complied with contemporary tastes and amended their poetry accordingly. Regarding the aesthetics of that poetry collection enterprise, the anecdote reveals the advent of interest in the wondrous aspects of pre-Islamic verse. Al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* provides further insight into this aesthetic, noting that "tales and legends (*al-asmār wa-l-khurāfāt*) have been in

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[1151] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Ḥayawān* 3:447.

[1152] Al-Jāḥiẓ also expressly alludes to fabrication and misattribution of poetry to Taʾabbaṭa Sharran (*al-Ḥayawān* 3:32,4:448), supporting my suspicion that later narrators augmented the poet's corpus to create the *ṣuʿlūk* persona.

popular demand during the Abbasid Caliphate, and particularly during the reign of al-Muqtadir [r.295/908-320/932], hence the authors wrote [them] with fabrications".[1153] Al-Nadīm counts two famous *adībs* of the early third/ninth century amongst these 'lying authors': Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir Tayfūr and Sahl ibn Hārūn.[1154] The latter also appears in al-Jāḥiẓ's description of aesthetics in *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, where he cites Sahl's opinion that the most delightful discourse is neither the prettiest or neatest, but rather the most unusual.[1155] Probing third/ninth century opinions on wonderment further, al-Jāḥiẓ (again quoting Sahl ibn Hārūn) is again instructive:

> A thing, when out of its ordinary place, is more unusual; whenever something is more unusual, it appears queerer in the imagination, and whenever it appears queerer in the imagination it is more curious, then more wondrous and then more marvellous...people are predisposed to exalt the strange and seek pleasure from the curious.[1156]

Both al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Nadīm were critical of the fascination with wonderment, and al-Jāḥiẓ explained that the fantastic was too close to low 'popular taste' and was distorting the representation of the 'true' Arabian desert culture. But these scholars were evidently powerless to stem the transformation of pre-Islamic Arabian lore towards increasingly outlandish tales.

The depiction of ancient, primordial history as an era of wondrous heroes in a fantastic environment has manifest parallels with what Western scholars have called a sublime aesthetic. The sublime refers to the artistic representation of awe-inspiring, wild and fanciful scenes which are intended not merely to repulse or shock (like horror), but rather to inspire audiences to think beyond their quotidian

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[1153] Al-Nadīm *al-Fihrist* 367.
[1154] Al-Nadīm *al-Fihrist* 367.
[1155] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:89.
[1156] Al-Jāḥiẓ *al-Bayān* 1:89-90.

experiences and to explore the unfathomable and ineffable and to give some meaning to what rational systems of thought cannot understand.[1157] The sublime invokes paradoxical feelings of fear and delight, manifested in the dual positive and negative reactions to observing awe-inspiring or dangerous things. A physical encounter with danger or mystery, be it dark forests, violent storms, wild animals or hydrogen bombs naturally evokes reactions of terror, fear and a mad scramble for safety. But in sublime art, audiences are not confronted with *real* dangers, but merely representations of them: art affords us a 'safe' aesthetic distance from which to view them. This permits the suppression of rational fears and grants a liberty to observe and actually relish such otherwise dangerous things. The feelings of fear and delight simultaneously provoked from beholding artistic representations of awe-inspiring and captivating things has led theorists to conclude that the sublime points to a "natural power" within humans which can be used for noble or destructive purposes:[1158] terror and wonderment here are two sides of the same coin.

It is tempting to see the brigand poets in the untamed wilds of *al-Jāhiliyya* as reconstructed in later Abbasid literature as naturally evoking the same contradictory and simultaneous responses of fright in reaction to the violent 'savagism' of pre-Islamic Arabia in tandem with a less rational, but definite admiration for the awesome martial strength and moral conviction of the era's protagonists like Taʾabbaṭa Sharran. The paradoxically 'awesome' and 'terrifying'

[1157] Kant refers to our "true nature which we suffocate with reason". To paraphrase Rousseau's lament that "reason has succeeded in suffocating nature" (1755) 70. Kant, who triumphed reason above all, stated that the most esteemed individual is one who is able to reconnect with his innate nobility (1991) 60-61 while still adhering to reason as this prevents his natural impulses from degenerating into barbarism (66-67). However, Kant is not entirely consistent here, and he retained great 'irrational' respect for humanity in the raw, witness his willingness to forgive murderers and villains some of their outrageous acts provided that they were committed with sublime, brazen dignity (1763) 53.

