

Late Antique Responses to the Arab Conquests

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Contents

	Preface	VII
	List of Figures and Tables	IX
	Notes on Contributors	XI
1	Late Antique Responses to the Arab Conquests: An Introduction	1
	<i>Josephine van den Bent, Floris van den Eijnde and Johan Weststeijn</i>	
2	The Qurʾānic Rūm: A Late Antique Perspective	32
	<i>Clare Wilde</i>	
3	Wine and Impurity in the Sura of the Bees: A Structuralist Interpretation of Qurʾān 16:67	56
	<i>Johan Weststeijn</i>	
4	Historical-Critical Research of the <i>Sīra</i> of the Prophet Muhammad: What Do We Stand to Gain?	74
	<i>Harald Motzki †</i>	
5	Arabicization, Islamization, and the Colonies of the Conquerors	89
	<i>Kevin van Bladel</i>	
6	Continuity and Change: Elite Responses to the Founding of the Caliphate	120
	<i>Peter Webb</i>	
7	Muhammad's World in Egypt	171
	<i>Petra M. Sijpesteijn</i>	
8	"May God be Mindful of Yazīd the King": Further Reflections on the Yazīd Inscription and the Development of Arabic Scripts	195
	<i>Ahmad Al-Jallad</i>	
9	Of Siblings, Kingdoms, and the Days of the Messiah: Jewish Literary Responses to the New Order in the Land of Israel in the First Muslim Period	212
	<i>Constanza Cordoni</i>	

10 New Light on the Dark Ages: A Byzantine Perspective on the Arab
Expansion 245
 Joanita Vroom

Index of Names and Subjects 267

Index of Biblical and Qur’ānic References 273

Continuity and Change: Elite Responses to the Founding of the Caliphate

Peter Webb

The wealth of recent scholarship on Late Antiquity demonstrates a seminal shift in perspective on the rise of Islam. The impression of most twentieth-century historians that Muhammad's mission inaugurated a new epoch that definitively buried Antiquity is undercut by now prevailing views that Islam's emergence did not trigger a rapid transformation of Middle Eastern life, politics, or even some of its religious systems. Late antique landholding elites, clerical establishments, and Christian and Zoroastrian rural populations greeted the emergence of the caliphate as a political change at the top that necessitated limited alteration to their local structures; the full transformation of the Middle East into a Muslim world appears to have unfurled more gradually. Scholarly emphasis on "continuity" does however carry latent risks of hypercorrecting the previous paradigm of "change" by overemphasizing some of early Islam's continuities with Antiquity. Notwithstanding continuities identified in recent scholarship, key changes did occur, especially among those who authored the venture of Islam. This paper considers the scale of continuity and change by evaluating how communities of the early caliphate's military elites responded to the success of the conquests and establishment of the caliphal system.

To assess the scope of change, this paper's focus is upon the social: the ideas that provide windows into the self-identity of the early caliphate's communities. Moving beyond the application of labels that define peoples/sects/groups in rough-hewn generalized and totalizing outlines, there is a need to sharpen analysis by posing questions to our sources that can reveal how communities articulated their sense of self: how did they conceptualize issues of identity? What sort of world did they think they inhabited, i.e., what spatial narratives did they construct to express their senses of "home" and proprietary space? What roles did they accord religious rituals in setting communal boundaries?

Along with these broad questions, we pay particular attention here to perhaps the period's most salient issues of community and identity: Islam and Arabness and the employment of these terms in connection with articulations of the communal "inside" of the caliphate's elite. By posing questions

to the poetry from pre-Islam and the Umayyad periods, we find important changes maturing in the Marwānid era (64–132 AH/684–750 CE) revealing that the ever-constant processes of constructing identity exerted particularly momentous force at this time. There is a wealth of source material, and in a paper of this scope we settle with revealing the contours of what poetry offers and invite more detailed studies. The paper closes with closer consideration of one case study—the tribe of al-Azd in Basra—as an example of how elite responses to the rise of the caliphate engaged processes of Arab ethnogenesis that underline the difficulty of approaching social actors in the Umayyad period with preset and monolithic labels. The scope of change surrounding our historical figures situated them in processes of adapting and reorganizing themselves and their identities to negotiate the fluctuating political circumstances of their world.

1 Conquests and Conquerors?

First, a note on terminology. The rise of Islam is viewed through the prism of conquest history: Western scholarship labels the opening stages of the caliphate in terms of “Muslim conquests” or “Arab conquests,” and their narratives are organized as military history. Premodern Arabic sources about early Islam describe the process by which the Muslim polity expanded as *fath* (pl. *futūḥ*/*futūḥāt*), and while *fath*’s connotation of “opening” does not necessarily tally with military invasion,¹ the association of *fath* with specifically “military victory” may be a loan from Ethiopic contemporary with the development of Qur’ānic Arabic.² The earliest layers of Arabic lexicography (i.e., from the late second AH/eighth century CE onward) are clear that *fath* is to be understood as “opening of the abode of war” (*iftitāḥ dār al-ḥarb*) or “victory” (*nuṣra*).³ Hence, although *fath* is not one of the most typical Arabic words for war/conquest/invasion, Arabic writers chose to interpret *fath* in explicitly military terms,

1 Donner 2016, 5 opts to define *fath* as “some momentous event that is good for the Believers,” and thus argues to move away from conceptualizing the *futūḥ* as “conquest,” and instead as part of a “salvation-historical agenda of nascent Islamic historiography” (2016, 8).

2 The Ethiopic evidence is described in Donner 2016, 3–4, who considers it remote given the wider meanings of *fath* in the Qur’ān. The evidence of the early Arabic lexicographic sources, outside of Donner’s purview, do support the military connotation of the word, and al-Azharī places it at the opening of the word’s definition 2004, 3:457: Donner’s contention that “conquest” is but only the “secondary meaning” of the root (2016, 2) does not necessarily align with the word’s early interpretation.

3 See al-Khalil 1980, 3:194; al-Jawharī 1984, 1:389; al-Azharī 2004, 3:457.

and thus primed modern scholarship to perpetuate the tradition of imagining Islam's origins as imperial expansion.

The difficulty with the imperial *fath*/conquest model is its dissonance with critical analysis of the sources. First, the earliest communities of “conquerors” do not appear to have referred to themselves as such: they are not recorded as having calling themselves *fāṭihūn* (i.e., the active participle of *fath*),⁴ “raiders” (*ghāzūn*), “victors” (*ghālibūn*, *ẓāfirūn*, *muẓẓafarūn*, *muntaṣirūn*, etc.), or other combinations of terms that imply people with an imperial expansionist ideology. The first conquerors seem to have preferred the term *muhājirūn*,⁵ or “Emigrants.” This term also appears in Arabic poetry from the early period of expansion,⁶ and leads to the sense that nascent Muslims considered themselves to be “moving” rather than “conquering” with an imperial agenda. Second, and related to the first, the “Emigrants” did not mix with indigenous populations as they settled in new towns, the *amṣār*, nor did they seek to convert the locals. The pattern of settlement indicates groups intent on helping themselves, motivated by their own inward-looking beliefs, rather than concerted efforts to establish and manage an integrated empire. Scholars have noted that indications of a “Muslim state” do not clearly appear immediately upon Muhammad's death; a “state” becomes visible perhaps during Mu'āwīya's caliphate, or even only during 'Abd al-Malik's. In either case, the first twenty years of military expansion do not exhibit an imperial metropolitan “center” served by the *amṣār*. This observation accords with an impression that early Islam began with a diffusion of Emigrants whose goal was something other than imperial state creation.

The Emigrant militarized advances were nonetheless different from “tribal migration.” Religious ideology is visible in the early records, along with indications of caliphal input in the organization of some advances, but the evidence for a state system is limited and a program of centrally coordinated campaigns is not uniformly attested across the geographical expansion that we label as the “Conquests.” Furthermore, the details of some individual “conquests” reveals an ephemeral nature. The Emigrants defeated the Byzantine

4 *Fāṭihūn* may not have been appropriate, since the Qur'ān associated *fath* with God's blessing to the Muslims, hence a related active participle *muṣṭaṭihūn* might be more theologically sound—i.e., “the people possessing *fath*”; this term is likewise absent in the sources.

5 The importance of “Emigrant” identity in early Islam has recently been detailed by Lindstedt 2015.

6 See, for example, the line of 'Abd al-Ṭabīb, who laments the departure of a beloved: “She set her dwelling in the military camp at Kufa, / An Emigrant, and took all her love with her!” (al-Anbārī 2003, 1:349).

and Sasanian armies in short order, and they diffused into the territories left behind by the two collapsing empires. However, the expansions further afield, into the Caucasus, North Africa, Iberia, and Khurāsān/Eastern Iran seem better understood as raids which yielded “treaties” of nominal fealty from the locals, and after which the Emigrant units soon returned to their *amṣār* towns in the Fertile Crescent. Only after a generation or two (depending on the region) did armies return to these far-flung regions with more evident intentions of staying and managing. By the end of the first century AH/seventh century CE, a more centralized caliphate was in operation; likewise, the will and interest in running an integrated empire becomes more evident.

From the perspective of Arabic historiography, the moment at which the first Emigrant military force entered a region and extracted cash constituted the climactic event of *fath*/conquest, and Arabic historiographical narratives are structured to present such events as monuments of heroic action and provide mythic significance to communal origins that established the borders of the Muslim world.⁷ This narrative tendency inflates the significance of the early stages of raiding and expansion: the actual integration of lands into a (more or less) centrally planned caliphate unfurled gradually as Emigrants first filled the vacuum left by the Byzantines and Sasanians; later the caliphate assumed greater responsibility in local political management under its widening umbrella. To read Islam’s early history as a tableau of imperial military expansion accordingly falls prey to the epic of Arabic historiography and its tendency to glorify the origins of the caliphate in grand military terms via an edifice of “conquest.” After the initial, decisive battles with Byzantines and Sasanians, opportunity arose for someone to take control of the power vacuum left behind, and, over the course of a generation, the caliphate organized and finally “conquered” for itself the land previously occupied by the Emigrants.

In short, the issue of “conquest” revolves around a semantic question. I do not mean that militarism was not central to the early Emigrants’ ideology, or that they were unaware of the powerful authority of the Qurayshite caliphs. However, the uneven contours of the expansion invite serious engagement with theoretical questions of what we mean by “conquest,” and narratological questions about how we can interpret the available sources. To engage in this critical scrutiny, this paper eschews the terms “conquest” and “conqueror.” To conceptualize the spread of the nascent Muslim community, this paper ventures the hypothesis that Muhammad’s immediate successors operated with

7 I use “mythic” here in the sense articulated by Eliade 1968, 8: an event of significance for communal senses of identity; it does not necessarily need be “untrue.”

a Qur'ānic-inspired belief that God would grant them blessed *fath*, and that they expanded outward with the intention of founding new communities and extracting the resources of their Byzantine and Sasanian neighbors. These goals were not imperial, and perhaps the process of converting the occupied lands into a caliphal system run by Muslims was not even conceived of at the outset. Only after the dust of battle had settled, the spoils counted, and the opportunities for a new state grasped, could the Emigrants begin transforming into empire builders. The multiple *fitna* wars fought between the military groups and rival caliphs suggest that a unified venture of Islam needed to be forged, and that it was not robustly established at the outset.

The descendants of the original Emigrants became the elite of the new system, and they monopolized the use of violence in the caliphate. Thus, I will refer to their communities as “elites” or “military elites,” since the term “conquerors” may misrepresent their self-identity at all stages. Initially they were armed settlers, and once the Umayyad caliphate asserted itself as a state at the end of the first century AH/seventh century CE, the elites then reimagined the first generation as the “conquerors;” the elites themselves were by this time keen to identify as “Muslims” and “Arabs.”

Likewise, it seems misdirected to seek the elites’ responses to the process of conquest/initial expansion: the important questions about the development of the society which created the Muslim culture we encounter in source literature really revolve around the elites’ responses to the maturation of the Umayyad caliphate, in particular how they responded to the evident efforts of imperial consolidation in the Marwānid period.

2 Continuity of Emigrant Communities?

It is a wonderful irony that the earlier scholarship which so emphasized the epoch-making changes of Islam’s rise nonetheless persisted in a converse belief that the Emigrants themselves were little changed by the process of emigration and resettlement. Historians of Islam postulated that pre-Islamic Arabia was populated by Arabs whom they imagined as a culturally cohesive community that embraced Muhammad’s mission, migrated across the Middle East, and established the caliphate, yet stayed much as they were before: they remained Arabs. Historical writing used one ethnonym for both the pre-Islamic and Umayyad eras, creating an impression of Arab ethnic continuity and unity. The scholarly opinions about Arabness enjoyed that pristine inertness which historians tend to project on peoples with an obscure history. There were few historical records about pre-Islamic Arabia, and hence, from Edward

Gibbon onward,⁸ European historians cast the “Arabs” as textbook barbarians: they emerged from the “Empty Hījāz”⁹ to destroy the remnants of the empires of Classical Antiquity and were but little civilized or changed in the immediate aftermath, until, that is, they were “civilized” by adopting a hybrid Persian-Arab culture in the ‘Abbāsīd era.¹⁰ Within these familiar paradigms, in the study of early Islam, a pre-Islamic “Arab” was conceptually similar to an Umayyad-era “Arab.” The latter differed predominately in having the trappings of an empire which made him wealthier and politically more organized than his pre-Islamic forebears. The assumed lack of cultural change and the fixedness of Arab identity is epitomized in von Grunebaum’s 1963 observation that “pre-Islamic Arabs” constituted a *Kulturnation*, which the “Muslim Arabs” converted into a *Staatsnation*.¹¹ i.e., the wars of expansion and the establishment of the caliphate were primarily political in nature, and did not affect what it meant to be an “Arab.”

