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Descendants and ancestors: a study of Arabic inscriptions from the Arabian Peninsula (1st-4th c. AH/7th-10th c. CE)

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Chapter Four: Missing people

4.1. Introduction

“One of the most important editorial decisions when composing a genealogically structured history is whom to include. Normally, the genealogist does not record every name he knows about, but chooses the most notable and notorious. Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn al-Kalbī follow this format quite rigidly – there are rarely instances where they include a name without a reason for its inclusion (normally they are accompanied by an anecdote or at least a job title). Al-Zubayrī is an exception though.”⁴⁶⁶

One of the main aims of this dissertation is to compare the literary records with the information that can be gleaned from the inscriptions and to explain any discrepancies. In the previous chapter, I have reconstructed the four *ṣaḥāba* families that form the focus of this thesis on the basis of individuals attested in the epigraphic records, and added all available information about them from the literary sources. In doing so, it became clear that the individuals who appear in the inscriptions fall into two main categories those that appear in the literary sources and those that do not. In the first category there is a large scope between those who are amply represented in the literary sources and those that get only scarce mentions. So we find people who have their own biographical entries or who are referred to in historical works and other people’s biographies, with short anecdotes about what they did or which functions they held. In other cases, only their name appears in *nasab* and *ṭabaqāt* records, where they are mentioned solely as someone’s son, or husband. In the second category are those I have labelled “missing people” as they are entirely lacking in the available literary sources. The second type is also divided into two groups – namely, those who can be

⁴⁶⁶ Robinson, “*Prosopographical Approaches*,” 87.

identified based on their relation to family members associated to their epigraphic entries (either because they mention them in their genealogy or because their inscriptions appear near those of their family members, as discussed in Chapter Three); and those who can only be placed in a certain family because of the presence of a known *nisba*, but whose identity remains otherwise unknown (Chapter Three, section 3.5.5).

However, as shown in Chapter Three, inscriptions help us to draw family trees that are more elaborate than the ones from the sources. Looking into these writings in more detail, will yield more interesting hypotheses or reasons about why certain individuals are missing from the *nasab* tradition. These different theories are discussed and analyzed in the following part.

The result of the investigations carried out in Chapter Three, shows that of the 106 individuals who appear in this dissertation, 58 could not be matched with literary records. This means that 55% of the individuals who left inscriptions in this group of rather prominent families, are entirely overlooked in the historical sources. Of this 55%, 12% could not be identified at all, although they clearly belong to one of the four well-known families of the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad; I labeled them unidentified Zubayrid (see Chapter Three, section 3.5.5).

In order to answer the questions of when, where, and why the epigraphic and literary historical records differ, I will examine *why* these ‘missing people’ are absent from available literary records. I will turn to the conceivable reasons behind their absence from the literary records, for which I have taken Majied Robinson’s dissertation as a starting point.⁴⁶⁷

4.2. What this corpus adds to the *nasab* tradition

In the previous chapter, I showed that the epigraphic corpus adds to our knowledge about individuals belonging to well-known Medinan and Meccan families of *ṣaḥāba* who are ‘lost’ in

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 87-100.

the work of the Muslim genealogists. Some recent studies have dealt with people mentioned in the epigraphic record that are missing from the genealogical works. Examples are the works by al-Zayla‘ī⁴⁶⁸ and by al-Ḥaddād.⁴⁶⁹ These studies only used inscriptions to add the individuals to the respective family trees. Al-Zayla‘ī, for example, argued that one late descendant of al-Mūsawiyya family was missing from the genealogical work.⁴⁷⁰ Al-Ḥaddād, on the other hand, dedicated a section in his book discussing how inscriptions can be used to correct mistakes that exist in the genealogical books, about members of family in the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁷¹ Al-Ḥaddād was able to provide additional information about two of the descendants of ‘Alī, two members of the Zubayrid family (as mentioned in Chapter Three, section 3.5.1.1), and a descendant of ‘Uthmān son of ‘Abd al-Dār.⁴⁷² However, as I mentioned in Chapter Three, section 3.5.1.1, he made a mistake in the sources he used on his identification of the two Zubayrids that appear in the inscriptions.

Our corpus adds members to each family in our corpus which were not known previously in the sources (see Chapter Three, figures 7-14). The aim of current chapter is not to provide additional corrections to the literary record by adding more names to family trees, rather, it is about trying to give an explanation of *why* people are absent from the historical discussions of these early generations of well-known families. Nonetheless, in the process of finding these answers we do still manage to also add new members to each family (see also the family trees in Chapter Three).