[1158] Kant (1763) 53-55.

Jāhiliyya could thus be seen as inseparable, two sides of the same coin of a literary sublimation.

In urbanite writings across the world, nature has traditionally been understood as quintessentially sublime owing to its terrifying, unknown and unpredictable wilderness [1159] and artists frequently choose natural subjects to represent the sublime. [1160] However, nature is not sublime *per se*, rather, it is *sublimated* by our imaginations. Urban people are familiar with man-made environments and hence wild, untrammelled nature is fundamentally different from their everyday milieu. It is this essential unfamiliarity that permits sublimation, and hence the sublime aspects of nature are found predominantly in the art of urban civilisations. In contrast, an ornamental garden, though biologically natural, is not considered sublime. [1161] The awesome fear of the unfamiliar Arabian Desert in the minds of third/ninth and fourth/tenth century urban Iraqis again resonates with the mechanics of the sublime.

The sublimated wilds of the 'natural world' in the urban imagination readily become a foil to the safe, rational, familiarity of civic surroundings and they therein intersect with many discourses generated in urban civilisations including, particularly, origin myths. Here a wild representation of nature becomes the unfamiliar, obscure and radically different setting in which pre-history is narrated. This starkly 'othered' space is sufficiently alien for audiences to reasonably believe that in such a place 'primitive man' could have existed. The origin myth is thus able to convincingly portray 'pre-modern man' and explain how he developed from the

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[1159] Burke (1759) 61-62.

[1160] The artistic representation of nature as sublime has particularly attracted the attention of art historians. See the work of the seventeenth century Italian Salvator Rosa for an early example of the sublime purposely applied to natural representation, and, see also the nineteenth century German Caspar David Friedrich who is the paradigmatic painter of sublime landscape, applying the theories of Kant and German Romantics deliberately into his work.

[1161] Burke (1759) 86.

'state of nature' into 'civilisation'. Because this story is told only after 'civilisation' has taken root, the actual 'state of nature' from whence civilisation emerged is enigmatic, a conjecture subject to imaginary reconstruction, and hence sublimation and mythification.[1162]

When a 'modern' society looks back towards its origins, it appears that this sublimation commonly occurs: the origin is sublimated so as to be 'othered' and focus is directed to its difference to the 'modernity' of the narrators' present day. The sublime's innate paradox means that this 'othered' imaginary world can be interpreted as the savage, pre-enlightened past with exaggerated terrors that facilitate a celebration of civilisation which 'rescued' humanity from its miserable first habitat. Conversely, the excitingly novel aspects of this sublimated world also provoke awe and admiration, becoming celebrated as a time before the perceived ills of 'civilisation' took root. Here myth is influenced by a nostalgia for primitivism and becomes populated by exaggeratedly 'noble savages', the delightful sublime.[1163]

The sublime therefore has informed interpretations of Western origin myths, narratives of the 'state of nature' and even American 'Western' films of sheriffs, bandits, heroes and anti-heroes in the twentieth century cinematic reconstructions of the 'pre-modern' nineteenth century 'Wild West'.[1164] And in conclusion, the remarkably sublime sounding aesthetics noted by al-Jāḥiẓ and the purposeful reworking of Taʾabbaṭa Sharran's legacy towards a clear literary

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[1162] Rampley (2005) 251,259.

[1163] A famous example of the dichotomy within origin myths is the origin narratives of Enlightenment Europe represented by Hobbes's miserable Natural Man whose life is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short" (1651) 89, and by Rousseau's Noble Savage "a free being whose heart is at peace and whose body is in health" (1755) 97. Žižek (2008) 202-204 analysed both 'stories', and found that such narratives are bound to create paradoxes on a number of levels, not least because they explain the process of 'civilisation' as if it were 'natural', while glossing over the fact that, paradoxically, such a 'natural process' leads mankind away from the 'state of nature'. Philosophers would have us believe that it is natural for us to want to avoid being natural!

[1164] See Simmon (2003).

sublimation suggest that part of the construction of *al-Jāhiliyya* between the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries was also a literary sublimation to create an origin myth.