Consequently, scholars set Arabness as the fixed pole from which emanated all the changes that they imagined swirled about the other late antique communities following the rise of Islam. The essential foreignness and difference of Arabness compared to late antique Middle Eastern cultures was postulated as the very driver of change: the newcomers were *different*; their language, culture, and religion were seen as different because the newcomers had been isolated in the deserts of pre-Islamic Arabia. The putative spread of these “Arab ways” across the Middle East via the founding of the caliphate thereby neatly explained the end of “Greco-Roman” Antiquity, the primary prism through which historians periodized the advent of Islam. Under this paradigm, “Arabs” had to play the role of game-changers and conveyors of a new culture in order to sustain the narrative of Islam as an epoch-making event. Hence, historians assumed that the core of “Arab culture” must have remained more or less

8 Gibbon 1994, 5:754–55 marks a shift in European historiography by labelling Muhammad’s community as “Arab.” Prior to the late eighteenth century, European writing predominantly referred to Arabians and Muslims with the term “Saracen”: see Webb 2016, 46–47, Donner 2018, 4.

9 Montgomery 2006, 45–50 provides a detailed study and critique of the “Empty Hījāz” theory, a construct that imagined pre-Islamic Arabia as essentially isolated from the rest of the late antique world.

10 In an authoritative source on the period’s history, the *Cambridge History of Iran* published in 1975, we read “Islam was rescued from a narrow Bedouin outlook and Bedouin mores primarily by the Iranians, who showed that Islam both as a religion and, primarily, as a culture, need not be bound solely to the Arabic language and Arab norms” (Frye 1975, xi; see also Zarrīnkūb 1975, 28, 42–43, 56).

11 Von Grunebaum 1963.

constant in the centuries before and immediately after Islam's rise. To this end, and as Fred Donner has shown, European scholars first coined the term "Arab conquests," which from the middle of the nineteenth century became the popular explanation for the arrival of a barbarian ethnicity with the intent of establishing a new empire that caused the abrupt end of Antiquity.¹² Similarly, Wellhausen dubbed the resultant caliphate under the Umayyads an "Arab kingdom."¹³

On closer reflection, the modern European coining of the term "Arab conquests" raises difficulties. First, from a macro perspective, the grand narrative of the radical change which Islam wrought across the Middle East is problematic, and given the developments in scholarship which show the broad continuities in early Islam, there is no longer a need to imagine the early Muslims as a barbarian *deus ex machina* whose cultural difference forged a changed world in the wake of their expansion. The impression of the early Muslims' distinctive separateness as ethnically unified "Arabs" is thus a carryover from an obsolete grand narrative.

Second, turning to the early communities themselves, if the Emigrants themselves did not label their expansions as "Arab" (and they did not, as indicated by known premodern Arabic sources), by what authority did European historians cloak the historical movement in an ethnic guise?¹⁴ The Emigrants hailed from Arabia, but the Peninsula was, at that period, a fragmented region comprised of different cultural and political zones. The assumption that all Arabians were "Arabs" is a hasty melding of space with race into a rigid conception of what a community means, and it lacks sensitivity to how pre-Islamic groups within the Peninsula imagined their own communal boundaries. The many wars,

¹² Donner 2018, 4–5, 11–12.

¹³ Wellhausen 1927.

¹⁴ A recent and detailed study of culture and identity from the perspective of Christian communities in the Middle East under the early caliphate includes a short section evaluating the terminology for "conquests," with the rather remarkable conclusion that "Arab conquests" is an appropriate term (Tannous 2018, 525–31). The study argues that Syriac sources appear to treat the invaders as a cohesive ethnic group, and because it is difficult to determine quite what the Emigrants thought about themselves, "Arab" is preserved as a term of convenience (531n). However, Greco-Latin writers and their late antique successors had a habit of viewing all peoples via an ethnic lens (see the essays in Gruen 2011). Therefore, the fact that Syriac writers thought about the "conquerors" as an ethnicity is not necessarily relevant to the question: they were predisposed to think in such ways, and they were outsiders to the Emigrant movement in any event. Moreover, the Syriac writers did not use the term "Arab" at all, so that the decision to interpolate "Arab" into their writing today perpetuates the Orientalist outlook and construct. For other critiques of the prevailing approach of "Arabizing" the past, see Millar 2013, 154–58; Donner 2018, 12–15.

different language groups, and different kingdoms across pre-Islamic Arabia are facets of cultural and communal divides. While contemporary Greek and Roman writers tended to generalize the panoply of Arabian identities in the centuries before Islam into a space/race meld of Arabness, their undifferentiated views can now be improved. Moreover, theories of identity and ethnicity anticipate that groups at the center of major political and economic developments will exhibit changes, and it would be rare—perhaps unprecedented—for groups to undertake widespread resettlement and reorganization of their communities into a novel state without altering core aspects of their own identities. The putative continuity of Arabness obscures the Marwānid achievement of establishing a centralized caliphate that substantially integrated the formerly disparate (and fractious) Emigrant communities.

The early generations of European Orientalists can in some respects be excused for their fixed notions of Arabness, given the then-prevailing notions of nation and race. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, scholarship accepted that people's racial and national identities were *longue durée* characteristics that remained constant across changes in context. In the Middle Eastern case, an "Arab" always embodied "Arab culture," but now such notions of fixed "race" have been replaced with more nuanced ideas of "ethnicity." Ethnos, and all forms of identity have been shown to be constructs—ideas that are never whole. The monolithic national labels familiar to modern readers each fundamentally emerged as ways to imagine the cohesion of communities from time to time under their unique circumstances. Theories of ethnicity stress that changes in economic and political structure are the primary drivers of an ethnogenesis that exerts transformative power on how people imagine community and identity.¹⁵

The descendants of the Emigrant communities—the people who created and established the caliphate in the mid- to late first century AH/seventh century CE—indeed experienced various changes that ran deeper than simply establishing a new kingdom. The descendants distinguished themselves by their religion, with its associated scripture and rituals. They also established a new form of kingship: rather than referring to their rulers in the terms of the emperors/shahs whom they replaced, the new office of caliph emerged

15 For the fundamental theories of ethnogenesis, see Weber 1996 and Barth 1969. These sources stress the central roles of political and economic factors in shaping communal boundaries within which ethnic identities develop. Subsequent theorists added further nuance, but the methodology of Weber and Barth remains largely intact: see Jenkins 2008 for more recent synthesis, and Pohl and Reimitz 1998 for a classic study of post-Roman ethnogenesis.

accompanied by new aspects of rulership.¹⁶ Geographically, the Emigrants also modified their world: they moved from various regions of the Arabian Peninsula and spread across the wider Middle East, where they primarily settled in newly-constructed towns (*amṣār*) separated from old urban centers.¹⁷ From their perspective, therefore, the Emigrants uprooted their communities and built new homelands; formerly dispersed groups found themselves living in close quarters that remained spatially distinct from local populations. As an ironic twist, therefore, the *amṣār*—situated outside of the Arabian Peninsula—conceptually created the possibility of Arab unity: the *amṣār* first concentrated ex-Arabian peoples into one space with common, shared interests, and thus nurtured the breaking down of the old senses of communal boundaries that had existed in pre-Islamic Arabia. Economic changes also emerged: the Emigrants first enriched themselves with the spoils of war, and then established regular income through taxation of the conquered lands. Former traders and herdsman found themselves in radically new economic relationships.

In brief, the actions of the Marwānid-Umayyad military elites directly oppose traditional models about the rise of Islam. Instead of bringing “Arabia” into the Middle East, they relinquished much of their physical ties to pre-Islamic Arabia and built new visions of community in new lands, where almost all aspects of their quotidian lives could be separated from former traditions. *Prima facie*, therefore, a study of elite responses to the establishment of the caliphate as a pan-Middle Eastern system of government would expect the elite community to exhibit some of the most dramatic changes, and while conservative elements in societies seek to maintain traditions, the scope of change and the mixing of populations in the Umayyad period are of a magnitude which usually tip the scales against continuity and in favor of change.

16 Al-Azmeh 2014, 96 refers to the caliphate as possessing “profound generic continuity with east Roman, Byzantine monarchism and imperialism,” with supporting discussion, and indeed it can be argued that the caliphate borrowed earlier traditions. However, al-Azmeh does not bring Sasanian traditions into the analysis; caliphal borrowings from that direction are significant. The Muslim rulers’ choice to designate themselves as “caliphs” was also new, and the caliphs’ imperial reach extended to a much different territory than the Romans. Beyond the caliph’s adaptations from Roman precedent, therefore, it does seem that early Muslims developed a new form of imperial rule.

17 Archaeological work continues to reveal new towns established by the Emigrants, either as “greenfield” new builds or “brownfield” occupation of abandoned or lightly-inhabited areas adjacent to the older cities, from central Asia to the Atlantic. Whitcomb 1994, 28 succinctly described the process of *amṣār*-construction as “intentional reconstitution of the social organization of the conquered lands.”

3 Sources

To evaluate the nature and extent of continuity and change experienced by Emigrant groups, we shall need to engage sources that furnish information capable of conveying the emotive senses of “self,” and compare such expressions of communal identities and practices in the pre-Islamic period with expressions of the same kinds of sentiments in the Umayyad caliphate. Only once we establish a baseline notion of community in both pre-Islam and the Umayyad era can we ground the comparison, and this poses two substantial methodological challenges.

First, pre-Islamic Arabia was a fragmented region with manifold cultures and peoples whose diverse identities resisted collection into one cohesive cultural block that can constitute a unified subject for analysis.¹⁸ Similarly, the Umayyad world included communities from the Atlantic to central Asia which had their own distinct fragmentations. The Umayyad-era case is helped by the twin political and demographic facts that the caliphate was clearly developing centralization (even if it did not fully succeed, it achieved certain results), and the settlers in *amṣār* communities reshaped the demographic map of the Middle East and concentrated populations in new ways. We can thus discern Umayyad-era acculturation among the caliphate’s military elite, but both ends of our comparative exercise rest on shifting foundations that will temper results.

Second, scholars have often commented on the lack of detailed records for both pre-Islamic Arabia and early Islam. Large numbers of pre-Islamic inscriptions have been found in parts of Arabia, but (with the exception of south Arabian imperial inscriptions) these examples are predominately short texts, and extrapolating them to address big questions about identity, communal relations, and belief structures can be difficult to sustain, especially given the uneven distribution of finds. As for the Umayyads, we possess voluminous Arabic prose histories and collections of anecdotes, but these were written between fifty to two hundred years after the fact, and while they are more detailed than the inscriptions, especially with regard to the kind of information we need to think systematically about how people imagined their identities, the texts may project later, anachronistic discourses onto the past.

At this point, it may seem that we shall never know enough about either pre-Islamic or Umayyad communities to establish meaningful criteria to evaluate the extent of continuity and change during the rise of the caliphate. However,

18 I have discussed the fragmentation of pre-Islamic Arabia elsewhere (Webb 2016, 77–88); see also an elaboration of these ideas with respect to Arabian Jewish communities in Hughes 2017, 9, 40–53.

the process of chipping away into the unknown can be ventured via an alternative source: Arabic poetry. The poetic corpus speaks to emotive subjects that offer uniquely rich insight into people's identities and cultural values. We possess substantial quantities of pre-Islamic, early Islamic, and Umayyad-era poetry, and because the styles of poetic composition were, to an extent, stable across the period, the evidence's form facilitates comparison. The corpus is also vast, providing ample material to observe patterns, making it possible to sift through poetic convention and artistic rhetoric to probe historical questions about the scope of social developments.

Arabic poetry's authenticity has been questioned because the extant collections were compiled from the late second century AH/eighth century CE, and thus post-date the pre-Islamic and Umayyad-era contexts by at least fifty, and up to 250 years. The gap is less significant than one might fear, however, since poetry circulated widely in oral (and likely written) form prior to the 'Abbāsid era; poetry's meters and rhymes assist memorization and protect textual integrity across its transmission, and while much poetry was lost, surviving verses are not necessarily 'Abbāsid-era Iraqi fakes anachronistically attributed to the mouths of pre-Islamic Arabian poets. 'Abbāsid-era poetry narrators were themselves aware of poetry fabrication; they sought to identify spurious material and critiqued uncaredful narrators,¹⁹ and as a result, we now possess collections of certain individual poets' works and thematic anthologies that were endorsed by 'Abbāsid-era specialists. Other collections of poetry survive in historical and other sources, but such verses were neither transmitted by the specialists nor considered genuine. The latter poems often contrast with the tenor, syntax, and/or vocabulary of poetry from the more established collections: the verses are akin to the poetry recorded in medieval popular literature, and more work is needed to determine to what extent the popularizing-style Arabic poetry may trace to pre-Islamic origins.

In the 1920s, sweeping claims accused the whole poetic corpus of forgery, and while the specter of forgery remains, especially with problematic verses narrated outside of the main poetry collections, poetry scholars today are more confident that much of the material preserved in the specialized pre-modern collections is genuine. The presence of some persistent false attributions is an insufficient excuse to discount the material. Other scholars have defended poetry's usefulness,²⁰ and trends identifiable across large numbers

19 See, for example, Ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī's comments on poetry fabrication, especially poems added to the Prophet's biography (al-Jumāhī n.d., 1:4–8).

20 Bauer 2010; Agha 2011, 8 describes the twentieth-century scholarly retreat from the "vigorous" doubts about authenticity in the 1920s; see also Webb 2016, 68–70. Dmitriev 2017, 106 articulates a similar call to use the poetry.

of verses very likely do present us with real sentiments from the earlier eras we seek to explore.

The poetic corpus has been underutilized to examine the nature of community in pre- and early Islam. Poetry specialists have asked literary questions about the development of Arabic poetry's forms and style, but employment of poetry to answer historians' questions about society and identity is limited. This circumstance is surprising since poetry collectors from the third century AH/ninth century CE considered poetry the "Archive of the Arabs" (*dīwān al-ʿarab*), the primary repository of Arabian communal memories,²¹ and a uniquely Arabic cultural artefact: Ibn Qutayba (d. 276 AH/889 CE) declared that "Poetry is the Arabs'" (*lil-ʿarab al-shiʿr*).²² Poetry therefore presents itself as the first source to pose our questions about community in early Islam. Because the amount of poetry is vast, and the issues relevant to depictions of identity are many, the following sections survey broad issues for which poetry provides pertinent insight into the nature of change amongst elite communities in early Islam.