4.2.1. The end of *nasab* and *ṭabaqāt* literature?

When examining the descendants of al-Mughīra, we can observe that throughout the 3rd generation, the inscriptions and literary sources are almost identical. Other members that left inscriptions are

⁴⁶⁸ al-Zayla‘ī, “Aḍwā’,” 169-189.

⁴⁶⁹ al-Ḥaddād, *al-Nuqūsh al-āthāriyya*, 1: 29-32.

⁴⁷⁰ al-Zayla‘ī, “Aḍwā’,” 174-175.

⁴⁷¹ al-Ḥaddād, *al-Nuqūsh al-āthāriyya*, 1:28-32.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 1: 29-30.

from later generations, which are absent from the sources (see Chapter Three, section 3.3). In the case of the family of Abū ‘Abs of which the 3rd and 4th generation are present in the inscriptions, through seven individuals, only two persons are known from the historical sources; one of them is from the 3rd generation, namely Maymūn son of Zayd (inscriptions 4.23-24), the other comes from the 4th generation namely ‘Abd al-Majīd son of Abū ‘Abs (inscriptions 4.17-18).⁴⁷³ The additional five individuals from this family that left inscriptions, are not present in the literary sources.

For the family of ‘Umar, on the other hand, there is coherence between the *nasab* and *ṭabaqāt* traditions and the information offered by the inscriptions up to the 5th generation, with only one missing person from this generation, and a missing client which I counted as belonging to the 4th generation. From the 6th generation onwards, the incoherence between the literary sources and inscriptions increases with three out of six individuals that did leave an inscription, but were never mentioned in the literary sources (see Chapter Three, figure 9).

The Zubayrid family genealogy showed some issues with identification between the inscriptions and the literary records. In each branch and generation, people that are mentioned in the inscriptions, are missing from the literary records. Strikingly al-Zubayrī and al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār are more accurate with regards to the ‘Umar family, than they are concerning their own family which is only complete up to the 4th generation, with one individual missing from this generation ‘Umar son of Muṣ‘ab son of ‘Urwa (inscription 3.57). After the 4th generation the family tree of the Zubayrid family becomes increasingly unclear and uncertain, both in the literary sources and the inscriptions. We do still have two individuals from the 6th generation, namely Yaḥyā son of al-Zubayr (inscriptions 3.21-23) and ‘Abd Allāh son of Muḥammad son of al-Mundhir (inscriptions 3.36-39) that both appear in work of al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār. This raises the question: why would

⁴⁷³ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 7: 589; al-Bukhārī, *al-Ta’rīkh al-kabīr*, 7: 341.

the two genealogists not include particular members from their own family in their work? And why did they claim that some of their relative's lineages had died out, when the graffiti show us a different picture? In the following pages, I will attempt to answer these two questions, not only with regard to the family of al-Zubayr but also with regard to the missing individuals in the other families.

4.3. Explaining the “missing people”

The reasons why the individuals who left their record in the inscriptions are absent from the literary record or only appear there by name are manifold. It is necessary to distinguish between intended and accidental absence from the literary records. Being absent in the sources does not necessarily mean that the authors intentionally ignored or removed an individual. We will see that in sections 4.3.8 and 4.3.9.

In the following pages, I will present nine possible reasons for the absence of individuals from our literary records. Hypotheses 1, 3 and 5 are built on Robinson's thesis, in which he discusses the three main reasons of why some members of al-Zubayr family are missing from the work of Muṣ'ab al-Zubayrī.

In his PhD, Robinson described that there are 23 Zubayrids missing from the work of Muṣ'ab al-Zubayrī, which were mentioned in three other sources: *Jamharat al-nasab*, *Ta'rīkh al-rusul*, and *Ansāb al-ashrāf*. For some of the individuals Robinson could not explain why they are absent, for the others he found they could be divided into three categories of absences: “the embarrassments, the rāwīs and the women.”⁴⁷⁴ Robinson's categories or cases and other explanations of why people went missing in the historical record are discussed below.

⁴⁷⁴ Robinson, “*Prosopographical Approaches*,” 89.