Set in a harsh desert presented as the primordial space of the 'original Arabs', this vision of Arabia is a natural foil to the urban Islamic civilisation of the Iraqi alluvial plain. Furthermore, portrayals of *al-Jāhiliyya* paradoxically represented both savagism and purity – the violence of pre-Islamic tribal warfare and the extreme ferocity of the *ṣaʿālīk* live side-by-side in literary representations of Arabia with Bedouin eloquence, generosity and purity of spirit. The 'pre-Islamic Arabian' accordingly bears two simultaneous and paradoxical interpretations in the fourth/tenth century Abbasid literary imagination: (a) a Hobbesian anarchical pagan with exaggerated terrors which facilitates the narration of the triumph of Islam; and (b) a Rousseauvian symbol of eloquent, manly heroism epitomising the purity of primitivism: free from perceived urban corruption and antecedent to both the loss of the postulated 'pure Arabic' of the desert community and the civil wars that bedevilled the Islamic empire.

The literary representations of the pre-Islamic Arabs, whatever interpretation they were accorded, however, share a key commonality: they were all carefully reworked to generate an archetypal notion of pre-Islamic Arabness. Philologists, historians, genealogists and poetry narrators each, from the third/ninth century and with remarkable congruence in the fourth/tenth century, present Bedouin Arabia as Islam's sublime origin myth, homogenised, pure and fascinating. Whilst the stereotyped 'Arab' thus suited a wide array of later Abbasid philological, literary, historical and ethical narratives, it leaves modern scholars hoping to explore pre-Islamic Arabia in a difficult bind. Arabic writings about the pre-Islamic past are so thoroughly transformed into archetypes of their own

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imagination, that our access to the 'real' pre-Islamic desert is in fact blocked by the textual tradition of Islam. Edward Said famously noted the problematic legacy Orientalism left the study of the Middle East, as Western writers for centuries othered Near Eastern peoples as a means to explore their own civilisation and assert their feelings of superiority. Research into the creation of *al-Jāhiliyya* in the fourth/tenth century mirrors this process exactly: the scholars of Iraq and Iran wielded the power to create the 'Arab' in the image they desired and so generated the stereotypes of Bedouin primitivism that persist to this day. Before Colonial-era European Orientalism, therefore, there was a Muslim Arabism that all modern researchers must confront as one of the most pervasive and important intellectual constructs of the Abbasid era that generated long-lasting narratives to explain Islam's origins and the essence of its urban, 'civilised' culture.

Conclusions

The divergent scholarly theories about pre-Islamic Arab identity and history can now be appreciated as a logical corollary of the fact that pre-Islamic Arabs never actually existed. Or at least, they did not exist in the form that we expect. We expect the original Arab to be an Arabian Bedouin, and we scour the pre-Islamic historical record to find the first stirrings of the Arab ethnos somewhere in the darkness of the 'Empty Ḥijāz', tending camels, singing poetry and jealously guarding their tribal honour. We cannot find these people, however, because that Bedouin stereotype is not a relic of pre-Islamic Arabia, rather, we have been conditioned to expect it thanks to a millennium of Arabic writing augmented by 300 years worth of European scholarship that entrenched the conceptual nexus of tribalist Bedouin-ness and Arabness. We shall never find the paradigmatic pre-Islamic Arab in any ancient historical record because the quarry of our searches is a construct invented in the Muslim imagination and championed in fourth/tenth century writings.

Pre-Islamic north Arabian Maʿaddites allied with a host of other peoples, Bedouin and settled, Arabian and otherwise,[1165] and, under the banner of the monotheistic faith based on "an Arabic Qurʾān", coalesced in the urban centres of Syria and Iraq, and, to a lesser extent, Iran and Egypt where they adopted a new identity and began to call themselves Arabs. Maʿaddites may have been the dominant group for a time, but the interests of the others were irresistible, the Maʿaddite designations were forgotten and a sense of shared Arabness emerged. But all of these demographic changes were distant history when Arabic speaking Iraqis finally began to record the story of their culture's origins more than two centuries later. By this time, the former elites had been completely replaced and

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[1165] Syrians and Iraqis seem to have been important, considering the memories of Tanūkh and Ghassān, and Lahkm, respectively in later Arabic writing.

communication with Arabia was all but non-existent; the stage was set for Arabness to become a useful topos for non-Arab Iraqi scholars. Their conception of Arabness embodied everything that was different from their contemporary milieu: the Arabian Desert contrasted Iraqi urban developments; the supposed natural eloquence of Arab *Fuṣḥā* contrasted the vernaculars of the mixed-race community of later Abbasid times; the pre-Islamic *al-Jāhiliyya* opposed Islam which, by the fourth/tenth century, had been established as the majority religion across nearly the entire Middle East; and the Bedouin's flamboyant generosity, eloquence and verve expressed a freedom that no urbanites, in any time, can enjoy.