4 Changes to Elite Communities: Poetic Indications

4.1 *Terms of Communal Identity*

A striking aspect of Arabic poetry is the history of the emergence of the word "Arab" as an ethnonym definitive of a community. I have detailed this feature elsewhere:²³ in brief, pre-Islamic Arabic poetry is remarkable for the absence of the name *ʿArab*. Surviving poetry indicates that pre-Islamic poets did not use Arabness as a term to define themselves, yet, in contrast, poets began using the term *ʿArab* almost ubiquitously to articulate community from the end of first century AH/seventh century CE onward, i.e., contemporary with the Marwānid-era caliphate's early articulations of its aspiring hegemonic polity across the Middle East.

21 See al-Jumahlī n.d., 1:24–25; Ibn Qutayba 2017, §2.8.8, §2.8.16; al-Yaʿqūbī 1883, 1:265.

22 Ibn Qutayba 2017, §2.8.1.

23 Webb 2016, 66–70, 85–96. Other studies have noted cases where "Arab" is used as a term of identifying groups and suggested alternative senses of Arab origins (Hoyland 2017, 126–28; Al-Jallad 2020); nonetheless, the copious pre-Islamic poetry is essentially devoid of reference to "Arab" and this source is overlooked yet bears importantly upon the debate. Most references to "Arab" in other pre-Islamic sources are as an exonym of an "other" group; and the search for the meaning of Arab community should engage theory of ethnogenesis, constructivist or instrumentalist, to appraise the evidence which has been lacking in statements about putative Arab identity based on epigraphic and linguistic evidence alone. Theories about ethnicity do stress that a language group of itself does not necessarily coalesce into a cohesive community without other external factors.

Von Grunebaum noted the lack of “Arabs” in pre-Islamic poetry, yet side-stepped the issue by positing that because pre-Islamic Arabic poets were aware of their Arab identity they had no need to call themselves “Arabs.”²⁴ His theory, however, overlooks a crucial trend in pre-Islamic poetry that reveals that pre-Islamic poets manifestly *did* intend to talk about their wider community, and with a particular term: they called themselves “Ma’add.”

Details of Ma’add’s history in Arabic poetry have been traced elsewhere.²⁵ The term appears as a byword for a broad community in nearly every collection of pre-Islamic poetry. For an example, consider how al-A’shā Maymūn ibn Qays (a northeastern Arabian poet whose poetry dates primarily to the years immediately preceding Muhammad’s prophethood) praises his people, the Qays:

Our men, who, when the chargers of Ma’add are gathered
Are most respected and awed.²⁶

When al-A’shā articulates how his kin’s warriors stand above all others, we could expect (from a rhetorical perspective) that the poet would utilize a word that indicated the largest conceivable community as imagined by him and his audience. Upon the cusp of Islam, that term was “Ma’add.” Likewise, the celebrated northern Ḥijāzi poet of the late sixth century CE, al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī, who travelled to Ghassānid, Lakhmid, and other notable groups in search of elite patronage, praised the tribal leader al-Nu’mān b. Wā’il al-Kalbī by invoking Ma’add:

You outstrip the nobles in nobility
Like a stallion outstrips hunting dogs in the chase,
You surpass all of Ma’add as a patron sought and enemy feared,
From the abundance of praise, you are its first recipient.²⁷

Again, if a collective term greater than Ma’add existed, would not the panegyrist’s voice use it instead? Similarly, al-Akhnas b. Shihāb, poet of the northeast Arabian Taghlib tribe, marshals Ma’add to boast his own clan’s primacy:

All people of Ma’add have their tribes
And each have their safe havens.

²⁴ Von Grunebaum 1963, 5–7; see also Robin 2012, 58 and Hoyland 2015, 24–25.

²⁵ See Webb 2016, 70–77, and for a specific study of Ma’add as an identity in pre- and early Islam, see Webb 2021b.

²⁶ al-A’sha 1974, 135.

²⁷ al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī 1990, 140.

But we have no mountain strongholds,
Only swords of formidable repute.²⁸

Michael Zwettler noted the use of Maʿadd in poetry, and interpreted the term as indicating militarized central Arabian groups—“progressive northern Arabs”—whose adoption of the horse for warfare connected them to the Sasanian sphere of influence.²⁹ The poets, however, never refer to their community as “Arab,” and the idea of Maʿadd spread beyond Zwettler’s model, as even non-horse raiding groups of the Sarāt mountains in the Ḥijāz use Maʿadd to express their sense of community. For example, the early seventh-century CE poet of the Sarāt-resident Hudhayl, Abū Dhuʿayb al-Hudhalī, addresses his lover:

Any woman of Maʿadd is dear to us,
Yet you have been lavished with gifts!³⁰

Similar citations of Maʿadd abound; from a rhetorical perspective, they consistently occur when poets intend to express the fullest extent of their community, or the concept of “all people,” the broadest imagined community. For the poets of the late sixth and early seventh century CE, Maʿadd was not a tribal identity: I have not found pre-Islamic verses containing the construction “Banū Maʿadd,” and hence Maʿadd appears rather clearly to have denoted a super-tribal identity, and it is the only such broader identity found in pre-Islamic poetry with any frequency and with the metaphorical rhetoric of pan-communal inclusiveness.³¹ The fact that pre-Islamic poets use the term Maʿadd in this way counters von Grunebaum’s suggestion that pre-Islamic Arabians did not need to express their broad collective identity: they were in fact frequently

28 al-Baṣrī 1999, 1:39–40. The poem has multiple versions (see al-Anbārī 2003, 1:513–17 who presents the last line as “We follow the rains, conquering all in our path”), and several additional lines appear mentioning specific tribes. Later narrators may have inserted these lines to extol their own tribes and/or patrons. In any case, the versions consistently present Maʿadd as the umbrella term used by an array of smaller groups.

29 Zwettler 2000, 276–80.

30 al-Sukkari 1963–65, 1:88.

31 Goldziher 1967–71, 1:89 considered Maʿadd to be one of several super-tribal identities, and suggested that Kinda and Ṭayyiʾ had similar connotations. Goldziher’s observation reflects its period; over the past century the collections of pre-Islamic poetry have been improved and more material has come to light. From a survey of the now expanded corpus, we do find occasional references to Kinda and Ṭayyiʾ, but they are rare and not used in the same standalone metaphorical sense as Maʿadd. Maʿadd, moreover, can be found in almost any collection of pre-Islamic verse, and clearly operated with grander rhetorical effect. Further research on super-tribal names such as Kinda and Ṭayyiʾ, as well as Nizār and Muḍar, would serve to better evaluate their conceptual relationship with “Maʿadd.”

engaged in communicating to a broad community via boasts, panegyrics, and lampoons, and they used the term *Maʿadd* to refer to the community of central Arabian groups who lived outside of the regular control of the Yemenis, Byzantines, Persians, and their frontier allies. The poetry also reveals that the term “Arab” lacked wide traction to unite these groups before Islam.

In contrast to its absence in pre-Islamic poetry, “Arab” appears in Muslim-era verse particularly in the Marwānid period. Poets from the late first century AH/seventh century CE begin to describe their community as “Arab,” and by the second century AH/eighth century CE virtually every poetry collection contains at least a few verses citing the name. Poets articulate the concept of “all people” with the binary term *al-ʿarab wa-l-ʿajam/al-ʿujm*, and they express the sense of “all of us” with the term *al-ʿarab* itself. Against the background of a community imagined as *Maʿadd* in pre-Islam, poets in the Umayyad period established that their audience was known as “Arab” some two generations after the first Emigrants. As an example of the binary construction referring to “all people,” the Meccan poet Abū Dahbal al-Jumāḥī (d. ca. 125/743 CE) praised a nobleman of the Ashʿarī tribe, Abū al-Fīl:

Abū al-Fīl’s virtues are innumerable,
They have spread well-known across the *ʿArab* and *ʿUjm*.³²

This example contrasts with the preferred binary construction used to describe all people in pre-Islamic poetry, which used *Maʿadd*, not *ʿArab*. Consider a pre-Islamic example of Abū al-Ṭayyib ʿAbd al-ʿUzzā’s elegy recorded in the prelude to the Prophet’s biography:

Lament for him: he, the best of the barefooted and the sandal-wearers of
Maʿadd.³³

Like the Islamic-era *ʿArab/ʿAjam* binary, Abū al-Ṭayyib’s formula is a merism: the two opposites denote the totality of all people. Using the same rhetoric, Kaʿb ibn Mālik al-Anṣārī, a Medinan poet contemporary with Muhammad, articulates the sense of “everybody” with another “*Maʿaddite*” merism:

All of *Maʿadd*, their passionate and their serene (*juhhāluhā*
wa-ḥalimuhā)
Altogether they shot at us with aggression.³⁴

³² Abū Dahbal al-Jumāḥī 1972, 78, see also 94.

³³ Ibn Hishām n.d., 1:175.

³⁴ Ibn Hishām n.d., 2:25.

By contrast, in Marwānid-era poetry, I have found only one Maʿaddite merism alluding to a sense of “all people,”³⁵ whereas the *ʿArab/ʿAjam* binary becomes common.³⁶ “Arab” also displaces Maʿadd in stand-alone contexts where Marwānid-era poets articulate a sense of their whole community. For example, al-Rāʾī al-Numayrī (d. 96 AH/714 CE or 97 AH/715 CE), who composed poetry in Basra among elite Iraqi circles, as well as northeastern Arabian tribes, boasts of his tribe’s supremacy:

Numayr is the burning ember of the Arabs
Burning all the brighter when war flares.³⁷

“Arab” did not completely replace Maʿadd in the Marwānid era, however, since the name Maʿadd does appear in several contexts when poets addressed the caliphate’s military elite, and both “Maʿadd” and “Arab” continued in use through the Umayyad period.³⁸ Yet the sudden appearance of “Arab” is striking. The stark contrast of pre-Islamic silence on Arabness and the term’s pervasive presence beginning in the Marwānid period demands that studies of Arab ethnogenesis address why poets from the end of the first century AH/seventh century CE would suddenly embrace the new label of “Arab.”

The congruence of the emergence of express Arabness in poetry and the rise of the Marwānid caliphate has led me to propose that the rise of Arabness as an identity embraced by the caliphate’s military elite indirectly resulted from the organization of the caliphate, particularly from ʿAbd al-Malik onward.³⁹ ʿAbd al-Malik faced the challenge of asserting authority over far-flung militarized elite communities during the Second Fitna War, when rival caliphs were poised to fragment Middle Eastern political structures. ʿAbd al-Malik defeated his rivals militarily, yet the challenge of how to maintain social authority in the wake of the war remained a problem. Mobilizing a new idea of ethnicity as Arabness, a term known to the Emigrants as the distinct and miraculous language of their proprietary scripture, the Qurʾān, logically could serve to identify the Muslim elite, particularly as a strategy to convince the militarized elite of their unity under the caliphates of ʿAbd al-Malik and his sons.⁴⁰

35 The Caliph Hishām is called “the Lord of Maʿaddites and non-Maʿaddites,” i.e., “everyone” (al-Isfahānī 1992, 20:408).

36 See al-Farazdaq 1987, 353; Dhū al-Rumma 1972–74, 1:23.

37 al-Rāʾī al-Numayrī 1980, 18.

38 See Webb 2021b, 80–90 for the gradual replacement of Maʿadd with ʿArab.

39 See Webb 2016, 126–52.

40 For consideration of the emergence of the term “Arab” as the label for the caliphate’s elite, and difficulties with various interpretations, see Webb 2016, 110–15, 141–52.

Whether ‘Abd al-Malik’s policy was itself the driver for encouraging the notion of Arabness as the elite’s identity can be tested with further research. Whatever the precise case, a dramatic shift in the ways of imagining community occurred in the Marwānid period as a new sense of Arab community burst into poetic expression. Elements in late Marwānid Iraqi society tried to maintain Ma’addite identity, but Arabness was ascendant, and by the ‘Abbāsīd period, “Arab” displaced expressions of Ma’addite community.⁴¹

Poetry indicates that a key communal response to the rise of the caliphate included the reorganization of disparate communities into a single entity under an “ethnic” idea of Arabness, which allowed larger numbers of groups to perceive a common identity than had ever been possible in pre-Islamic Arabia. At the time of the first Emigrants, poets did not articulate community in terms of being “Arab,” which problematizes the familiar paradigm that labels the Emigrant migration as “Arab.” Self-expressed “Arabs” emerge in poetry in subsequent generations, when Ma’addite and non-Ma’addite peoples who had participated in the Emigrants’ wars, raids, and settlements were brought together thanks to new settlement patterns and the creation of a new military elite within the caliphate. Because some groups inside the elite, such as south Arabians, Omanis, and others, were not part of the pre-Islamic Ma’addite world of the central Arabian poets, the identity of “Ma’add” would not have been readily amenable to provide a smooth transition of such groups into the new, broader constituency. In pre-Islam, Ma’add connoted a community of central Arabian groups; adding south and eastern Arabian newcomers would upset old balances. Would the “new Ma’addites” hold the same status? Would they become subordinated? Would established Ma’addite elites accept the new groups? Ma’add’s former association with pre-Islamic central Arabian power would stand in the way when communities had been reorganized in the *amṣār* and early caliphate, and it had evident disadvantages for a project that sought to unify the diverse populations of former Arabians. Hence a new identity, Arabness, could be more effective.

4.2 *Spatial Considerations*

Through the *amṣār* settlements and the organization of the caliphate, the Emigrant groups (i) interacted with a broader array of peoples from various parts of Arabia and the Fertile Crescent, and (ii) became part of a geographical system larger than that of their pre-Islamic forebears in Arabia. Given that senses of communal space and communal identity have theoretical

41 I trace the dwindling of Ma’add in the later Umayyad era in Webb 2021b, 84–90.

interconnections, the broadening of worldviews that followed the spread out of Arabia and the founding of the caliphate crossover with the sense of community, the articulations of “homeland” and the nature of communal self-perception would thus necessarily have expanded as a response to newfound unities between formerly distinct and distant pre-Islamic groups. Questions therefore arise about how Emigrant populations (in their changed domiciles and with more cosmopolitan interactions) responded to the new construction of the Umayyad Middle East.