4.3.1. Women, clients and slaves

Women, clients and slaves are not typically mentioned in our historical sources, neither in the literary nor in the epigraphic sources, though clearly there are exceptions. This is because the authors of the *nasab* works did not value their role in society. Only occasionally do they mention women in the context of their relationship as mothers or daughters to the men that are discussed in the sources. Indeed, the five women who appear in our corpus, could not be identified properly. Luckily, four of them have a long genealogy mentioned on their epitaphs, which enabled me to fit them into their family tree. The remaining one, however – Ḥakīma, daughter of Hārūn son of ‘Abd Allāh son of al-Zubayr (inscriptions 3.70-71) – could not be identified further within the family that she belonged to due to her short lineage. Robinson has argued that women were absent in *Nasab quraysh* because they were not considered important, he says: “al-Zubayrī omitted his female relatives simply because he did not think them important enough to be named in the context of a father’s children.” Robinson also suggests that when al-Zubayrī did include women, they were included as wives who were the mothers of particular sons that were also mentioned in the genealogy. In other words, they were solely mentioned in their husbands’ entries and would not be listed alongside their brothers in their fathers’ entries.⁴⁷⁵

It is worth mentioning here that the five women in our corpus are all from later generations of the Zubayr and ‘Umar families and were absent from the literary sources, see inscriptions (inscriptions 2.33 and 34) and al-Zubayr (inscriptions 3.59, 65, 70 and 71).

Likewise, clients and slaves are mostly absent in the literary sources, with one exception: Ḥabīb son of Abū Ḥabīb the client of ‘Urwa son of al-Zubayr (inscription 3.51) is mentioned in the literary sources because of his role as *ḥadith* transmitter (see Chapter Three, section 3.5.3). Three

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 99.

clients in our corpus, as discussed in Chapter Three, are missing in the sources: one belonged to the family of ‘Umar (see section 3.4.2); two are found in the graffiti connected to the family of al-Zubayr (see sections 3.5.2 and 3.5.4). Additionally, we find one slave of the ‘Umar family (see section 3.4.2). Even more so than women, slave and freedmen were not considered important enough to be mentioned as dependents of male members of important families, or those men who made a name for themselves.

4.3.2. Lost books

One may also speculate that at least some of the people whose names are lacking from the genealogical works might have been mentioned in works that have been completely or partially lost. As mentioned in Chapter Three, section 3.2.1 part of al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār’s book is still lost as well, the information available on Bakkār’s writing is based on a combination of two incomplete manuscripts, which only really came to light in 2010.⁴⁷⁶ An especially likely candidate in the case of our corpus is *Akḥbār al-madīna* by Ibn Zabāla (d. 199/814). Some parts of this work were reconstructed by Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Salāma who collected quotations of this work in other books that did survive time.⁴⁷⁷ As the field of ancient Arabian epigraphy is still new and moving quickly, it is in fact not unthinkable that more literary genealogical works will get (re)-discovered in library or private collections at some point.

4.3.3. Historical role

The third reason to be considered for why people are overlooked in the literary records is that they had played no role that was deemed historically significant during their lifetime. We can consider Zayd son of ‘Umar son of Ḥafṣ (inscriptions 2.78-86) as an example. Zayd’s name is found under

⁴⁷⁶ See the introduction: al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab*, 1: 31-35.

⁴⁷⁷ Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn Zabāla, *Akḥbār al-madīna*, ed. Ṣalāḥ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Salāma (Medina: Markaz Buḥūth wa-Dirāsāt al-Madīna, 2003), 8.

his father's entry in *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, *Nasab quraysh* and *Jamharat nasab quraysh*.⁴⁷⁸ His brothers are mentioned in the sources as separate entries since they were identified as *ḥadīth* transmitters. However, Zayd was only mentioned as the son of his father with no additional information. We can imagine this is because there was nothing that was considered to be historically relevant to tell about him. Because Zayd, as such, was deemed irrelevant as an historical figure, the family line ended there which explains why his son 'Abd Allāh (inscriptions 2.87-88) is missing entirely from the sources.

Another example is that of the two brothers Muḥammad (inscriptions 2.24-26) and 'Umāra (inscription 2.27) sons of Ḥamza son of 'Ubayd Allāh son of 'Abd Allāh son of 'Umar. In this 'Umāra is known through the literary sources but his brother is not (see Chapter Three, section 3.4.1). Also here it is likely that Muḥammad son of Ḥamza (inscriptions 2.24-26) was not mentioned, because there were no historically significant actions or events associated with him.

