The Historian of Islam at Work

Essays in Honor of Hugh N. Kennedy

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Bedouin, Bandits, and Caliphal Disappearance: A Reappraisal of the Qarāmiṭa and Their Success in Arabia

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The Qarāmiṭa are a group best-known today for the extent to which their memory is maligned.* Originating from a nebulous network of grassroots uprisings in third/ninth-century Iraq, a Qarāmiṭa-ruled state emerged in fourth/tenth-century eastern Arabia, and their expansionist ambitions and violent tactics soon made enemies everywhere—from Egypt and Syria to Iraq and Yemen. Leaving little written history of their own, their memory was predominantly carried by their many foes who uniformly reviled them; sectarianism also entered the rhetoric as the Qarāmiṭa's pseudo-Ismaʿili creed was denounced as heretical by Shiʿi and Sunnis alike, and hence a pall of deviation and sacrilege infuses most premodern discussions of Qarāmiṭa history.

The biases of the premodern anti-Qarāmiṭa sources rationalize the movement's success as an upshot of caliphal weakness, the gullibility of the peasant and Bedouin rabble who joined the Qarāmiṭa, and a mixture of cunning manipulation and terrifying violence employed by Qarāmiṭa leaders.[1] Yet this obscures recognition that the Qarāmiṭa created a viable state that, at its height, had the military capacity to threaten Damascus, Cairo, Mecca and the Iraqi countryside simultaneously. And their achievement was durable: among the fourth/tenth-century regional state-building efforts across the Middle East following the weakening of the central caliphate, the Qarāmiṭa's rule in eastern Arabia was one of the more stable and long-lasting.

Modern-era scholarship has revisited the movement, but with mixed results for elucidating the practical and political aspects of the Qarāmiṭa state. For example, considerable Arabic writing in the 1970s and 1980s pursued an

* This chapter's genesis began as a paper I gave at the International Medieval Congress, Leeds, July 4, 2016. I would like to begin by thanking Ann Christys for inviting my presentation, and Matthew Gordon and Harry Munt for sharing material in ensuing discussions.

1 Detailed sources include the various references in al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*; and the continuous narrative summary in al-Maqrīzī, *Ittiʿāẓ* i, 173–238; see also sources collected in Zakkār, *al-Jāmiʿ*. The prevailing premodern literary "othering" of the Qarāmiṭa is analyzed in El-Cheikh, *Women* 66–75.

intriguing new spin that described the Qarāmiṭa as pioneers for equality (*musāwāt*) and justice (*ʿadāla*), opposing the greed and iniquity of the Abbasid caliphs and Turkic warlords of the fourth/tenth century.[2] This, however, was a rather transparent exercise to posit the Qarāmiṭa as "Islam's first socialists,"[3] putative forerunners of 1970s' socialist Arab governments, hence these works ultimately tell us more about the intellectual architecture of twentieth-century Arab socialism than the realities of the fourth/tenth-century Qarāmiṭa. Such interpretations were aptly critiqued by Suhayl Zakkār as "anachronizing" (*ʿaṣarnat ḥarakat al-Qarāmiṭā*),[4] and Zakkār's approach focused on sectarianism, suggesting that the Qarāmiṭa identity and their spread related to their particular creed. Zakkār echoed the scholarly trend led by Wilfred Madelung, Farhad Daftary, and Heinz Halm, whose rigorous scrutiny of Qarāmiṭa doctrines helpfully unpacked old biases and generalizations of Sunni heresiography.[5] Yet this scholarship skews the interpretation of Qarāmiṭa politics toward a confessional bent, prompting the conceptualization of the Qarāmiṭa as a theological venture where different groups developed different creeds as the basis of their core mobilization and differentiation from each other and the surrounding Sunni and Shiʿi states. Such notions perpetuate the problematic paradigm that presumes the primacy of faith driving Middle Eastern sociopolitical formation, and there is accordingly a need to "materialize" the Qarāmiṭa, to conceptualize them beyond theocracy and explore other factors that contributed to their specific success in Arabia.