Post-emigration spatial narratives accordingly are fertile ground for investigating how the Emigrants and subsequent Umayyad-era military elites changed as they settled in the *amṣār*, and as Arab ethnogenesis gathered momentum in the Marwānid period. Did the new community engender a new sense of “Arabia” to indicate a new collective homeland suitable for the newly-formed elite collective, alongside greater awareness of pan-Arabian geography? Poetry can assist this investigation: pre-Islamic and Muslim-era poets cite myriad toponyms in their verses and refer to peoples whom they imagined to be “foreign,” yet the poetic corpus has received little attention in this regard.

As an example of the data provided by poetry, analysis of toponyms cited in the extant oeuvres of three pre-Islamic poets from the late sixth century CE, Ta’abbata Sharran, al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka, and Durayd ibn al-Ṣimma, suggests that many pre-Islamic poets did not stray far from their usual stomping grounds. Each of the three famous raiders mentions numerous place-names in his poetry,⁴² but neither Ta’abbata Sharran nor Durayd mention any known toponyms outside of their Ḥijāz homelands. The majority of the place-names to which they refer were either obscure local places or locations outright unknown to the Muslim anthologists who studied the verses.⁴³ Similarly, the collected poetry of the Hudhayl, a group in southwestern Arabia, contains over 472 place-names across 4,600 lines of poetry, and a survey of these toponyms mirrors the findings from the individual poets noted above. Again, most place-names are obscure or unknown, with few references to places beyond the mountains, wadis, and towns of the Ḥijāzi homeland of the Hudhayl.

42 In their extant oeuvres, al-Sulayk mentions 10 toponyms, Ta’abbata Sharran mentions 24, and Durayd mentions 47. In other words, therefore, place-names occur once in every eight or nine verses of poetry.

43 Specific analysis of these toponyms, cross-references with geographical compendia and other poetry, and discussion of place-names in the poetry of the Hudhayl is detailed in Webb 2021c.

Intriguingly, more distant toponyms, such as Buṣrā in Syria and Aden in Yemen, only appear in Hudhālī poetry from the Islamic period.⁴⁴

The limited geographical scope of the pre-Islamic poets, the very scant crossover of toponyms even between poets who lived in the same region, and the lack of precise geographical knowledge about Arabia in Muslim-era geographical compendia highlight the inferences about pre-Islamic Arabian identity outlined above. Pre-Islamic poetry's spatial narratives indicate a fragmented map: groups did not necessarily travel very far from their familiar migratory paths, they did not share spatial vocabulary, and their worlds appear, in short, rather small and constricted. The representations of space hitherto uncovered indicate that poets were not possessors of pan-Arabian horizons, harmonizing with the lack of other evidence for pan-Arabian communal cohesion before Islam. The four groups of poetry considered come primarily from the Ḥijāz, and while further work is needed to consider whether more uniformity of toponyms existed in central Arabia, where most people of Ma'add congregated, concepts of pan-Arabian space do not appear in the pre-Islamic poetry: "Arabia" (Ar. *Jazīrat al-'Arab*) is neither named expressly nor alluded to conceptually as a coherent geographical entity. Michael MacDonald's conclusion that outsiders invented the very notion of "Arabia" as a geographical unit⁴⁵ is thus supported by the poetry. Pre-Islamic Arabians did not seem to know what "Arabia" meant and they did not use the term in poetry, notwithstanding the many other place-names that they do identify. It follows that a pan-Arabian community spanning the Peninsula as we define it today was likely conceptually impossible for them to imagine.

Mirroring the emergence of broader spatial awareness noted in the Hudhālī poetry from early Islam, other Arabian Umayyad-era poets such as al-Shammākh ibn Ḍirār (d. 30 AH/650 CE)⁴⁶ indicate similarly expanded horizons, spanning a triangle of Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.⁴⁷ The later Marwānid-era Medinan al-Aḥwaṣ al-Anṣārī (d. 110/728–29 CE) refers to places further afield, mentioning Syrian, Iraqi, western and central Arabian, and Omani toponyms.⁴⁸

44 Only Mulaḃ ibn al-Ḥakam, an Islamic-era poet, mentions Aden (al-Sukkārī 1963–65, 3:1055). Ma'rib and other Yemeni toponyms appear very infrequently in Hudhālī poetry. Hudhālī poets mention Buṣrā three times: Abū Dhu'ayb (1:94 where he pairs it with Gaza), Ṣakhr al-Ghayy (2:964), and Sā'ida ibn Ju'ayya (3:1134); these three poets all lived in the early Islamic period.

45 MacDonald 2009, 1–2.

46 Conflicting details surround al-Shammākh's death and date. He was born during Muhammad's early prophecy, and he participated in the Emigrants' wars as a young man.

47 al-Shammākh 1977, 142–43.

48 al-Aḥwaṣ 1990, 131, 132, 158, 166, 170, 181, 183.

The frequency of such distant toponyms is noticeably greater than in our selection of pre-Islamic poets, and while some pre-Islamic poets did name distant places (al-A'shā Maymūn ibn Qays is the most celebrated pre-Islamic traveler-poet), survey of toponyms across the corpus points to a broadening idea of space and “home territory” as a consequence of emigration. The period when poets began calling themselves “Arabs” therefore coincides with the period when the poets became aware that the various elements of the Marwānid caliphate’s military elite shared an Arabian homeland bounded by the Red Sea, the Gulf, and the Euphrates. The Arabic conception of *Jazīrat al-ʿArab* as a geographical unit may therefore be another result of Umayyad-era elite responses to the consolidation of the Umayyad caliphate.⁴⁹

4.3 *The Hajj*

Comparison of pre-Islamic and Umayyad-era poetry about pilgrimage to Mecca offers another window into community from the perspective of ritual, with a perceptible change following the rise of Islam. The Hajj is mentioned in seemingly reliable and authentic pre-Islamic poems, indicating the existence of a pilgrimage to Mecca before Muhammad which was sufficiently important for poets to marshal in oaths, and the poems indicate that the ritual focused on physical contact with Mecca’s central shrine (the Kaaba), worship of a single deity, and sacrifice. For example, al-Nābigha al-Dhubayānī mentions the Kaaba by name in a celebrated poem addressed to the Lakhmid king Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir:⁵⁰

I swear by the life of He, whose Kaaba I have touched,⁵¹
And I swear by the thick blood poured upon the sacrifice stones,
By the Lord who preserves the birds in His sanctum,
And the riders to Mecca, passing the wells of al-Ghayl and al-Saʿd.⁵²

49 The Muslim-era definition of Arabia is intriguingly fluid. Early indications suggest that the idea of *Jazīrat al-ʿArab* did not extend far beyond Mecca and Medina, but the definition expanded outward to encompass the whole Peninsula by the end of the second century AH/eighth century CE. Further study of the development of a Muslim concept of Arabia alongside the articulation of Arabness is needed: for considerations to date, see Munt 2015 and Webb 2016, 137–38, 166–67.

50 al-Nābigha 1990, 25; al-Tibrīzī 2000, 1:528–29 also narrates the poem.

51 Another version of this line reads: “I swear by He whom I have visited on hajjes” (al-Nābigha 1990, 235).

52 Debate surrounds these toponyms. The names appear to have been forgotten by the time Muslim collectors began commenting upon the poem in the late second century AH/eighth century CE (see the commentary in al-Tibrīzī 2000, 1:529). The fact that these

Another celebrated Ḥijāzī poet of the late sixth and early seventh century CE, Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, composed an oath that directly referred to the pilgrims' campsite at Minā, as well as to another aspect of Hajj ritual—the shaving of hair:

I swore solemnly by the campsites of Minā,
And by the shaven forelocks and lice-laden hair.⁵³

Al-Sukkarī's collection of Hudhayl poetry articulates similar expressions, such as the poem by Sā'ida ibn Ju'ayya:

I swear by my camel, and by every
Sacrificial animal, covered in dust,
Corralled at the narrows of Ma'zim
And driven by al-Akhshab.⁵⁴

Ma'zim and al-Akhshab are within Mecca's landscape. Note also here the poet's emphasis on the ritual of sacrifice.

While several other pre-Islamic verses about Meccan pilgrimage are similar to the above lines, their overall number is remarkably small within the vast corpus of pre-Islamic poetry. Moreover, virtually all of the poets who mention the pilgrimage lived in (or, in the case of al-Nābigha, originated from) the Ḥijāz and near Mecca.⁵⁵ Poets from further afield are essentially silent on Mecca.⁵⁶ To account for the discrepancy, the poetry supports a hypothesis that the pre-Islamic Hajj was a local event particular to the Quraysh (the Quraysh are mentioned by name as custodians of the ritual in several pre-Islamic poems), whereas the Hajj lacked importance for poets at a distance from Mecca. Muslim-era narratives presenting the Hajj as the unifying event of the "Arabs" before Islam are accordingly anachronistic exaggerations of the ritual's original ambit. If the Hajj had been an annual event attended by all Arabians, we could expect central and eastern Arabian poets to mention it, yet instead the

names were unknown to Muslims supports the argument that the verse was not composed in the Muslim era.

53 Zuhayr 1982, 85.

54 al-Sukkarī 1963–65, 3:1101. For a similar oath invoking the sacrifice of animals, see al-Sukkarī 1963–65, 3:1172.

55 See al-Sukkarī 1963–65, 1:39, 95, 144, 3:1101, 1172; al-Anbārī, 2003, 1:431; al-Marzūqī 1968, 4:1635; Zuhayr 1982, 23.

56 An exception is the northeastern Arabian al-A'shā, who twice mentions the Hajj: al-A'shā 1974, 173, 241.

poetic corpus reveals that while poets who lived near Mecca invoke the Hajj as a local ritual, even such local poets only infrequently mention it.

By contrast, the Hajj becomes essentially ubiquitous in Umayyad-era poetry. While aspects of the Hajj recall the tenor of the pre-Islamic verses—citation of Hajj in oaths, references to sacrifice, and emphasis on the Quraysh as the Hajj's custodians—Umayyad poets also put the Hajj in overtly communal contexts in which Hajj-goers are synonymous with "Muslim" and the Hajj signifies communal solidarity. The association of the Hajj with such blatant communal connotations is evident, for example, in the poetry of Jarīr ibn 'Atiyya (d. ca. 110 AH/728–29 CE), one of the Umayyad-era's three most famous poets who composed poetry for Marwānid and Iraqi patrons, and among Basran tribal communities. Jarīr uses pilgrimage to disparage the kin of al-Akhṭal (d. ca. 92 AH/710 CE), Jarīr's rival and a second member of the "big three" Umayyad poets (the third is al-Farazdaq, whom we shall encounter below). Jarīr's citation of Hajj is pertinent because al-Akhṭal descended from the Taghlib, a Christian tribe in the Syrian desert: according to Jarīr's lampoon,

They [the Taghlib] make their Hajj to St. Sergius
While the Meccan pilgrims exult praise of God.⁵⁷

And similarly, Jarīr derides al-Akhṭal's people:

Their hands never touch the Sovereign House (*al-Bayt al-ʿAtīq*)⁵⁸
No, they stroke the Cross at Mass.⁵⁹

Having chided al-Akhṭal's Christian kin for their absence at Hajj, Jarīr then praises his own people for their presence: they are the "group always camped in the plains at Minā."⁶⁰ Elsewhere, Jarīr repeats the praise of his kin using Hajj-participation metaphors:

Are we not the greatest of all people:
The most noble at Minā, with the grandest tents!⁶¹

57 Jarīr 1969, 1:231.

58 *Al-Bayt al-ʿAtīq* (the "house controlled by no authority other than God") is a common sobriquet for the Kaaba. The Qurʾān twice refers to the Sanctum by the same term (Q 22:29, 33).

59 Jarīr 1969, 2:840. For other examples, see 1:67, 158, 237.

60 Jarīr 1969, 2:676, i.e., his people continuously practice the Hajj and can be located there. See also 1:248, 390.

61 Jarīr 1969, 2:823.

Jarīr constructs his boast by expressly referencing his kin's preeminence at Mecca, revealing that when he sought to conceptualize the widest extent of his community's boundaries, the Hajj presented itself as a device suitable to articulate communal demarcation, both positively for his own kin's boast, and negatively as grounds for socially excluding al-Akḥṭal's Christian kin. In precisely the same vein, the third great Umayyad-era poet, al-Farazdaq (d. 110 AH/728 CE or 112 AH/730 CE), refers to the Hajj in verses about communal inclusion and exclusion.⁶²

The notable shift here is the emergence by the Marwānid period of the notion that Hajj participation of itself can operate to identify members of the Muslim community. The Hajj seems to have conceptually expanded from the domain of localized ritual into a very broad socio-political function that signified loyalty to the caliph, the Quraysh, and membership within the Muslim community itself. That the Hajj adopted such a function intriguingly indicates the way in which its community of participants imagined their identity. Belonging to the "inside" of the group meant participating in a religious rite controlled by the ruling elite (the Quraysh), so that communities who had participated in the wars and raids of the Emigrants but did not participate in the religious rites of Hajj, such as al-Akḥṭal's Christian Taghlib, could be chastised by Marwānid-era rivals as outsiders. The emergence of the expressly religious activity of Hajj as a marker of communal identity and the timing of this emergence in poetry of the Marwānid period again highlights that the end of the first century AH/seventh century CE was a seminal period for defining Umayyad elite social groups whereby religious affiliation became directly relevant to communal standing. The Hajj therefore straddles the continuum of "continuity" and "change" inasmuch as Muslims perpetuated the pre-Islamic ritual with its same custodians, sacred locations, and rites, whereas by the Marwānid era, a reinterpretation of the Hajj emphasized its community-defining aspect as a cornerstone of Muslim collective identity.

The social role of the Hajj aligns with impressions that 'Abd al-Malik's caliphate was a watershed moment in the development of Muslim orthodoxy, or at least the official endorsement of recognizably coherent boundaries of Muslim practice tied to the establishment of the Muslim communities as the caliphate's elite.⁶³ The emergence of the Hajj as a faith-based marker of social belonging at this time starkly contrasts with pre-Islamic poetry, where participation in religious ritual is muted and not tied to a sense of group identity.

62 al-Farazdaq 1987, 34, 60, 108. Here, the non-Hajj-goers are called the Ṭayyī'.