This principle applies also to the descendants of individuals who were historically deemed insignificant. We find an example of that in the three brothers al-Qāsim (inscriptions 4.1-8) 'Abd al-Malik (inscriptions 4.13-15) and Maslama (inscription 4.16) and their nephew Sālim son of 'Abd al-'Azīz (inscriptions 4.19-22). 'Abd al-'Azīz, the fourth brother and father of Sālim is not known to have left an inscription so we will not discuss him here. The sons and grandson of Muḥammad son of Abū 'Abs who are attested in the inscriptions are not mentioned in the literary sources. Muḥammad does appear in the literary record, but only in the biography of his father where he is mentioned as his son, without any further information. Because Muḥammad was not

⁴⁷⁸ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 7:460; al-Zubayrī, *Nasab quraysh*, 362; and see al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab*, 2: 23.

historically important enough to appear in the *nasab* and *ṭabaqāt* literature, neither did his offspring (see section 4.3.9).

4.3.4. Contemporary to the genealogists

Another reason for individuals to be absent from the historical record is that they were contemporary to the genealogists. Robinson provides a good hypothesis for the reason that some individuals were omitted from Muṣ‘ab al-Zubayrī’s book *Nasab quraysh*. He says: “The *rāwīs* present in al-Ṭabarī’s records, but absent in the *Nasab Quraysh*, are not the victims of their clansman’s purge – they are guilty of nothing except being alive at the time the book was written.”⁴⁷⁹ This situation only applies to some ⁴⁸⁰ of the ‘missing people’ in my corpus. So it might explain why an individual such as ‘Āmir son of Ya‘qūb son of Ṣaddīq son of Mūsā (inscription 3.34), does not appear in the literary records, it does, however, not account for the absence of his father. His father supposedly lived prior to Muṣ‘ab al-Zubayrī, which we base on the knowledge that the other son of Ya‘qūb, ‘Atīq (d. 227-228/841-843), died before al-Zubayrī (d.236/851).⁴⁸¹ Also al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār did not include ‘Āmir’s brother ‘Atīq⁴⁸² in the entry of the descendant of Mūsā son of ‘Abd Allāh.⁴⁸³ He did, however, use ‘Atīq as a narrator in his book. It is clear that the 6th generation, which al-Zubayrī himself belongs to, is missing from his work, making the hypothesis of Robinson quite likely. The observation does, however, not explain in full why al-Zubayrī in fact already stopped registering some of his family members from the 4th

⁴⁷⁹ Robinson, “*Prosopographical Approaches*,” 97.

⁴⁸⁰ Based on the discussion in Chapter Three, I think these Zubayrids are ‘Abd Allāh son of ‘Atīq son of Ṣaddīq son of Mūsā (inscription 3.30), and those that belong to the branch of al-Mundhir Muḥammad son of Falīḥ (inscriptions 3.43-44), Ibrāhīm son of Falīḥ (inscription 3.40) and Ishāq son of Falīḥ son of Muḥammad (inscriptions 3.45-46).

⁴⁸¹ al-Zubayrī, *Nasab quraysh*, 243.

⁴⁸² al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab*, 1:175.

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 1:552.

generation and onwards, we can notice for instance that the sons of ‘Abd Allāh son of ‘Urwa are missing in the work of Muṣ‘ab al-Zubayrī,⁴⁸⁴ but they appear in the work of Ibn Sa‘d.⁴⁸⁵

4.3.5. Political conflict

Political conflict as a reason for explaining why individuals are absent from the historical record is the fifth hypothesis I address here. These are Robinson’s “embarrassments.” Robinson found some Zubayrids who had joined the revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya are not mentioned by al-Zubayrī but are mentioned in other *nasab* and history works.⁴⁸⁶ It seems convincing that a specific pattern in the genealogy forms a strong indication that an individual was deliberately removed from the written record on the basis of political motives. This pattern is recognized when the sources move from grandfather to grandson in a genealogy, skipping over the father. Indeed, the father in this case likely participated in some level of conflict against the state that disqualified him from being included in the genealogy. This becomes even more likely when the wives, mothers, and offspring of an individual are mentioned in the record, but the individual himself is not.