Hugh Kennedy, when he was my PhD supervisor, prompted my interest in the Qarāmiṭa as a means to address practical questions about how fourth/tenth-century Iraqi Hajj pilgrims interacted with Arabia given the threat of Qarāmiṭa raids, and how fear of the Qarāmiṭa influenced Iraqi litterateurs' conceptualizations of Arabia. Since Hugh also first advocated the interpretation of Qarāmiṭa attacks as economically minded efforts to expand revenue sources,[6] for Hugh's *Festschrift*, I pursue the practical considerations of the Qarāmiṭa regime, questioning why their state building was particularly successful in Arabia. For answers, it is valuable to switch our gaze from the intricacies of doctrine and focus upon the interests and social contexts of the Qarāmiṭa's largest

2 Ghālib, *al-Qarāmiṭa* 7–8.

3 The thesis of al-Walī, *al-Qarāmiṭa*.

4 Zakkār, *al-Jāmiʿ* 5. Blois, Abu Saʿidis 19 makes the same critique.

5 Madelung, Das Imamat 48–52, 113–114; Madelung, Fatimiden und Bahrain; Halm, Die Söhne Zikrawaihs; Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 122–124. Blois (Abu Saʿidis) takes a similar approach, epitomizing the state's history (14–15) and focusing on theology (15–19).

6 Kennedy, Desert 24–25.

Arabian constituency: the Bedouin of central and eastern Arabia. Adopting a third/ninth-century Arabian perspective opens new insights into the movement's success.

1 Arabia and Qarāmiṭa States

Qarāmiṭa rule in eastern Arabia (then called al-Baḥrayn) began with Abū Saʿīd al-Jannābī's emergence in al-Qaṭīf from 276/889–890, his establishment of a capital in al-Aḥsāʾ, and his reduction of the regional seat of caliphal authority in Hajar in 289/902. Al-Jannābī's precise relationship with contemporary Qarāmiṭa groups in southern Iraq was fluid and sometimes tendentious, and by the time of his assassination in 301/913–914, his state was operating independently of most other Qarāmiṭa, but it was secure and had a stable succession plan: al-Jannābī's eldest son, Abū l-Qāsim Saʿīd, assumed power and for a decade maintained quite cordial relations with the Abbasid caliphs.

Concurrently, another group, led by Zakarawayh b. Mihrawayh, emerged in the northern Arabian desert near Kufa and spread revolts among Bedouin in Syria and also Najd, approaching the territory of al-Jannābī. Zakarawayh's actions were belligerent—between 293–294/906–907 he despoiled Iraqi Hajj pilgrim caravans and ruthlessly attacked settlements in Syria and Iraq. Zakarawayh was killed in 294/907, but violence returned to Najd in 311/923 when a younger son of al-Jannābī, Abū Ṭāhir Sulaymān, became ruler of the eastern Arabian Qarāmiṭa: he savaged pilgrim caravans and advanced across Arabia, sacking Mecca in 317/930 and removing the Black Stone to al-Aḥsāʾ. A large payment induced Abū Ṭāhir's brothers to return the Black Stone in 339/951, and while Qarāmiṭa aggression thereafter abated, it did not cease: in 373/983 they attacked Basra, and they occupied Kufa in 375/985. From that point onward, however, the Qarāmiṭa began a territorial decline, yet maintained control in eastern Arabia, administering al-Baḥrayn with relative stability until the late fifth/eleventh century.[7]

Looking beyond the sensationalism of murdering pilgrims and sacking Mecca, al-Jannābī's successors maintained a stable state for two centuries, and local populations were of crucial importance: the Bedouins of al-Baḥrayn and Najd were willing and fairly reliable allies from ca. 290–360/902–970. Scholars have expressed varied explanations of the Qarāmiṭa's Arabian popularity, including the following:

7 The fifth/eleventh century state in al-Baḥrayn is described in detail in the celebrated travelogue of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who visited in 443/1051.