63 Donner 2010 emphasizes the role of 'Abd al-Malik in reorienting the parameters of the military elite community.

4.4 *Islam and Poetry*

Related to the new emphasis in Marwānid-era poetry conjoining the Hajj and communal belonging, religious expression generally also exhibits analogous changes. Probing the nature of religious expression in Arabic poetry broaches questions that have long concerned scholars: How does “religion” manifest itself? What aspects of apparent religious expression in poetry can be linked to changes in belief systems? How can we discern the impact of Islam on poets of Muhammad’s generation and during early Islam? Generally, scholarship embraced the view that pre-Islamic poetry contains little religious sentiment.⁶⁴ Indeed, poetry infrequently named idols, and we have seen that pre-Islamic verse only rarely attests to the Hajj; overall the kinds of poems associated with late antique religious groups, such as homilies or hymns, clearly did not feature in pre-Islamic poetry.

More recent work does not outright categorize the pre-Islamic poetic corpus “profane”⁶⁵ since poets contemporary with Muhammad, such as Umayya ibn Abī al-Ṣalt and al-Samaw’al, do engage mythico-religious themes that touch on questions of faith and invoke similar topics found in the Qur’ān,⁶⁶ and Muslim-era memories of some companions of the Prophet, such as Ṣirma ibn Abī Anas, note their shunning of polytheism before Muhammad’s mission, alongside some verses with religious tones.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, religious themes are generally muted: the poets of Ma’add often invoke a deistic notion of “the Fates” (*al-Manāyā*) to explain the inevitability of Destiny, but even if the Ma’addites worshipped these “Fates” as gods, their poetry makes little reference to trappings of systematic religious practice or ritual. Therefore, the poetry leaves us guessing about the precise beliefs of the Ma’addites and how they might have practiced religion.

Christian Arabian communities present a separate conceptual puzzle. Since the late nineteenth century, some scholars have maintained that many central Arabian Ma’addite groups were Christian, however the collections of these purported “Christian poets,” such as that compiled by Cheikho, do not record

64 Brockelmann 1922 offered an early observation about the lack of religious sentiment in pre-Islamic poetry. Montgomery 1997, 219–22 raises important questions over such issues, and (221) he cites Wagner as an example of the traditional approach: “[I]n pre-Islamic poetry, religion was accorded a minimal role. It was not part of the thematic register which poetry of an Islamic inspiration could replace.”

65 See Dmitriev’s critique of the traditional view: 2017, 105–6.

66 For analysis of these poets, see Sinai 2011 and the summary of previous research on Umayya (398–400); Dmitriev 2017.

67 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr 1992, 2:747–48. The historicity of such poetry and tropes of pre-Muhammadic believers needs further research.

verses that expressly refer to Christianity.⁶⁸ Broader searches of Arabic literature do reveal enigmatic Christian memories, such as a verse attributed to one ‘Amr ibn ‘Abd al-Jinn al-Tanūkhī:

I swear by what the priests sanctify in all those sacristies (*haykal*)
By Abīl al-Abiliyyīn, Jesus son of Mary!⁶⁹

The name Abīl is remembered variously as the “head of the Christians,” or a specific priest, or Jesus himself.⁷⁰ The variations suggest “Abīl” was an ancient word associated with a form of Arabic Christianity largely forgotten in the Islamic period, but the poet who used the word, Ibn ‘Abd al-Jinn, is cast back in an archaic history, and is almost entirely unknown,⁷¹ and the above lines comprise one of only four verses attributed to him. It is difficult to make conclusions with the available scarce evidence: beyond these unusual lines, Christian Arabic-speaking communities in pre-Islamic Arabia and the Syrian Desert did not leave an extant corpus of pietistic poetry or panegyric/hagiographical material devoted to monks or church leaders.

Within discussions of Christian poetry, ‘Adī ibn Zayd is sometimes presented as a poet-spokesman of the Christian *Ibād* in al-Ḥīra,⁷² though his religious poetry is one of the types of pre-Islamic verse which arouse particular suspicions as to authenticity. In the early third century AH/ninth century CE, the first known generation of pre-Islamic poetry compilers voiced concerns about ‘Adī’s work: Ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī (d. 231 or 232 AH/845 or 846 CE) notes

68 See Cheikho 1926. Cheikho classifies poets as “Christian” based on their tribe and a generous assumption about the number of Christian pre-Islamic tribes. However, the poetry across the 800-page collection does not express Christian themes. Shahid 2009, 295–96 discusses Christian material in pre-Islamic Arabic of Syria, but his description of a thriving corpus of Christian texts in Arabic follows his interpretation of two words in the poetry of al-Nābigha al-Dhubayānī, and the argument is framed as a “must-have-been,” without further evidence. His hypothesis that Christianity influenced Arabic poetry is likewise rather “must-have-been.” I would argue that his suggestion that references to monks and lamps in Arabic poetry imply Christian influence does not adequately demonstrate that poets were themselves Christian and influenced by Christian ideas (1989, 440–41). Shahid himself admits that his proposal about the versification of the Bible is “pure speculation” (1989, 440).

69 al-Marzubānī 2010, 1:40–41.

70 Ibn Manẓūr 1994, 11:6–7.

71 This poet is also missing from Ibn Jarrah’s (d. 296 AH/909 CE) encyclopedic compendium of poets named ‘Amr, suggesting that the poet was not well remembered among Muslim-era poetry specialists.

72 For the Christian community of the *Ibād*, see Toral-Niehoff 2010, 333, who hesitates to assert the authenticity of the poetry.

that “the narrators know little” of his oeuvre, and that much of the poetry attributed to him in Muslim-era Iraqi literary circles should be considered spurious.⁷³ Ibn Qutayba (d. 276 AH/889 CE) more severely stated that “a very great detail of poetry has been forged in ‘Adī’s name, and our scholars (*‘ulamā’nā*) do not narrate his poetry as philological proof (*hujja*).”⁷⁴ Indeed, the style of his poetry containing biblical allusions notably differs from the pre-Islamic Arabic verse in the major collections.⁷⁵ The verses with biblical allusions ascribed to ‘Adī may be of the sort critiqued by the early poetry specialists, and hence the Christian sentiment should be understood as the result of Muslim-era inhabitants of Kufa back-projecting ideas already digested in exegesis of the Qur’ān onto the pre-Islamic character of ‘Adī ibn Zayd. The verses too contain seeming anachronisms: for example, references to the collapse of the Byzantine (Banū al-Aṣṣar) and Persian empires as part of the *ubi sunt* motif more likely reflect worldviews of Muslim-era poets, and references to characters in the Qur’ān, such as Tubba’, also suggest that the verses emerged after a period of Muslim exegesis of the Qur’ān.⁷⁶

Cheikho also noted the extent of spurious verses ascribed to ‘Adī.⁷⁷ Intriguingly, the poems that are more widely accepted as genuinely by ‘Adī, and that circulated in early poetry collections, do not contain any biblical material or allusion. I have found only one line where ‘Adī swears by Abīl,⁷⁸ but this line has varied recensions, and only one recension has an overtly Christian reference, casting some doubt on the “original” form of the verse composed by ‘Adī. Overall, ‘Adī’s poetry as preserved in the main collections speaks of “the Fates” (*al-manāyā*) in terms very similar to the Ma‘addite poets noted above.⁷⁹

73 Ibn Sallām n.d., 1:137, 140.

74 Ibn Qutayba 1982, 1:219. Ibn Qutayba also notes that ‘Adī’s residence in al-Ḥīra affected his language, which thus lost the “pure Bedouin” characteristic of other pre-Islamic poets, an opinion he ascribes to the earlier Abū ‘Ubayda (d. ca. 209 AH/824–25 CE). While perhaps a trope of ‘Abbāsīd-era taste, Abū ‘Ubayda comments that “no Arabs narrate his verses because his language is not Najdī” (1:219). The other extant early commentator on poetry, Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī (d. 255 AH/869 CE), likewise decries his poetic prowess (1991, 114).

75 These verses may have contributed to the poor opinion of ‘Adī’s non-Najdī Arabic, but the surviving verses in Ibn Qutayba 1982, 1:219–27 and Cheikho 1926, 439–74 contain verses that do not radically diverge from Ma‘addite styles, however, these do not contain the expressly religious material.

76 For the verses, see Cheikho 1926, 456, 458, 468. Cheikho 1926, 472 narrates a verse with the term *kitāb Allāh* (the Book of God): this intriguing reference could be a Muslim-era projection, but further work is needed for its evaluation.

77 Cheikho 1926, 465.

78 Cheikho 1926, 453. Abīl is presumably Jesus, as discussed above, note 70.

79 See Cheikho 1926, 442–43, 468 for examples.

To pursue the issue of authenticity, it is relevant to note that the third-century AH/ninth-century CE compilers of material about ‘Adī imagined the *Ibād* of Kufa as true “Arab Christians,”⁸⁰ and because those Muslim-era writers also associated Arabness with poetic composition, their worldview required them to reconstruct ‘Adī’s career via poetry, so that new poetry would then need to be created to sustain an acceptably Arabized narrative for the history of the Christian *Ibād*. In support of this hypothesis, the poetry with biblical references ascribed to ‘Adī is stylistically rather analogous to the large quantities of poetry forged by early ‘Abbāsid-era narrators and spuriously attributed to pre-Islamic Yemenis to prove the Arabness of ancient southern Arabians. From the perspectives of language, style, and allusions to Qur’ānic material, ‘Adī’s religious poetry resembles these “Yemeni” verses,⁸¹ suggesting that the real pre-Islamic ‘Adī’s poetry likely had the same tenor as most other pre-Islamic poets, and likely did not include overtly Christian references.⁸² The problematic character of ‘Adī’s verse with biblical allusions, the impression shared among early scholars that very little genuine poetry of ‘Adī survived, and the absence of Christian references in the verses that are considered authentic limit the extent to which a tradition of Arabic Christian literature can be postulated before Muhammad. If some poets (Ma‘addite and otherwise) were Christian, their faith left very faint marks in their poetry.

Turning to the Islamic period, substantial research has investigated whether Arabic poetry changed as poets converted to Islam. While some scholars suggest a deviation from pre-Islamic norms,⁸³ the more common opinion holds that Islamic belief did not radically alter poetry.⁸⁴ Poetic allusions to Islam are indeed indirect, but it is significant that studies largely focus on literary perspectives and such research into styles and motifs does not necessarily intersect with the paper’s questions about identity and community. The presence

80 As al-Ṭabarī 1960–69, 2:42–43 makes explicit.

81 See especially the “pre-Islamic Yemeni” Arabic poetry in al-Khuzā‘ī 1997. Pseudo-Wahb 1996 includes plentiful other poetry. Third-century AH/ninth-century CE scholars criticized these forgeries (al-Jumāhī n.d., 1:10–11).

82 In some lines, ‘Adī mentions God (*Allāh*) and expresses monotheistic ideas (see Cheikho 1926, 454, 468), but these examples hardly differ from similar sentiments in other Ma‘addite poetry (the presence of *Allāh* in pre-Islamic poetry is the subject of Brockelman 1922), and thus do not betray any specifically Christian influence.

83 See Jacobi, 1960–2007. Shahid 1989, 439 states that the rise of Islam “immediately affected the warp and woof of Arabic poetry,” though without discussion of the nature of the change.

84 Montgomery 1997, 219–20 discusses previous scholarship and draws similar conclusions that Islamic elements seamlessly mix with pre-Islamic conventions without overtly privileging the Islamic (245–53). See also S. Stetkevych 1994 and J. Stetkevych 2006.

of religious themes in Islamic-era poetry does reveal changes, and while more comprehensive survey is needed, here I outline some intriguing leads.

Poetry from the generation of the original Emigrants refers to the name *Allāh* as the monotheistic deity. We have noted that *Allāh* also denotes God in pre-Islamic poetry, but the early Islamic-era verse clearly quotes from and reflects Qur'ānic language, indicating that scripture influenced poetic production. Modern poetry specialists have noted such Islamic influences, but they emphasize the “co-existence of pre- and early Islamic ideas and values.”⁸⁵ In light of developments in our understanding of Islam's history, this view could have been anticipated. Historians now stress that Islam did not enter history as a fully codified system,⁸⁶ so that followers of Muhammad and the first caliphs cannot reasonably be expected to have transformed completely upon “conversion.” A mixture of old conventions influenced by new faith is likely to be as much as can be expected at such an early period, and the glimpses of a tentatively emerging Islam into poetry therefore support the historians' thesis of Islam's gradual maturation. Consider 'Abda ibn al-Ṭabīb's invocation of God in his understanding of the sustenance of his nomadic lifestyle:

Our hope is for the leftovers of the bounty
Of a most generous Lord, all benefit is within Him, all is welcome!
He is a Lord who granted us our possessions,
All He bestows is sustaining.⁸⁷

'Abda articulates straightforward monotheism within a poem otherwise replete with tropes familiar from pre-Islamic convention. This complexity may indeed reflect the tenor of the nascent faith that an Arabian nomadic member of the early community was required to absorb: 'Abda's lines reflect awareness of the single deity, and the language in which he couches his “bestowing” Lord aligns with the signature Qur'ānic method of articulating God. Therefore, stylistically, 'Abda's line expresses the divine in a way that differs from pre-Islamic poets, but his verses do not intone more complex theology. Generally, most collections of early Islamic poetry contain at least some similar quotations, allusions, and resonances of the Qur'ān.⁸⁸ Qur'ānic language clearly and

85 Montgomery 1997, 250.

86 Goldziher 1890 and Izutso 1966 present theses about Islam as a program of moral reform that held considerable sway in mid- to late twentieth-century scholarship, prompting scholars to expect that early Islamic Arabians should have radically changed their ways after Muhammad.

87 al-Anbārī 2003, 1:368.

88 For a discussion of the Qur'ān in early poetry, see Kadi 1994; Montgomery 1997, 230–50.

rapidly penetrated Arabic poetry, but the extent to which the Qurʾān, belief in the monotheistic God, and specific rituals combined to constitute a cohesive *community* of believers at such an early period poses questions of a different type, and this issue remains unresolved.