Later Abbasid writers wanted to believe that the Arabian Bedouin stereotype reflected Islam's past. It allowed them to conceptualise the miraculous birth of Islamic empire from a pagan desert void, it bestowed a sense of mythic wonderment to the past, and it allowed them to conceptualise their civilisation as a complete break from the millennia of Iraqi/Iranian civilisations that preceded them. In order for this edifice to work, however, Muslim writers would need to forget who the original Muslim conquerors were and forget even where they came from. They would need to be homogenised as Arabs, deported into the distant pre-Islamic Arabian Desert and converted into primordial Bedouin. The tidy 'model Arab' could then form the basis of a field of knowledge; scholars could become experts and sell their learning to reveal the 'true' nature of the Arabic language and the 'true' condition of Islam's founders. Since the sense of Arab awareness had declined in Iraq, and since Arabia was entirely inaccessible, the scholars faced little resistance: socio-political changes left them unprecedented freedom to conceptualise 'Arabs' in a new way. Captivated by the allure of the Bedouin we still search for Arabs in pre-Islamic Arabia, but our energies ought to focus on the creation of this myth instead.

The pre-Islamic Arabia recreated in Arabic writings from the third/ninth century must have reflected some 'true' memories of the 'real' past, but quite how much, we cannot yet tell. The demands of the Arabness topos required poetry to be carefully crafted to transform the Maʿaddites into Arab archetypes, even the Umayyads, as successors to the 'original Arabs', would need to fit the mould too, and my diachronic survey reveals the inexorable desertification of history over the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. Just as the dissection of fact and fantasy in Orientalist accounts of the nineteenth century Middle East is a difficult exercise (Europeans did not simply invent the East *de novo* as a strict reading of Edward Said could imply), the deconstruction of early Muslim 'Arabism' should prove just as complex. We are left to question afresh the codification of pre-Islamic 'Arabic' poetry, the genesis of the heroic stories of the pre-Islamic 'Arabs', and to reappraise pre-Islamic history: for example, who were Ghassān and Lakhm?[1166] Does the fact that their conflict exactly mirrors the power struggles of early Islam across the Euphrates frontier mean we have completely misread their historical significance; did Muslim agendas transform them? Further study of these agendas will also help us understand why Yemenis earned the honour of the "Arab Arabs" (*al-ʿāriba*), while the Maʿaddites would have to settle for "Arabised Arabs" (*al-mustaʿriba*), and why the sublimated *Arabica* became the 'classics' of Arabic literature.

We shall have to reappraise early Islamic history too. If an Arab unity did not fuel the success of the Muslim Conquests, what did? Who actually waged those wars? From which groups did the Umayyad Caliphate rise, and why were geographically diverse peoples such as the south-Arabian Ḥimyar, the Medinan

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[1166] Current research is addressing this question: Fisher (2011a) 173-209 offers a new approach on the Ghassanids and Lakhmids, identifying them, respectively, as Jafna and Naṣr, and seeks to situate them within the Late Antique milieu and without adopting pre-conceptions from later Muslim-era Arabic sources.

Anṣār, the Syrian Ghassān and the Iraqi Lakhm all grouped together as Yemenis? Was this a form of resistance to Maʿaddite dominance, or was the notion of *Yamāniya* imposed by later genealogists?

My explanation that Muslim 'Arabism' othered the Arabs and created the paradigms under which the Middle East has been studied ever since offers an explanation of why the Arabs seem to come from nowhere in the historical record of the first/seventh century and why Muslim writers wrote their most detailed accounts of Arabness precisely during the period when Arabia was completely inaccessible. Like any historian, I construct a narrative to make the past understandable for the present. Like any historian, I am also handicapped by the spatial and temporal gap between my study in which I write and the material which I study. But as a practical matter, I am but only a little more removed from pre-Islamic Arabia than al-Jāḥiẓ and al-Iṣfahānī were when they expounded on the 'authentic habits' of the 'original Arabs'. Readers should trust no one, and rigorously question the complexities of Arabness to better understand the rise and significance of one of the world's most discussed and oft-misinterpreted peoples.

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