(a) Bedouin always craved freedom, and Qarāmiṭa egalitarianism provided for this need;[8]
(b) Bedouin were Arab partisans and opposed the Turco-Persian direction of the Iraqi Abbasid Caliphate;[9]
(c) Bedouin were illiterate marauders with a proclivity to fall for false messiahs and prophets;[10] or
(d) Bedouin were opportunistic raiders who joined the Qarāmiṭa to win a share of the booty.[11]

The difficulty with such views is that they lack specificity: they reduce Bedouins to a "presence" that responds with a limited, stereotypical repertoire of options to follow and fight. Since the nature of the Qarāmiṭa regime was not a recurring feature of Arabian politics, and since the Bedouin violence of the late third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries reached unprecedented levels of severity and scope, the specificities of the Qarāmiṭa-era revolts indicate something more significant at play. The Qarāmiṭa's Arabian state formation must have stemmed from unique drivers specific to their particular context.

Fourth/tenth-century Arabia was indeed a region in crisis: there was widespread insecurity, settlements were abandoned, Medina received defensive walls in the late third/ninth century,[12] and few outsiders ventured into Arabia, such that the region largely falls out of Arabic written history. The chaos resonates well with impressions of Qarāmiṭa violence, but it cannot simply be the case that the Qarāmiṭa availed themselves of the vacuum that was lawless Arabia to establish their state, since their rise and alliances with Bedouin occurred prior to Arabia's eclipse. Furthermore, Arabia is a diverse region, and it was the population in Najd who supported Zakarawayh and crucially enabled al-Jannābī's successors to expand outward onto the pilgrim routes and threaten Iraqi interests. Via a longer view of history, we apprehend that the mid-third/ninth century was a particularly remarkable moment for Najd, during which considerable transitions occurred right upon the eve of al-Jannābī and Zakarawayh's arrivals.

8 Ghālib, *al-Qarāmiṭa* 7–8.
9 Al-Rāshid, *Pilgrim Road* 83.
10 Blachère and Pellat, al-Mutanabbī, *EI*[2].
11 Kennedy, *Prophet*, 286–287; Landau-Tessaron, Arabia 446.
12 Munt, Construction 238.

2 Najd and Its Political Economy in Early Islam (to 132/750)

Arabic chronicles offer scant indicators to reconstruct the historical situation of Najd in the mid-third/ninth century, since the chronicles say little about central and eastern Arabia over the two centuries following the wars of apostasy (*al-ridda*) during the caliphate of Abū Bakr (11–12/632–633). Narratives about the nascent Muslim state's campaigns against secessionist tribes in Najd and into eastern Arabia (al-Baḥrayn and al-Yamāma) project an image that the early caliphate needed to pacify the region in the immediate aftermath of the Prophet's death, but after the initial hiccup, central Arabia was controlled. To paraphrase Hayden White, the chroniclers' subsequent silence induces readers to assume "nothing happened"[13] thereafter: Bedouin life continued without anything of wide significance transpiring.

The "pacific Najd" image is challenged, however, by scrutinizing sources beyond the chronicles. There are attestations in literary accounts of *luṣūṣ* and *ṣaʿālīk* bandits,[14] and even apparent attacks on pilgrim caravans by an obscure outlaw, Mālik b. al-Riyab.[15] This might be explainable as low-level violence and criminal opportunism that persists in any physically challenging region, such as the desert of Najd, remote from large centers of population, but the early Islamic state *was* involved in power consolidation, yet via official efforts that largely escaped the attention of chroniclers. Though long predating the Qarāmiṭa, aspects of this early stage of caliphal inroads into Najd society reveal an instructive foil to the early Abbasid-era context, which then brings us to the Qarāmiṭa.

Central to early caliphal statecraft in Najd was the creation of government-controlled pasturing preserves (*ḥimā*, pl. *aḥmāʾ*), which spread from the edges of the Ḥijāz into the best grazing grounds of Najd around Ḍariyya during the reigns of the first caliphs.[16] The preserves were intended to provide sufficient grazing for the state's large stocks of horses and camels used in the initial conquests, and afterward, the preserves enabled the state and elite functionaries to maintain the animal wealth raised in taxes. From the local Najdī perspective, the ramifications of this pasture appropriation by the state, as a matter of practical reality and as revealed anecdotally, seem impactful.