As for other religious communities in early Muslim-era poetry, al-Shammākh ibn Ḍirār describes “the Christians” (*al-Naṣārā*) as walking in black slippers in a metaphor,⁸⁹ presenting them as a monolithic group that is visibly different and conceptually separate from al-Shammākh’s own community.⁹⁰ It is intriguing that al-Shammākh uses a religious label to differentiate social groups: does this label indicate that the poet used faith to categorize others as well as to define his own identity within the fledgling caliphate?⁹¹ The character and communal notion of *al-Naṣārā* as an “other” (an identity opposite and separate from “Muslim”) needs further investigation. In broad terms, ‘Abda, al-Shammākh, and other early Muslim-era poets such as Labīd, composed poetry in which they express their personal submission to a Qurʾānic-sounding God, whereas poets praise the polity established by Muhammad in Medina as a political entity capable of military action, rather than as an apocalyptic group leading its believers to paradise. Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr’s celebrated ode to the Prophet Muhammad is much discussed for his emphasis on Muhammad and his community as a war band,⁹² and when al-Shammākh refers to the caliphate of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, he uses decidedly secular terminology too:

Were not Ibn ‘Affān and the Government (*al-sulṭān*) watching,
I’d lampoon you hard!⁹³

The notion of modern historians that the early caliphs projected their role via the lofty title of “God’s Successor on Earth” (*khalīfat Allāh*)—the individual charged with the community’s salvation—evidently is not part of al-Shammākh’s conception of authority here. As a voice from the generation following Muhammad, therefore, al-Shammākh presents us with a nomadic poet from northeastern Arabia who knew enough of the Qurʾān to internalize

89 al-Shammākh 1977, 83.

90 Ibn Qutayba 2011, 1:259 explicitly argues that “Christian” is rhetorically structured as distinct from al-Shammākh’s “Arab” people, who wore undyed leather sandals; this conclusion is logical.

91 Elsewhere, al-Shammākh invokes the names of “othered” communities of Hebrews (*‘ibrānī*) and Persians (*al-fārisī*) (1977, 94, 124).

92 See Sells 1990; Stetkevych 1994; Montgomery 1997, 222–24.

93 al-Shammākh 1977, 122.

its language occasionally in his poetry,⁹⁴ but he neither refers to himself as a “Muslim” nor muses at length on Muslim dogma and identity. Al-Shammākh refers to the nascent caliphate as a worldly power, yet he depicts “Christians” as a different community, and, by all accounts, he became an Emigrant and participated in combat in Iraq and Armenia.

In the Marwānid era, the styles of poetry and references to the Qurʾān are similar to the above verses, but religious themes appear with clearer focus on matters related to status and community. More comprehensive comparison is needed before adducing firm conclusions, but a survey of Marwānid-era poetry indicates increased religious allusions in lampoons and praise. For example, the Iraqi-domiciled Ziyād al-Aʿjam⁹⁵ (d. ca. 100 AH/718 CE) ridicules his rivals by describing them with phrases such as “Their people are pigs of Iraqi peasants, shunned and impure,”⁹⁶ or by chastising a rival’s mother’s vagina for being uncircumcised.⁹⁷ He scorns the Jarm (an ancestral group of the Qudā’a who lived in the Syrian desert at the beginning of Islam) for continuing to drink wine “after its prohibition was announced.”⁹⁸ Against the Yashkur (a major ancestral group of the Bakr ibn Wā’il, also from the Syrian desert near Iraq), Ziyād is particularly uncharitable:

If the robe of a Yashkurī should touch yours,
Then you must not mention God’s name until you wash!⁹⁹

94 See, for examples, al-Shammākh 1977, 71, 142, 228.

95 Ziyād al-Aʿjam translates literally as “Ziyād the Non-Arabic,” which is an unusual sobriquet for an early Arab poet! *Aʿjam* is a complex term with various meanings, one of which indicated residents of Khurāsān (easternmost Iran). Ziyād’s nickname may have signified his eastern birth, but it may also mean that his accent differed from the Iraqis (*aʿjam* also means non-proper-Arabic speaker, not non-Arab *per se*; *aʿjam* became the preferred term to describe people of non-Arab descent). Anecdotes about Ziyād show that he considered himself a full-fledged member of the “Arab” community through his tribal affiliation and membership within the military elite groups who controlled the land between Khurāsān and Basra, although some of his poet-rivals ridiculed him for his accent and eastern birth. For a detailed analysis of the anecdotes, see al-Aʿjam, *Dīwān* 15–22.

96 al-Aʿjam 1983, 67.

97 al-Aʿjam 1983, 64. Whether female circumcision is an “Islamic” practice is the subject of current polemical debate and anthropological research (for a balanced approach to the pre-modern sources, see Berkey 1996). Ziyād’s poem makes it clear that from his perspective, people who do not circumcise their girls were “outsiders” apart from his own community. The other examples from Ziyād’s poetry listed here reveal how Islamic taboos and injunctions could delineate communal boundaries. While Islamic law is equivocal on female circumcision, I consider it reasonable that in the first century AH/seventh century CE Ziyād would consider it an important custom for his notion of Muslim/Arab community.

98 al-Aʿjam 1983, 87.

99 al-Aʿjam 1983, 69.

And he unequivocally derides Yazīd ibn Ḥabnā':

You have abandoned devoutness: religion is Muhammad's
For the people of devotion, for the Muslims.¹⁰⁰

What emerges from Ziyād al-A'jam's collection is an instrumental use of Islam in the context of social interaction. Ziyād does not mean that his foes' souls are in peril (his poetry is devoid of eschatology), but rather he casts them as politically and socially inferior because of their failure to meet an Islamic normative standard. Breaches of Islamic codes and engagement in Muslim taboos evidently served as an effective rhetoric for maligning foes, and I have not found such sentiments in earlier poetry. As such, it does not appear that earlier targets of poetic lampoon could be chastised for religious failings. For Ziyād's rhetoric to be successful in his Iraqi environment, his target audience would need to have possessed awareness of a common set of religious norms expected from those inside the elite community, and to have adopted a worldview whereby those norms spoke to the heart of their self-identity. Therefore, it seems that by the Marwānid period Muslim mores had rather well entrenched themselves as a basis for social inclusion; it is noteworthy that Ziyād was contemporary with Jarīr and al-Farazdaq who likewise used the Hajj ritual to exclude Christian groups from the elite "inside" community.

Moreover, Ziyād's rhetoric is not unique: the Ḥijāzi resident al-Aḥwaṣ al-Anṣārī chided an Umayyad appointee over Medina with a verse referring to the trappings of Islamic belief:

I'm amazed to see Ibn Ḥazm mount a donkey,
Yet more amazing still, he mounts the pulpit (*minbar*)¹⁰¹

Al-Aḥwaṣ does not mean that Ibn Ḥazm is not Muslim, rather, it is Ibn Ḥazm's inability to demonstrate the expected gravitas of sermon-giving that forms the source of critique. Pre-Islamic slander does not operate within this type of framework with a faith-oriented tenor.¹⁰²

In contrast, but with the same aim, Marwānid-era poets also utilize Islamic allusions for praise, whereby the upholding of Islamic values or the

¹⁰⁰ al-A'jam 1983, 50.

¹⁰¹ al-Aḥwaṣ 1990, 93. See also 105.

¹⁰² For representative examples of the tone of pre-Islamic *hijā'* (lampoon) with its focus on individual virtue as opposed to religious norms, see van Gelder 1988, 15–20.

performance of Muslim religious practice is correlated to social excellence. For example, Ziyād al-Aʿjam praises the governor of Nishapur, ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ḥashraj, in a four-line fragment: the first two lines copy the established pre-Islamic poetic motifs of praising patrons for their generosity, virtue, hospitality, and “crowned kingship” (*malikun agharru mutawwajun*), but the third verse expresses a new sentiment.

He is the most devout to ascend the pulpit (*minbar*)
Second only to the sinless chosen Prophet.¹⁰³

As in the above example by al-Aḥwaṣ, mounting the pulpit to give the Friday sermon was the prerogative of Umayyad-era governors, and here Ziyād uses the device to praise his patron. In the Ḥijāz, the poet Abū Dahbal al-Jumaḥī praised Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam in a similarly constructed two-verse poem: the first line uses the pre-Islamic praise language, but the second associates the new caliph’s rise to power with Moses’s command to his people to cease worship of the Golden Calf.¹⁰⁴ Poetry specialists have already noted this duality of pre-Islamic and Muslim norms in poetry, however, it is important also to highlight that citation of religious norms to establish social standing is a distinctly novel addition in Muslim-era poetry.

Ziyād also refers to Islam explicitly in a possessive way: “our religion,”¹⁰⁵ which appears to be a new expression that emerges in the Umayyad era. Separate from questions of personal piety, therefore, religion emerges as a tool in social relations. For such verses to have been composed, the society as a whole would have been using faith as a means to self-define and to imagine communal boundaries. Marwānid-era poets were not necessarily any more devout than their forebears, nor did poetry become a medium for dedicated devotional expression at any point during the Umayyad era. Muslim poets perpetuated most pre-Islamic tropes and metaphors, hence the rise of Islam itself cannot be said to have *changed* poetic composition, but Marwānid-era poets did assign religious matters a social function that is absent in previous Arabic poetry. This observation fuels inference that the consolidation of the caliphate did change community, such that poets began using religion as a primary means to define meaningful social boundaries.

¹⁰³ al-Aʿjam 1983, 49.

¹⁰⁴ Abū Dahbal 1972, 80.

¹⁰⁵ al-Aʿjam 1983, 56.

The “religious” indicators chronologically align with the emergence of the self-expression of people as “Arab” in poetry. Thus, from the perspective of communal identity, processes definitive of what would become iconic aspects of Muslim culture began to mature during the Marwānid period: the emergence of Arabness as an ethnic identity and Islam as a communal creed. The transformation of Arabness and Muslimness into markers of an elite identity stands as a seminal response of the Marwānid-era military elites.

5 An Arabness Case Study: al-Azd in Umayyad Politics

The above analysis of poetry offers important insights into understanding the military elites’ responses to the rise of the caliphate, including the process of ethnogenesis that reorganized the original Emigrants into an Arab ethnos. Because identities are social constructs, we should be able to detect fissures and contradictions when the array of formerly distinct peoples began to embrace Marwānid-era Arabness as their identity. This final section explores the ramifications of Arab ethnogenesis using the case study of al-Azd.

In models of Arab genealogy developed during the early ‘Abbāsīd era, al-Azd were classified as a large tribe of “southerner Arabs” (*al-Yamāniyya*), comprising three sub-groups: one “eastern” group of the Azd ‘Umān and two “western” groups, the Azd Shanū’a and Azd al-Sarāt. ‘Abbāsīd genealogists considered al-Azd as among the genealogically purest Arabs: as members of the “southerner Arab” lineage, they were understood to be descendants of the “Arab Arabs” (*al-‘arab al-‘āriba*), the “original Arabs” whose blood was considered unmixed with that of non-Arab peoples.¹⁰⁶ The ‘Abbāsīd genealogical models posited a common descent from four sons of an ancient eponymous ancestor, al-Azd ibn al-Gawth ibn Nabt, to unify various geographically dispersed peoples as “Azdis”: Omanis (Azd ‘Umān), various ancestral groups in the Sarāt mountains of south-central Arabia, the two main tribes of Medina, and the Ghassānids and Lakhmids (rulers of the Syrian and Iraqi deserts in the pre-Islamic period).¹⁰⁷ Most of the Omani and Sarāt mountain al-Azd groups were classified as descendants of Naṣr ibn al-Azd, while the “nobles” of Ghassān and Lakhm, the Medinan *Anṣār* (the Aws and al-Khazraj clans who comprised the first community that accepted Muhammad as their Prophet and leader), and

106 For al-Azd’s genealogy, see Ibn al-Kalbi 1988, 1:362–508; Ibn Durayd n.d., 435–95; for the “Arab Arabs” and the history of the idea in Arabic sources, see Webb 2016, 217–22.

107 Genealogists note that al-Azd was originally pronounced al-Asd (Ibn Durayd n.d., 435); this accords with a tribal name appearing in pre-Islamic inscriptions.

the Muhallabid family (which claimed nobility over the Omani al-Azd who had settled in Basra during the Umayyad era) were each identified as scion of Māzin ibn al-Azd.¹⁰⁸

While ‘Abbāsīd-era constructions of Arab genealogy grant unequivocal Arabness to al-Azd, signs of the genealogies’ fabricated nature can be detected. The establishment of southerners as “Arab Arabs” at the top of an Arab family tree was almost certainly an invention of ‘Abbāsīd-era scholarship and bore little relation to how Umayyad-era southerners imagined their identity, let alone pre-Islamic groups.¹⁰⁹ On the level of al-Azd genealogical construction, the markedly disjointed genealogies connect widely dispersed groups, suggesting that various distinct entities in the early Islamic period had their ancestries rationalized to fit them within one Azdī identity. To explain the shared Azdī roots of such disparate groups, Muslim historiographers developed a migration story in which all the al-Azd subgroups lived in Yemen in an ancient period until their leader, ‘Amr ibn Muzayqiya, was inspired to learn that a dam in Ma’rib was about to burst and flood his lands. Through a clever ruse he was able to sell out to unsuspecting locals shortly before the dam broke, and he led his people northward. Along the way, subgroups separated themselves from the migration at different points to settle new lands. Brian Ulrich has argued that the migration story is an anachronistic elaboration, constructed to retrospectively fit the various al-Azd groups into one shared past.¹¹⁰ The articulation of “noble” Azdī lineage through the ancestor Māzin ibn al-Azd, in contrast to the more numerous tribal blocs considered descendants from Naṣr ibn al-Azd, is also curiously binary and streamlined.

The genealogical issues led Crone and Blankinship to propose that the early caliphate created the entire existence of al-Azd: a military (not genealogical) designation assigned to unify an array of people after they settled in the

108 Al-Azd’s genealogical tree was established by the end of the second century AH/eighth century CE: see the earliest version in Ibn al-Kalbī (see note 89). Subsequent genealogists repeat the same genealogical model (e.g., Yāqūt 1987, 86; Ibn Ḥazm 1994, 330–86). For discussion, see Webb, “al-Azd,” *EI3* and Ulrich 2019, 30–48.