Robinson argues that some Zubayrids turned against al-Manṣūr which cost them their place in al-Muṣ‘ab Zubayrī’s book. He writes: “he (al-Zubayrī) is clearly cleaning up his family’s past in this section by editing out family members who supported the al-Nafs al-Zakiyya uprising, while including those who were known to have opposed it.”⁴⁸⁷ Indeed, our research confirms that al-Nafs al-Zakiyya’s revolt was also popular among the family of ‘Umar. Another individual that is left out of the genealogy and seems to fit the pattern of ‘a (political) embarrassment’ is ‘Uthmān son of ‘Ubayd Allāh son of ‘Abd Allāh son of ‘Umar. He actively participated in the above

⁴⁸⁴ al-Zubayrī, *Nasab quraysh*, 246.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 7: 460.

⁴⁸⁶ Robinson, “*Prosopographical Approaches*,” 89- 90.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 91.

mentioned revolt, and thus seems to confirm Robinson's observation. 'Uthmān was not mentioned by al-Zubayrī and al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, while this can hardly be because of his controversial politics. He is found in al-Ṭabarī.⁴⁸⁸ Al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār passes in his book from 'Ubayd Allāh the father of 'Uthmān to 'Uthmān's daughter Umm Hishām.⁴⁸⁹ However, his brother Abū Salama who did not join al-Nafs al-Zakiyya⁴⁹⁰ is also missing from the works of al-Zubayrī and al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār while the sons of Abū Salama are mentioned as having held positions in Medina. Thus this instance seems to contradict the assumption that we made above.

Additionally, al-Zubayrī does mention two other participants in the revolt, without any scruples. As mentioned in Chapter Three, section 3.4.2, Abū Bakr son of 'Umar (inscriptions 2.42-44) and his brother 'Abd Allāh (inscriptions 2.89-90) participated in the revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya against al-Manṣūr, even though Abū Bakr was appointed as a judge during al-Manṣūr's reign, before the revolt of al-Nafs al-Zakiyya. They both appear in the works of al-Zubayrī and al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār and they both also left inscriptions.⁴⁹¹ This shows that not all opponents were omitted. In other words, we cannot automatically conclude that the absence of some individual in the written sources is due to him choosing the 'wrong side in a political conflict. It happened that this caused someone's removal, but it was not an iron fist rule.

4.3.6. Family disputes

The sixth reason that might explain the disappearance of someone's name from the genealogical works, lies in family disputes. As Robinson discussed, some of the Zubayrid family members were removed from al-Zubayrī's book *Nasab quraysh* due to their political preferences,⁴⁹² this led me

⁴⁸⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul*, 4: 1579.

⁴⁸⁹ al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab*, 2: 18.

⁴⁹⁰ al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul*, 4: 1579.

⁴⁹¹ al-Zubayrī, *Nasab quraysh*, 362; and see al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab*, 2: 23.

⁴⁹² Robinson, "Prosopographical Approaches," 89-91.

to think that we could probably find other similar patterns in the *nasab* tradition; after all, there might be other reasons why someone would try to erase another individual from historical memory, and it occurred to me that family disputes might be a good candidate. This led me to think that the two Zubayrid genealogists al-Zubayrī and al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār could have omitted individuals from their family tree, due to family disputes. And indeed, as we will see below, the case of ‘Amr son of al-Zubayr, lends itself for this explanation. It is difficult to understand what historical event would have instigated the removal from the genealogical records, in other missing people. Moreover, as the genealogists did not provide any explanation for the reasons why they did not include certain individuals, it remains rather speculative to argue that it was because of quarrels going on within a family.

The two genealogists al-Zubayrī and ibn Bakkār belonged to the branch of ‘Abd Allāh son of al-Zubayr. There is in fact a major family dispute that might have played a role in their *nasab* traditions. As is well-known, ‘Amr son of al-Zubayr stood up against his brother ‘Abd Allāh during the latter’s claim of becoming a counter-caliph. This led to a fierce dispute, ending with the death of ‘Amr in ‘Abd Allāh prison.⁴⁹³ If we look at the work of al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, we see that amongst the descendants of ‘Amr, ibn Bakkār skipped the second and third generations of ‘Amr.⁴⁹⁴ Though al-Zubayrī does mention them, he is less detailed in his descriptions of the descendants of ‘Amr son of al-Zubayr.⁴⁹⁵ Concerning the descendants of Khālīd and ‘Amr sons of al-Zubayr, he mentions – for example – that they have sons, but never mentions their names. So here we find a strong indications that family discord influenced the way these biographies were shaped. However, this one case is too little to draw firm conclusions. It remains difficult to find other clearly

⁴⁹³ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 7: 185.

⁴⁹⁴ al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab*, 1: 225-226.