The desert upland of Najd offers relatively limited lush pasturelands, and given the nexus of camel ownership and social status among the Bedouin,

13 White, *Content of the form* 11.

14 See a compilation of bandit details in ʿAṭwān, *al-Shuʿarāʾ al-ṣaʿālīk* 171–208.

15 Al-Iṣfahānī *al-Aghānī* ixx, 163.

16 A helpful list of the main *aḥmāʾ* is compiled by al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ* iv, 72–101.

there would be natural competition over access to reliable pasture. The declaration of a *ḥimā* to monopolize good land accordingly was a strong assertion of authority: the *ḥimā* creator prevents rivals from using the land and compels them to acquiesce, fight, or migrate away. Arabic literary accounts of pre-Islam suggest that certain strongmen declared proprietary *aḥmā'* for their herds,[17] and the Prophet is remembered as declaring a *ḥimā* over Naqīʿ and perhaps al-Rabadha, too,[18] indicating express continuation of this local form of sovereignty assertion. The early caliphate's claim to pasture rights was thus an assertion of sovereignty in a way the locals would understand, and it had further social consequences. From Najdī perspectives, the caliphate manifested as an acquisitive organism: it demanded taxes and it appropriated some of the best lands, and when evaluating Najdī-caliphal relations in this period, a core issue is to investigate what the caliphate gave the Najdīs in return. State exploitation of subject areas is a staple feature in the history of governance, but this usually operates within a locally defined norm of reciprocity that is sufficient to appease the locals and prevent their resentment turning into violence.[19] As a consequence, howsoever sympathetic Bedouin groups may have been to Islam, the nascent caliphate's expanding *aḥmā'* would restrict the locals' grazing opportunities, and could be expected to have stirred tensions and prompted some form of negotiation that would shape the dynamic of Najdī-caliphal relations.

The early caliphs do appear sensitive to the possibility of Najdī discontent and revolt, as statements ascribed to ʿUmar (r. 13–23/634–644) reveal willingness to admit some nonstate herds into the *ḥimā*, lest large herd owners set their animals loose in agricultural estates, and lest smaller-scale Bedouin raise angry petitions to the caliph.[20] An Umayyad-era anecdote suggests that when *ḥimā* vegetation was sufficiently lush, a public decree would announce access for private herders,[21] but while some *ḥimā* expansion, such as ʿUthmān's (r. 24–35/645–656) absorption of new wells into the *ḥimā* of Ḍariyya, was achieved by purchasing rights from the Ḍabīna tribe,[22] other indications suggest that some administrators more jealously guarded the preserves at the expense of locals,

17 The most celebrated pre-Islamic *ḥimā* declarer is Kulayb b. Rabīʿa, a leader of the Wā'il and associated with assertions of sovereignty, see Ibn Nubāta, *Sarḥ* 92–93.

18 al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 72, 78.

19 Much research on state appropriation and reciprocity is conducted in the context of early modern and colonial societies; Scott, *Moral economy* 180–192 sets out the theories, and their lessons seem sufficiently fundamental to help us consider premodern cases, too.

20 Wakīʿ *al-Ṭarīq*, 346; al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 78–79.

21 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 76–77.

22 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 87.

converted water resources surrounding the reserves into agricultural estates for themselves, or created new personal *aḥmā'* without caliphal permission.[23] Complaints against greedy administrators feature in early Muslim-era Arabian poetry, such as the verse of Kaʿb b. Maʿdān of the Ashqar:

> One does one's best to keep one's own,
> But the administrators are wolves on your land.[24]

It also appears that some *ḥimā* essentially became their administrators' private fiefs, handed down from one generation to the next.[25] Caliph al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik's (r. 88–98/705–715) maternal uncle, Ibn Khulayd al-ʿAbsī, reportedly made constructions for his own use in the territory of the Ghanī around the *ḥimā* of Ḍariyya; evidently to the considerable chagrin of the Ghanī, as they are said to have destroyed his installations when the Abbasids replaced Umayyad rule.[26] Elite Ḥijāzī families' control over Najdī territory reveals another aspect of land appropriation from local hands.