109 See Webb 2016, 213–22 for the process by which southerners placed themselves at the top of the Arab family tree; and Webb 2021a for specific study of southerner Arabness as expressed in early ‘Abbāsīd Iraq. Notwithstanding the complex nature of ethnicity in pre-Islamic Arabia, modern scholarship generally concurs that the pre-Islamic south Arabian kingdom of Ḥimyar did *not* consider itself part of a wider Arab community, and their inscriptions express “Ma’add” as an outsider group. Hence the “pure Arabness” of Yemenis in Muslim times was a novel construction.

110 See Ulrich 2008 for the migration mythology, and Ulrich 2019 for a broad study of how individual families manipulated al-Azd genealogy to invent their own tribal identities.

amṣār towns.¹¹¹ In defense of the ‘Abbāsid-era genealogists, pre-Islamic epigraphy does include the name “As¹dn” as a southwestern Arabian group located roughly within the homeland that Arabic historians call the Azd Sarāt.¹¹² The name As¹dn translates into Arabic as al-Asd/al-Azd, but pre-Islamic As¹dn’s precise geographical extent and subdivisions remain unclear. Like many ancestral groups, al-Azd’s boundaries were fluid and the social changes following the rise of Islam likely reshaped its identity, admitting new members and extensively reorganizing genealogical trees.

The construction of a new al-Azd genealogy encompassing Omanis, western Arabians, central Arabians, and even groups in the Syrian desert appears convincingly to be the result of Umayyad-era politics; we can push further by investigating the construction of the very Arab identity of al-Azd during the same period. The al-Azd participated in the wars and raids of Muhammad’s successors, placing them at the epicenter of Emigrant settlement, the maturation of the caliphate, and subsequent Arab ethnogenesis. However, the Omani al-Azd did not fit easily into Arabness, and these difficulties have attracted some attention in the study of the Muhallabids, a Basran family with roots from Oman. Their ancestor, Abū Ṣufra, led Omani contingents in invasions to southern Iran, then he settled in Basra. His son, al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra (d. 83 AH/702 CE), became a military leader during the mid-first century AH/seventh century CE,¹¹³ and the family’s third-generation patriarch, Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab, considered himself powerful enough to challenge caliphal authority. Yazīd was defeated and killed in 101 AH/720 CE, but the family remained influential, and the Muhallabids and al-Azd held positions at the top of the Basran social order during the ‘Abbāsid period. Some Arabic sources claim that Abu Ṣufra had a Persian origin,¹¹⁴ but the sources invite us to dig deeper because all Basran groups hailing from Oman and claiming Azdī ancestry appear to have been chided in the Marwānid period for being non-Arabs. Arabness was thus not merely problematic for the Muhallabids—other genealogies of the Azd ‘Umān

111 Crone 1980, 30–31; Blankinship 1994, 44.

112 For further details of the pre-Islamic al-Asd/al-Azd, see Webb “al-Azd,” *E13*, and Ulrich 2019, 25–28.

113 Arabic sources identify him as leader of al-Azd, but Crone rejects this “al-Muhallab b. Abī Ṣufra,” *E12*. However, in what follows, we will see a strong connection between al-Muhallab and Azdī tribal identity. It is likely that the Muhallabid family lacked Azdī roots, but perhaps many groups in Basra who claimed to be al-Azd likewise hailed from different lineages, and in the Umayyad period they created a new Azdī lineage to organize themselves.

114 al-Ṣfahānī 1992, 20:85–88. The sources are not unanimous, however: see al-‘Asqalānī 1995, 9:185. See Hinds 1981 for discussion, and now Ulrich 2019, 117–18.

were involved, which adds perspective to Ulrich's observation that the migration story used to explain how Omanis are Arabs from al-Azd is a Muslim-era fabrication designed to prove the Omani Azd's connection to a wider Arab family tree.¹¹⁵ Proving Arab identity evidently challenged the Basran-resident Azd 'Umān, and their story presents us with the processes by which tribes "became Arab" in the Umayyad era. In what follows, we consider the evidence.

The first piece of evidence comes from a poem by al-Farazdaq, composed as a lampoon of the Muhallabid patriarch al-Muhallab ibn Abi Šufra. Al-Farazdaq worked during the early Marwānid period, contemporary with 'Abd al-Malik, when poets used the term "Arab" to speak about their own community. References to "Arabs" occur frequently throughout al-Farazdaq's poems when he speaks of his identity and other Umayyad elites, but in his treatment of al-Muhallab ibn Abi Šufra and al-Azd, his tone differs. Al-Farazdaq ran afoul of al-Muhallab, and while al-Muhallab had the support of the Umayyad governor of Basra, al-Farazdaq nonetheless composed a lampoon of al-Azd:

Were it not for the strong-arm of Bishr ibn Marwān,¹¹⁶
 I'd have no concern for the brooding anger of al-Muhallab.
 Let him shut the door in my face and hide,
 Neither of my parents stood by a jand tree!¹¹⁷
 My clan are from Mecca and Ṭā'if,
 They clambered down no Omani wadis.
 Nobles from Qays and Khindif: should I call out,
 They run to aid one waving his robes in distress.
 When I see al-Azd, it's their beards that flap
 About a ship's deck, a miserable vessel.
 How I marvel to see them swap an anchor chain for reins,¹¹⁸
 Who ever heard of such absurdity?
 They hide their noses—not Arab noses those,
 Beards of Nabaṭis,¹¹⁹ no clear Arabic from their mouths!
 How could they be—they made no sacrifice at Mecca,
 They never worshipped idols at al-Muḥaṣṣab.¹²⁰

115 Ulrich 2008.

116 The Umayyad governor of Iraq, appointed in 74–75 AH/693–94 CE.

117 The jand (*ghāf*) was a tree indigenous to Oman, the homeland of the Muhallabids.

118 Here al-Farazdaq chides al-Azd for only recently becoming cavalrymen.

119 In Umayyad-era Arabic poetry, *nabaṭ* served as the preferred term to label the indigenous population of Iraq. At the time when Arabness became a potent marker for elite identity, *nabaṭī* took on the meaning of non-Arab, much like the use of *'ajam* and *a'jam*.

120 Al-Muḥaṣṣab is a prominent ritual toponym at Mecca.

When a call for help was raised, they rode forth
 But it was on the boards of ships.
 No Azdī woman felt the sting of circumcision,
 Nor did she taste milk from a pail.
 Huntsmen never brought her eggs or truffles,
 Nor did she taste meat won by lot.¹²¹
 Nor did a slave girl ever raise a tent above her,
 A Bedouin shelter propped on poles.
 She never lit a fire to guide night-arriving guests,
 Nor did she ever hear the welcoming bark of dogs ...¹²²

Al-Farazdaq's remarkable poem illuminates several issues connected with imagining communities in the Muslim cities of Iraq at the end of the first century AH/seventh century CE. To lampoon al-Muhallab, al-Farazdaq focuses on the al-Azd tribe as a whole, which aligns with Arabic prose narrative sources that identify al-Muhallab as a military commander with authority over al-Azd in Basra. To belittle al-Azd, lines 13–14 articulate the heart of al-Farazdaq's lampoon: the poet expresses al-Azd's non-Arabness. From an 'Abbāsid perspective, this accusation is nonsensical, since, by the third century AH/ninth century CE, al-Azd were firmly part the Arab family tree. However, al-Farazdaq's poem suggests that this position was not always the case. While Omanis claimed to be members of al-Azd, participated in the wars of early Islam, settled in the Emigrant garrison town of Basra, and claimed to be Arabs along with the rest of the Marwānid-era elite, their Omani home and different cultural heritage conflicted with the dominant Quraysh-led groups who defined their sense of Arab identity with different parameters. Accordingly, opponents of al-Azd could point to Azdī difference as "proof" to deny their Arabness.

Al-Farazdaq is helpfully specific in his justification: he focuses on al-Azd's ancestral home in Oman (distant from his central Arabian kin), their seafaring ways, and their lack of a Bedouin heritage. Al-Azd, in al-Farazdaq's description, have no history of living like "Arabs" lived: al-Azd toil with ropes on boats, Arabs work with horses' reins (line 11); Arabs speak the clear Arabic language, al-Azd do not (line 14); Arabs perform the Hajj, al-Azd did not (line 15). Al-Farazdaq explains that the non-Arabness of al-Azd naturally emerges from their different past: Arabs used to worship idols, but the al-Azd did not (line 16); the typical aspects of Bedouin life that Arabs performed in pre-Islamic

121 *Maysir*, a form of gambling by throwing arrow lots, commonly appears in poetry as part of the typical repertoire of the pre-Islamic Arabian tribesmen.

122 al-Farazdaq 1987, 18–19.

times are likewise not part of al-Azd's past (lines 20–26). Beyond their seafaring lifestyle, al-Farazdaq does not specify how the pre-Islamic al-Azd lived. Further elaboration was unimportant for him: al-Farazdaq's rhetoric hinged on his emphasis of the non-Arabness of al-Azd, defining them as outsiders to the "inside" cultural system imagined for the Arabs.¹²³

Ziyād al-Aʿjam, a contemporary of al-Farazdaq, articulated similar sentiments:

Do al-Azd hear what's said about them
In the palace's courtyard—or are they deaf?
A people who're circumcised once they reach senility,
Misguided aspirants to be Arabs, though they be non-Arab.¹²⁴

The prominence of circumcision is pointed: Ziyād accuses the al-Azd of being late joiners to Islam, i.e., because they only recently adopted Islamic practices, their elderly men had to be circumcised—they were not born into Islam. He elaborates the same theme in a poem directed against al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra:

We were the ones who cut off Abū Ṣufra's foreskin
So that he could enter Basra,
When ʿUthmān¹²⁵ saw the foreskins,
He set the knife upon them.¹²⁶

123 The poem is also noted in Ulrich 2019, 77, 117 in the context of al-Muhallab's lineage and the standing of al-Azd in Basra; Ulrich concurs in reading the poem as an example of the fluidity of Arab identity in the early period, though also considers the poem to evidence that the trappings of Bedouin identity were key to a sense of Arabness (76–77). However, al-Farazdaq does not make the claim that proper Arab identity is that of the Bedouin *per se*, since each of the examples he cites relating to the desert are past tense: for al-Farazdaq, it appears that Arabs are those whose roots emanate from the Arabian desert, not necessarily those who currently live as desert nomads. The ramification of al-Farazdaq's poem also can be extrapolated further, given that very similar sentiments about the non-Arab identity of al-Azd are expressed in other sources—notably al-Farazdaq's contemporary Ziyād al-Aʿjam, whose poetry has not been studied in this regard, and will be discussed presently.

124 al-Aʿjam 1983, 97.

125 The poet refers to ʿUthmān ibn Abī al-ʿĀṣ, appointed ruler in Khorezm during the caliphate of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who was apparently ordered to circumcise non-Arabs in the city of Shahrak (or Shahrkand) (al-Isfahānī 1992, 20:86–87). In another story of Abū Ṣufra's late circumcision, Ibn Ḥajar refers to the poetry specialist al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 213 AH/828 CE) who, specifically commenting on another of Ziyād's poems, links it to an audience of Abū Ṣufra with the caliph ʿUmar (al-ʿAsqalānī 1995, 9:186).

126 al-Aʿjam 1983, 71.

The emphasized absence of circumcision among the al-Azd is significant, as we perceive Arabness and Islam as intertwined: the poem suggests that a “proper Arab” has a long tradition of complying with Islamic norms, and that the Bedouinized identity of Arabness cannot easily be separated from Muslimness. In their lampoons, both Ziyād and al-Farazdaq also emphasize al-Azd’s non-participation at Hajj, which, as we have seen above, was considered in the Umayyad era to be a central aspect of communal belonging. As al-Farazdaq presents it, an “Arab” of Marwānid-era elite understanding must *ipso facto* be a practicing Muslim too. This melding of religious and ethnic identity has perceptible relevance in the concept of community in the Marwānid period.

In a third poem, Ziyād mirrors al-Farazdaq in using fishing associations to chide al-Azd:

In came al-Azd, tripping on their beards,
Juwāf fish falling out of their nostrils.¹²⁷

The rhetorical device suggests that because desert Arabs did not fish, al-Azd’s alleged proclivity to fish indicates their non-Arabness. I have not found such tropes used against other Basran tribal groups. Thus, the physical distance of al-Azd’s Omani home from central Arabian heartlands, and the consequent cultural differences evidently handicapped al-Azd’s efforts to assume an Arab identity when it became popular among the caliphate’s military elite. The al-Azd were easy targets for their detractors.¹²⁸

Al-Azd’s problematic Arabness further emerges in an anecdote from the end of the Umayyad era about a battle waged between a group of southerners, including al-Azd, pro-Umayyad, and pro-Quraysh forces outside Medina in 130 AH/748 CE. According to a memory of the battle recorded by Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī,

A Qurayshite man beheld one of the Yemenis exclaim: “Praise be to God who has brought me contentment to see the Quraysh killed!” His son added, “And Praise be to God who has used our hands to disgrace them!” This was because the Quraysh did not consider the Azd from Oman as Arabs.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ al-Aʿjam 1983, 83.

¹²⁸ The poems noted above that chide Christian groups for their nonparticipation in the Hajj do not, as my research has so far revealed, deny the Arabness of those Christian groups to the extent expressed by al-Farazdaq and Ziyād al-Aʿjam.

¹²⁹ al-Iṣfahānī 1992, 23:241.

Why the Quraysh in the early second century AH/eighth century CE would have such a negative view about al-Azd likely stems from the only recently silenced troubles in Basra, when Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab sought to parlay al-Azd's Basran power into a challenge against caliphal/Quraysh authority in Iraq. The Quraysh's response aligns with the poetry of al-Farazdaq and Ziyād al-Aʿjam: the Omani al-Azd possessed attributes that did not fit with the notions of Arab identity embraced by the center of the caliphate, and al-Azd's opponents could utilize ethnos to belittle them and deny them elite status.