⁴⁹⁵ al-Zubayrī, *Nasab quraysh*, 250.

identifiable examples of this phenomenon in the limited cases central to this thesis. It would, thus, need more research in a larger corpus to find out if this patterns occurs in other biographies as well, but that falls beyond the scope of this thesis.

4.3.7. The line died out

The seventh reason for omission is that biographers considered a family line to have died out. It happened rather frequently that the biographers designated a family line to have died out, although there are inscriptions of descendants attested. In some cases the ‘existence’ of these individuals is confirmed by other sources.

When the genealogists describe a line that died out, they say: “so and so had a son but the line died out” or “so and so did not have sons.” Presumably, the genealogist worked on the basis of incomplete or incorrect information. This presumption is supported by the fact that when this sentence occurred, indeed no further progeny was mentioned. This in contrast to the earlier cases, where one individual would be missing from the genealogy that would than still continue with his sons. Making up a the dying out of a family line to cover up a politically motivated removal from the historical record, seems incongruous with this pattern.

Examples of the biographical dictionaries claiming someone’s line died out, while the inscriptions show it did not are discussed in Chapter Three.

The first example is related to ‘Umar’s family. According to Ibn Sa‘d, ‘Āṣim son of ‘Umar son of Ḥafṣ son of ‘Āṣim did not have any sons, so the line stopped.⁴⁹⁶ A graffito I examined during my fieldwork contradicts this claim. This graffito was inscribed by a son of ‘Āṣim named Ja‘far (inscription 2.77). This case is discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.4.2.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 7: 532.

The second example relates to the al-Zubayr family. According to al-Zubayrī and al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, Sulaymān son of Ḥamza’s lineage continued only via his daughters.⁴⁹⁷ As discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.5.1.2, a graffito located next to Sulaymān son of Ḥamza (inscription 3.25) mentions Ismā‘īl son of Sulaymān son of Ḥamza (inscription 3.26). This suggests that Sulaymān had at least one son. A probable assumption to make here, is that these individuals like Ja‘far and Ismā‘īl died young, without establishing a family and offspring themselves. One can thus assume that, as such, these young people were not considered important enough to be included in the genealogical works. Like the women who were believed to be unimportant in terms of genealogy, boys that died before the age of manhood and before they would have produced offspring, were probably equally discarded. In Chapter Three, more comparable cases are discussed: epigraphic evidence confirms that the descendants of Šāliḥ son ‘Abbād and ‘Uthmān son of ‘Urwa did exist (see Chapter Three, section 3.5.1.1 and 3.5.3), while some sources seem to have denied it.

As mention in Chapter Three, section 3.5.5, Robinson found another similar example from the sources, i.e. the case of Muṣ‘ab son of Muṣ‘ab son of al-Zubayr. In the *Nasab quraysh* of al-Zubayrī it is mentioned that his line was continued solely by his daughter,⁴⁹⁸ but Robinson found in the sources that he had at hand, that there had in fact been a son.⁴⁹⁹

4.3.8. Fading out of the chronicling of families

It is noticeable that the *nasab* and *ṭabaqāt* literature contains little information about several individuals who left their inscriptions, especially those who lived in mid-2nd/8th century and later. Although the individuals in question are mostly known as having existed or died before the sources were compiled. Still they were not included. In other words, these individuals do not fall under the

⁴⁹⁷ al-Zubayrī, *Nasab quraysh*, 241; Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab*, 1: 78.

⁴⁹⁸ al-Zubayrī, *Nasab quraysh*, 250.

⁴⁹⁹ Robinson, “*Prosopographical Approaches*,” 89-90.

category of being contemporary to the compiler of biographical information which might explain their absence from al-Zubayrī's book as discussed above under 4.3.4.