For the early caliphate, maintenance of the *aḥmā'* was evidently important enough to merit continuous official involvement. The benefits for the caliphate are clear: the *aḥmā'* provided means to preserve state wealth as represented in the large herds raised from taxation, which would need concentrated pasture, and the *aḥmā'* enabled some physical presence in the otherwise underadministered Najd, where the caliphate's government (*sulṭān*) did not establish major centers. Accordingly, most *aḥmā'* remained officially administered throughout the Umayyad period via the governor of Medina who appointed a deputy (*ʿāmil* pl. *ʿummāl*) to maintain them.[27] Even if elite Ḥijāzī families such as the Zubayrids and the descendants of ʿUthmān were entitled to run particular *aḥmā'*, the formal relationship with gubernatorial power was officially upheld. Alongside the deputies, the government also adopted a pragmatic approach vis-à-vis the locals: while Najdīs technically lost control over *ḥimā* land, some were nonetheless incorporated by appointment as "rangers" (*ḥuwwāṭ*) to maintain security, and local tribal leaders were promoted to head the ranger groups.[28] Co-opted clans thus could continue to use the pasture pre-

23 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 78, 84, 87–88.
24 Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān* iii, 358.
25 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 76, 84.
26 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 94.
27 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 94.
28 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 87, 94.

serves, but references to local intrusion into the *aḥmā'*[29] and the engagement of the *ḥuwwāṭ* in skirmishes against would-be intruders reveals that not all groups were equally incorporated.[30] It also appears that complications over pasture access could have serious repercussions, including violence, petitions to the government for justice, and migration of groups who lost control of land.[31]

Beyond the *aḥmā'*, the Umayyads did not take significant further measures to integrate Najd into their realm. In contrast to the Umayyads' extensive contemporaneous development of the Ḥijāz,[32] and their attention to maintaining communication between their Syrian holdings and their homelands near Mecca via the northern Ḥijāz and Wādī Sirḥān, no material efforts were expended to develop communication or waystations in Najd along the routes towards Iraq.[33]

In terms of the negotiated balance between caliphal interests and Najdī locals, a "norm of reciprocity"[34] may have been expressed in part by curbs on the caliphate's exploitative intervention: the Umayyads did not sequester all good Najdī pasture—reportedly, pasture around Fayd was granted to the Ṭayyi' outright, presumably as a means to appease them.[35] Land appropriations in central Najd were significant, however, and the early caliphal system was overall prejudicial to the Najdīs. Locals lost some of their best pasturelands to the *sulṭān* while receiving very little infrastructure or integration into the government in return. Scattered *ʿummāl* maintained a limited administrative presence, but most government was run in faraway Medina, and thus the Najdīs were largely left to their own devices to resolve quotidian issues, and low-level conflicts could continue to smoulder unless one of the parties actively sought to involve the *sulṭān*.

The system logically engendered latent instability: good land was appropriated, while the government was otherwise largely absent. References to outlawry in Umayyad-era Najd thus could be read as acts of resistance to the appropriating and nondistributing government,[36] and there are helpful the-

29 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 76.
30 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 87–88.
31 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 87–88, 92.
32 See Munt, Trends; and Munt, Caliphs.
33 Al-Rāshid, *Darb Zubayda* 37–44 discusses the Umayyad work building up the Hajj infrastructure, however, closer analysis of the sources suggest that their attention was actually light, and in Najd, particularly scant, see Webb, Power.
34 A term borrowed from Scott, *Moral economy* 167–176.
35 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 102.
36 One thinks, though necessarily loosely, of the Hobsbawmian-style "social bandits" whose banditry results from a changing status quo attendant upon the rise of the caliphate