An anecdote from an entirely different context—early Persian historiography from eastern Iran—similarly uses al-Azd's perceived difference from other military elites of the Marwānid caliphate in political rifts. The *Tārīkh-i Harāt* attributed to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Fāmī al-Harawī (d. 546 AH/1151–52 CE) contains remarkable old material, including a story that the Muslim commander in the east, Qutayba ibn Muslim (d. 96 AH/714–15 CE), upon being appointed governor of Khurāsān, converted a garden constructed by the previous governor, Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab, into a camel paddock. Qutayba and Yazīd were political rivals, and al-Harawī's text recounts how Qutayba remarked upon converting the garden that: "My father was a camel-owner (*ushtur-bān*), Yazīd's father was a garden-owner (*būstān-bān*)."¹³⁰ Qutayba's chiding of Yazīd precisely echoes the lines of al-Farazdaq and Ziyād al-Aʿjam: the Omani Muhallabids could be insulted for their lack of camel-rearing roots, an overt insinuation of their place outside the growing sense of Arab-Muslim elite identity in the Marwānid caliphate. The success of Abū Ṣufra and his son al-Muhallab in Basra during the earlier periods of initial Emigrant expansion indicates that a lack of Arabian nomadic background was not a handicap to political power, nor did it prevent groups from participating in military expeditions of the first Muslim expansions. However, by the Marwānid era, the shifting expectations of elite identity found a new emphasis on Arabness (as evidenced above) and opened potential weaknesses in the social standing of the Muhallabid's third-generation leader, Yazīd.

Considering matters from the perspective of Arabness as it was conceived in early Islam, we can better understand the motivations of al-Farazdaq, Ziyād, Qutayba ibn Muslim, and the Quraysh. Al-Azd, especially its members from Oman, left almost no footprint in Muslim-era texts about pre-Islamic Arabia. The al-Azd have no poets,¹³¹ Ibn al-Kalbī's *Kitāb al-Aṣnām* (the Book of Idols)

¹³⁰ al-Harawī 2008, 11–12.

¹³¹ Even the Azd Sarāt from central Arabia had few pre-Islamic poets. Al-Shanfarā and Ḥājiz al-Sarawī are identified as Azdī, and while they were famous poets, they are shifty figures from outlaw lore. It can thus be argued that the central Arabian al-Azd had at

does not refer to any idols venerated by al-Azd in Oman,¹³² and Azd ‘Umān are absent in the major collections of ancient Arabian lore, such as Ibn Qutayba’s *Faḍl al-‘Arab*; Ibn Ḥabīb’s *al-Muḥabbar* preserves only one curious story linking the Azd ‘Umān to a stray branch of the Quraysh.¹³³ In contrast to the importance Arabic sources assign to al-Azd as major participants in the nascent caliphate, Arabic memories about the cultural icons of Arabness palpably do not intersect with al-Azd. Thus, although the al-Azd in Basra were part of the Umayyad caliphate’s Muslim-Arab elite by virtue of their physical participation and success in military ventures, they did not possess the same cultural and other intangible characteristics as the other “Arab” groups.

Perhaps responding to the rhetoric of their rivals, the early sources suggest that al-Azd appear to have made efforts to assert their Arabness by finding a way into Arab lore. Ibn al-Kalbī’s *Ansāb al-khayl* (The Genealogy of Horses) reports that al-Azd claimed that the ancestor of their horses, Zād al-Rākib, was a stallion from Solomon’s stables, which escaped and became the ancestor of all Arab horses.¹³⁴ In this legendary story, the connection of Solomon to the origin of the Arabs’ horses strongly suggests a Muslim-era creation meant to assert al-Azd’s pedigree in horsemanship, which, in the Umayyad period, was closely associated with Arab identity. Similarly, the earliest elaborate stories of al-Azd’s pre-Islamic history and their spread across Arabia derive from the (likely apocryphal) text of Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 110 AH/728 CE), *Kitāb al-Tijān*,¹³⁵ a book containing legends and epic expansion that have been called “extravagant flights of fancy” by one modern commentator.¹³⁶ Premodern Arabic historians likewise criticized the historiography of Azdī and Yemeni Himyarite kings: the fourth-century AH/tenth-century CE Ḥamza al-Ḥafḥānī remarked “there is nothing in all of history more corrupted and erroneous than the history of the governors and kings of Ḥimyar, for its dynasty lasted such

least some tentative connection to Arabic poetic culture, whereas any Azd ‘Umān poets seem unknown to Muslim collectors. The early ‘Abbāsīd-era poetry collector Ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī states that eastern Arabian Baḥrayn had “many excellent and eloquent [pre-Islamic] poets” (n.d. 1:271), but he did not mention any poets from Oman.

132 Ibn al-Kalbī 1924, 37–39 refers to idols of Azdī groups in central Arabia, i.e., the Azd Sarāt, presumably related to the al-Asd who appear in pre-Islamic inscriptions but separate from the Azd ‘Umān. Ibn al-Kalbī does not mention any idols in connection with Oman.

133 Ibn Ḥabīb 1942, 168.

134 Ibn al-Kalbī 2009, 17–19.

135 Pseudo-Wahb 1996, 273–303.

136 Vajda 1960–2007. Khoury 1960–2007 is more sympathetic to Wahb’s reliability as a narrator, and Wahb material mixed varied sources: the material in the *Tijān* better fits on Vajda’s side of the spectrum.

a long time and so few of their kings are mentioned.” Ibn Khaldūn was even more scathing.¹³⁷ This source was outside the ambit of Ulrich’s 2008 study of the al-Azd migration stories, however it tallies with his findings and furnishes further support of his conclusion that the migration story was a Muslim-era anachronism given that its first articulation occurs in pseudo-Wahb’s very problematic text that contains considerable anachronistic material. No extant pre-Islamic poetry grounds the migration tale within memories of tribal groups from pre-Islamic Arabia, and the story did not circulate among the collectors of ancient *Arabica*. Muslim-era storytellers seem the primary crafters of the story, using Qur’ānic exegesis to create a narrative specifically targeted to prove to a Muslim audience that Omani Azdis were “Arab.” Further support for this conclusion appears in another early source for the al-Azd migration story, which so far has not been brought into the discussion. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān’s (d. 150 AH/767 CE) *Tafsīr*, a text that resembles the pseudo-Wahb storytelling genre and that has been criticized for extensive reliance on legendary material, includes the migration story.¹³⁸

To summarize, the first references to the Arabness of Azd ‘Umān are very early, and nearly contemporary with the anti-Azdī poetry of al-Farazdaq and Ziyād al-Ajam, suggesting efforts to situate the Basran Omanis within a family tree that included their compatriot central and western Arabian Emigrant groups. However, the pro-Azdī stories come from contrived narratives of dubious reputation. Moreover, because they lack the usual means of corroboration through pre-Islamic poetry, the stories are likely not vestiges of pre-Islamic memories.

We accordingly behold the fluidity of Arabness in the Marwānid period. Military elites articulated Arab identity, but the parameters of that Arabness were unclear. The Quraysh and Umayyad military elites from Ma‘addite central Arabian backgrounds controlled what seems the “hegemonic” voice in determining the hallmarks of Arab identity, which they crafted around both the Ma‘addites’ Bedouin heritage and the caliphate’s normative Islamic practice. Other groups, such as Yemenis and Omanis, attempted to join the newly emerging Arab family tree, and while they could acculturate to the current Islamic norms of the Marwānid elites, their different cultural and geographical origins jeopardized the legitimacy of their Arabness.

Quite why al-Azd faced the rhetoric that denied their Arabness likely stemmed from politics. Political tensions in Basra (where the Muhallabids and

137 Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī n.d., 106; Ibn Khaldūn 1998–99, 116–21.

138 Muqātil 1979–89, 3:531.

al-Azd organized various acts of independence and rebellion, clashed with Umayyad governors, and played political power games with other ex-Arabian groups who also claimed to be Arabs) pitted al-Azd in particular against the other major stakeholders in the Umayyad system.¹³⁹ Al-Azd's opponents used Arabness as a means to champion their own identity, and because al-Azd lacked the required cultural capital, rival ex-Arabian groups could use Arabness against al-Azd. The lampoons can therefore be understood as products of factional power politics, and the poets' choices of Arabness as a weapon within that struggle is particularly telling: the al-Azd evidently were less able than other ex-Arabian groups to be accepted as "Arabs" in the Umayyad era.

The challenges we have found that the al-Azd faced regarding their membership to the elite's "Arab" identity are anticipated in the anthropological theories of ethnogenesis of Weber and Barth, who both identify that political and economic factors are the main drivers for grouping people within ethnic boundaries. Al-Azd, as central members of the Umayyad-era military elite, would naturally seek to fit themselves within Arabness as it had become the preferred means for Marwānid-era elites to articulate their identity, but al-Azd's "cultural stuff" traits¹⁴⁰ differed and caused difficulties of assimilation. Al-Azd, by virtue of political-economic status, technically could locate themselves on the inside of the social boundary defined as the "Arab community," but they lacked the cultural markers of other members of this community. When tensions flared, al-Azd's rivals could thus capitalize on cultural difference to exclude al-Azd.

Barth and Weber also offer theoretically grounded explanations for why the poets' lampoons ultimately did not succeed: al-Azd eventually integrated into the Arab family tree, leaving the anti-Azd poetry in the margins of later historical sources. The theories of ethnogenesis stress that social groups form primarily because of economic/political/social realities, and not as a matter of cultural affinity. Basra's al-Azd were at the core of the caliphate's military elite, so that once the Muhallabid factionalism subsided, especially in the early 'Abbāsid period when almost all factional fighting ended in Iraq, all of Iraq's military elite groups enjoyed high social status and wealth. Al-Azd found themselves firmly inside the social boundary of the early 'Abbāsid military elite, which by this time also meant "Arab elite." The reality of al-Azd's influence in Basra demanded that the new system embrace them. To this end, the al-Azd did at least share the common heritage with the other "Arab" elite groups of being

139 For discussion of these conflicts, see Ulrich 2019, 139–52, 180–87.

140 Barth 1969 coined the term "cultural stuff" to refer to attributes such as language, dress, history, food, and other visible attributes of an ethnic identity, which he considered secondary to political and economic boundaries in the formation of ethnic groups.

part of the original Emigrant expansion, and since al-Azd's members were also allotted *ʿaṭā* payments of the caliphal system,¹⁴¹ they had evident commonalities with the rest of the "Arab" elite. Theories of ethnogenesis urge us to take such material considerations seriously, and political/economic factors seem to have been aligned such that the al-Azd could be assimilated once the frictions of factional infighting had been resolved. In the 'Abbāsīd peace, the old cultural differences which had fueled the anti-Azd lampoons and distanced the al-Azd from Arab identity could then fade away as mere "cultural stuff," and members of Basra's al-Azd would be welcomed into the Arab fold. Al-Azd's Arabness was approved in the 'Abbāsīd period, their genealogy cemented, the migration story widely narrated, and al-Azd never again had to endure the slings and arrows of al-Farazdaq and Ziyād's slander.

6 Conclusions

The question of elite responses to the rise of Islam indicates that radical changes to the nature of society neither occurred during Muhammad's lifetime nor the militarized settlement of the first Emigrants, but rather two generations later in the context of the maturing and centralizing caliphate. Poetry indicates that Islam clearly factored into the consciousness of Emigrant-era Arabians, and the first Emigrants mobilized their faith into wars, raids, and resettlement, but the significance of these changes took time to crystallize into a real cultural transformation. Poetry supports the suspicions of modern historians that Islamic practices only became clear and sufficiently widely accepted to serve as an unambiguous marker of social boundaries in the Marwānīd era when the development of the centralizing caliphate allowed for the early articulations of Islam as the property of one social group. It is most intriguing that this timing aligns exactly with the emergence of the name "Arab" in poetry to delineate elite social boundaries in the Marwānīd caliphate. The Emigrants' generation did not produce poems in which "Arab" connotes their sense of self-identity, and likewise, their poets' relationship with Islam does not serve as a rhetorical device for social inclusion or exclusion.

The Marwānīd-era elites thus became "Muslim" and "Arab" simultaneously, so the knotty issue of how "Muslim identity" can be separated from "Arab identity" cannot easily be untied. The case of the Omani al-Azd

141 *ʿAṭā* refers to stipends paid by the government to the military elite groups in the *amṣār* in recognition of their contribution to the early expansions and as compensation for calls to fight new campaigns.

brings into high relief that the hegemonic form of Arabness looked back to Bedouin culture as the signature of Arab identity. However, the various groups aspiring to be Arabs did not all have a Bedouin past, but rather they shared membership in the first Emigrant communities. As often occurs in many social groups, a contradiction emerges: members of the caliphate's elite had a shared communal history as settlers in the *amṣār* (going back two or three generations), but when the Marwānid elites began expressly calling themselves Arabs, they looked to an older sense of the past to ground that identity. Other groups subsequently scrambled to produce genealogies, poetry, and migration stories to get on board. By contrast, the problems of al-Akhṭal's Christians reveal another side to Marwānid-era elite identity: as it became increasingly important to be Muslim, al-Akhṭal's Christian Taghlib kin, despite their Bedouin origins, found their path complicated by their different faith, opening them to lampoons from Jarīr about their nonparticipation in the Hajj.

The elite response to the caliphate therefore centers on a dual consolidation of faith and ethnos, which created both Arabness and Islam in a new codified form. The processes changed social identities and defined the faith in ways that the first Emigrants would not have been able to articulate. In the early period, Christians and Omani sailors could join the Emigrant armies, while Arabian poets would summon Allāh's name in general terms as the venture of Islam began on broad foundations. After two generations, however, elite society in the *amṣār* understood their identity in terms of an Arab ethnos that looked to a new demographically-cohesive conception of *Jazīrat al-'Arab*, imagined as the homeland of an ancient unified people. These members of elite society developed a clear sense of normative Muslim culture that was distinct enough to demarcate social boundaries in the otherwise cosmopolitan caliphate. The responses to the organization of the caliphate in terms of ethnogenesis and religious codification opened new doors for Muslim-era populations to conceptualize community around faith and ritual in new, starker ways, and the role of Arabness in Islam and in Middle Eastern culture embraced novel features that loomed significantly in the complex negotiation of identity for an ever-growing percentage of the region's population ever since.

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