There is thus a general trend that the biographical dictionaries listing *ṣaḥāba* descendants, would include fewer and fewer people over time, a trend starting from the mid-2nd/8th century. One can note that al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār stopped chronicling or registering some of his own family members in the 4th generation, and, at times, it is very challenging to retrieve any information on them. For instance, the descendants of Falīḥ son of Muḥammad son of al-Mundhir belonging to the 5th generation of al-Zubayr family, are missing entirely from the work of al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār. Ibn Bakkār mentioned the father Falīḥ still, but he never mentioned if he had a sons or not.⁵⁰⁰

In some cases, al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār clearly skips an entire branch as he moves from generation to generation. Examples are most evident in the branch of 'Urwa. A narrator of Ibn Bakkār provides information on the branch of 'Urwa on the authority of Muṣ'ab son of 'Uthmān son of Muṣ'ab son of 'Urwa. Ibn Bakkār mentions Muṣ'ab son of 'Uthmān without any information about his father or brother.⁵⁰¹

Ibn Bakkār provides an entry for Yaḥyā son of al-Zubayr, but no information is available for his descendants, as mentioned in Chapter Three, section 3.5.1.2, a graffito dated during ibn Bakkār lifetime (207/822-823) mention Yaḥyā's son Muḥammad (inscription 3.24) ibn Bakkār. Furthermore, it is not stated whether Yaḥyā produced any children or raised any further offspring.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰⁰ al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab*, 1: 183.

⁵⁰¹ In some part, he was the main narrator of his work, especially in the branch of 'Urwa, see al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab*, 1: 193-213.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 1: 85.

This removal of a father and his offspring from the biographical record is difficult to explain. One can imagine that no one in this branch played a historically significant role which would have justified including them and their families (ancestors and descendants) in the record.

4.3.9. Leave options open

In *nasab* traditions we also encounter a number of examples with open or vague statements that allow for a wide interpretation, such as the phrase “so and so has sons”, which gives the impression that the genealogists or bibliographers knew about the lineage, but for one reason or another decided not to record them.⁵⁰³ For instance, al-Zubayrī did not count or mention any sons of Muṣ‘ab son of ‘Urwa of al-Zubayr, but one appears in the inscriptions ‘Umar son of Muṣ‘ab (inscription 3.57).⁵⁰⁴ This case also applies to other descendant of ‘Urwa through his grandson ‘Abd al-Malik son of Yaḥyā, where al-Zubayrī speaks about Yaḥyā having sons but does not mention them.⁵⁰⁵ Ibn Sa‘d does mention them, though.⁵⁰⁶ The last example comes from the family of Abū ‘Abs, which is discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.6. Ibn Sa‘d mentions that Abū ‘Abs had sons in Baghdād and Medina,⁵⁰⁷ indicating that he is aware of their existence, but he decides not to mention their names. As with the branches disappearing from the biographical entries of families it is difficult to think of a reason why the biographers provided such incomplete information. One can imagine they did not have full or accurate information and preferred to mention that it was known that someone had male descendants rather than not to mention it at all. After all, further on in the family tree, families had grown very big and individuals had branched out all over the place. It is not hard to imagine that for the genealogists a 6th generation son that filled no particularly high

⁵⁰³ al-Zubayrī, *Nasab quraysh*, 243.

⁵⁰⁴ al-Zubayrī, *Nasab quraysh*, 243. al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār, *Jamharat nasab*, 1: 175-176.

⁵⁰⁵ al-Zubayrī, *Nasab quraysh*, 247.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 7: 461.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 3: 415.

position in the administration, would be quite hard to track down, especially if he no longer lived in the vicinity of Mecca and Medina. Spending time and effort on finding out the name of this person probably would have no priority for the genealogist. It is also possible that the biographer did not include the names of the descendants because they were not deemed historically relevant.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter studied the so-called ‘missing people’ and made suggestions how to explain their absence from the literary records. As mentioned above, there are two types of ‘missing people’: those who can be identified through their fathers, sons, or daughters, either in their genealogy or through association; and those who are only known by their family *nisba* but about whom nothing else is known.

Amongst these 58-missing people, there are 13 whose origins are entirely unknown. All of them belong to the family of al-Zubayr. As discussed above, they were described as ‘origin unknown’ in Chapter Three, section 3.5.5. It is difficult to link them to a specific generation or to a specific branch. To create an idea about which part of the families was lost, we can count the generations mentioned in the inscriptions of these unidentified people whose origin remains unknown. For instance, Aḥmad son of al-Zubayrī (inscription 3.72), his son Muḥammad son of Aḥmad (inscription 3.73), and his grandson ‘Abd Allāh, son of Muḥammad (inscription 3.74), all left three inscriptions, and as such offer a clear example of this phenomenon. Also, we have a father with his two sons, Ishāq son of Muṣ‘ab son of Ishāq son of Ja‘far (inscriptions 3.76-82), and his two sons Muṣ‘ab (inscriptions 3.81-85) and Ja‘far (inscription 3.86), who are all missing from the literary records extending the family tree thus with four generations.