oretical parallels with the "social bandit" figure most thoroughly theorized by Hobsbawm. He posits that social bandits emerge in conditions where the status quo is disrupted in ways that cause new hardships on the locals, and where central power has relatively weak control.[37] The early caliphate in Najd can indeed be read as a change to the status quo and transformations of structures of power and norms of legitimacy, and the incidents of small-scale banditry in Najd—where central authority was weak—without triggering full-scale revolts suit Hobsbawm's conceptions rather well.[38] If the Umayyad-era outlaws were indeed taking a measure of self-help against the state, there were scarce tangible assets against which they could direct their violence since the state did not create much infrastructure. It seems that intertribal relations were the most operative local politics, while the latent instability caused by intergroup jockeying over reduced pasturing opportunity was diffused by local stakeholders allied to the *sulṭān* as *ḥuwwāt*/rangers. Accordingly, the anecdote of al-Qāsim b. Jundab, a leader of the Fazāra who reportedly neither concerned himself with the Hajj, visited settlements, nor traveled beyond his own lands, seems a reasonable representative of much Najdī experience under the Umayyads.[39]

3 Early Abbasid Najd: the "Darb Zubayda"

Whether or not the Umayyad system would have been sustainable over a longer term became moot since the geopolitical shift engendered by the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate in Iraq engendered immediate transformations in Najd's significance in the eyes of officialdom—an important new significance that has eluded comment in modern studies. In order for Iraqis to travel to Mecca

(Hobsbawm sets out conditions for social banditry and the weakness of central power in *Bandits* 9–17). Substantiating this particular angle of banditry as protest, however, needs careful consideration, especially given the limitations of Hobsbawm's theory in practice.

37 Hobsbawm, *Bandits* 9–17, 24–26.

38 Note that Hobsbawm expressly excluded Bedouin from his analysis (*Bandits* 20), though the rationale for this is hasty, and it appears Hobsbawm was not sufficiently familiar with Arabic material to identify the parallels. He was, moreover, particularly keen to focus his analysis on peasant societies to posit social banditry as resistance to capitalism. The Umayyad-era Najd is accordingly far from Hobsbawm's world, and while his theories have been as widely critiqued as they have been admired, some of his lessons do appear to help aspects of understanding Arabian banditry and should be further tested. We return to Hobsbawm in the final section of this chapter.

39 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 91.

and Medina, they had to journey across the length and breadth of Najd, and because the early Abbasids were particularly keen patrons of the Hajj as a kind of procession to demonstrate their legitimacy, it became paramount for them to maintain communication pathways through Najd and ensure peaceable relations with Najdī tribes.[40] The practical manifestation of Najd's theoretical importance took the form of official attention right from the outset of the Abbasid era. The caliphs sponsored unprecedented investment in Najdī infrastructure, building roads, way stations, storehouses, wells, water channels, and cisterns to facilitate pilgrim traffic. Although known today as "Zubayda's Way" (*Darb Zubayda*), after Zubayda bt. Jaʿfar, wife of Caliph al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/813–833) and patron of many infrastructural works, much of the intensive construction was undertaken before Zubayda: it began with the first Abbasid, al-Saffāḥ (r. 132–136/750–754),[41] considerable work was ordered by al-Manṣūr (r. 36–58/754–775), and al-Mahdī (r. 158–169/775–785) was especially active.[42] The cumulative effect was that within 40 years of the Abbasid takeover, the 800-mile track from Iraq to the Ḥijāz was furnished with over 50 waystations, 1,200 wells, and some 90 reservoirs/cisterns (*birka/ḥawḍ*) for storing rain and groundwater, also complemented by extensive canal networks channeling water to convenient points for pilgrim travelers.[43] The work required continual maintenance, too, as wells can run dry without upkeep: even Mecca's Zamzam had shortages in the Hajj of 190/806, prompting Zubayda to sponsor full-scale redigging.[44]