This chapter has discussed the reasons why these individuals whose existence is confirmed by their inscriptions are missing from the literary record in general and from the works of al-Zubayrī and

al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār specifically. Nine leading hypotheses explaining why these people are missing, were presented in this chapter.

The first reason applies to a specific category, namely women, clients, and slaves who are almost entirely absent from the literary sources. The second explanation is that some of these individuals that we do not know at this moment from the historical record might be mentioned in books that are lost. In this context it was also explained that it is in fact not unthinkable that some of these lost works might in fact still be recovered in the future. The third reason is that their role was not considered important enough to warrant recording. A fourth reason could be that they are contemporary to the genealogists which, as Robinson suggested, made the genealogists ‘miss’ them. The fifth reason is that their political convictions caused them to be omitted from the narrative record, which was also one of Robinson’s findings. The sixth reason is that family relationships were cut due to interfamilial disputes which might cause someone to disappear from the literary record as he belonged to an opponent of the author. The seventh reason is related to the biographers’ statement that a particular line died out which seems to have been based on incorrect information available to the biographer. The eighth reason is that the authors clearly stopped to register people after certain generations. Finally, we observed that genealogists often used an undefined statement about someone’s descendants mentioning that someone has sons without providing their names. We tentatively explained this in terms of information being unavailable to the authors.

Nasab and *ṭabaqāt* works follow the natural expansion of the Arab population. As families extended through time, biographers were faced with an almost impossible task. It was inevitable that they would make a selection, especially concerning the individuals closer to their own period, of whom more information would be included. This might explain why certain branches

disappeared from the biographers' records or why someone's children are mentioned but without giving names or mentioning their descendants in turn. In short: If these people did not achieve anything special during their lifetime, if they did not fulfill an office high enough to be mentioned, if they did not transmit *ḥadīths* or write poetry or scientific literature, then the fact that they descended from famous families was not sufficient to have their names included in the biographical literature. There were simply too many of them. Of earlier generations more or less everyone who descended from a companion or contemporary of the prophet Muḥammad would have been listed simply because of this descent.

The pattern that we see emerge is as follows. The very early generations of *ṣaḥāba* are very elaborately described in the literary sources, but we have only one graffito related to the first generation that of Khālīd son of al-ʿĀṣ. For the 2nd-3th generation we have quite detailed descriptions in the literary sources, and we also find many graffiti referring to the same individuals that are described in the literary sources. Moreover, there is hardly any contradiction between what is stated in the literary sources and what is confirmed through the epigraphical sources. Thus in most cases when we find a graffito mentioning a family lineage, this information perfectly matches the literature. From roughly the 4th generation onwards, the information in the literary sources starts disintegrating, only mentioning particular individuals and leaving out others. Some of these left out family members did still leave graffiti and on that basis, using epigraphy, we can extend the family trees that we already knew from the literary sources.

It is clear that there were many forces at play in the process of compilation of the *nasab* works. Which information was available to biographers was determined by the process of oral transmission that preceded that of the writing down of the genealogies. Inevitably, a lot of information was lost and especially the biographies of great and important people were

transmitted. As the biographer stacked the layers of generations branch by branch in each family, he faced some moments of choice. Individuals whom he might have known belonged to one branch or another were deemed unfit to be included in his books – for political or personal reasons, or because they did not leave much of a mark on the historical record. This had repercussions for subsequent generations, as it meant that biographers often also stopped recording the descendants of that person. In other words, even if an individual would be capable of great deeds, if his grandfather had not done anything that was considered worthwhile, the line would already be ‘broken’ and the mentioned individual would usually not make his (re-)appearance in the *nasab* works as a descendent of a particular *ṣāhib*. Finally, biographers obviously displayed a disinterest in recording accurately identifiable information about certain individuals. This applies to women, clients and slaves, but also to the offspring of certain individuals. In short, both accidental and intentional factors played a role, whereby a chronological development can be observed as well. The historiography of Arabic literary production is not very well developed and especially the methods and editorial practices of the genealogists discussed in this chapter deserve more detailed study so that we can better understand what drove them and evaluate the works they produced in that light.

After having analyzed the possible motives of the historians and biographers recording information about the individuals who left the inscriptions of our corpus in the literary record, it is now time to turn to the motives of the people who left the inscriptions themselves. How did they want to be remembered? What messages did they intend to convey through their writings? This is the topic of the next chapter.