While the infrastructure naturally eased Iraqi urbanists' transit *through* Najd, the continuous work also had an impact *on* Najd itself, which had a momentous local effect that scholarship has yet to fully explore. The food stores, markets, and access to water that the pilgrims could avail themselves of once a year were available *year-round* to the locals, providing unprecedented food and water security. Also, the tremendous manpower needed to under-

40 The prospects of the active need to foster security in Najd perhaps bear connection to events in eastern Arabia at the outset of the Abbasid period: in 151/768 (or 152/769) the locals of Yamāma killed the governor of Caliph al-Manṣūr, and further insurrections continued during al-Mahdī's reign. After considerable effort, al-Mahdī successfully defeated the rebels, and it can be appreciated that officialdom did not relish the prospects of constant security actions to maintain the Hajj roads.

41 He ordered the construction of new milestones and fire signals, as well as the construction of rest houses/forts (*qusūr*) for pilgrims (al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* vii, 465).

42 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* viii, 136.

43 Textual and archaeological evidence for the works are detailed in al-Rāshid, *Pilgrim road*, and significantly updated in al-Rāshid, *Darb Zubayda*.

44 Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh* ii, 428–429.

take the 50-year infrastructure projects involved locally raised labor,[45] offering equally unprecedented work opportunities and further food security for Najdīs. Further roads, including an official postal route (*barīd*), were constructed to cross Najd, equipped with officials, entailing a much denser presence of the *sulṭān* in the region as well. In sum, the Abbasid attention to Hajj road building both provided for the Najdīs and integrated them into regularized interaction with the government.

Al-Mahdī is also associated with the end of the *aḥmā'* system: al-Samhūdī (d. 911/1506) observes that during al-Mahdī's caliphate the *aḥmā'* were "let open" (*ubīḥat*),[46] and the evidence of family control over *aḥmā'* also seems to cease contemporaneously (i.e., in the third quarter of the second/eighth century).[47] The coincidence of the abandonment of *aḥmā'* and the undertaking of intensive infrastructure projects suggests changes in official interaction with Najd and a shift from the largely one-sided system of the Umayyads to reciprocal arrangements with manifest benefits for the locals. As a practical matter, the Abbasid concessions can be seen as easy for the state to make: the Abbasids had little need for Arabian animal wealth; their vast incomes from Iraqi agriculture relegated the *aḥmā'* to comparative fiscal insignificance, and they could accordingly be relinquished, especially given the benefits in doing so. The abandonment must have had the positive effect of appeasing Najdīs by returning the best pastures to free grazing,[48] and since nomadic groups were already well-stocked via the expanding new markets and storehouses, and well-watered given the massive expansion of wells and reservoirs, the return of *ḥimā* pastureland would have been a further boon. We can appreciate that numerous Najdī groups were sufficiently employed and supplied thanks to the Darb Zubayda so as to obviate the urgency of competition over pasture, and hence on a wide scale, Najdīs reaped the benefits of a surplus, opening the scope for an unprecedently felicitous chapter in Najdī-*sulṭān* interactions in the late

45 Some arduous infrastructural work, such as paving parts of the desert track and the manual carrying of water was performed by slaves owned by the Abbasid caliphal families (e.g., Wakīʿ, *al-Ṭarīq* 59; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* viii, 539), but these appear to be exceptions to the wider-scale levy of locals variously attested in the sources; see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* viii, 539; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh* ii, 448.

46 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 83.

47 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 83, 89.

48 Bedouin pride in grazing at Ḍariyya is articulated in an anecdote of an exchange between a Bedouin and al-Mufaḍḍal b. Isḥāq, a relatively obscure philologist of the generation before al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 213 or 216/828 or 831), i.e., active in the early Abbasid period (al-Samhūdī, *Wafā'* iv, 99–101).

second/eighth century, perhaps ultimately intended by the caliphs to provide security across Najd without requiring large garrisons to police the long and exposed Hajj roads.

The greater sharing of resources between officialdom and Najdī locals, and the construction of pilgrim infrastructure alongside local camping sites are also discernible in geographical texts. For examples, at the way station of al-Nuqra the al-Fazāra occupied the surrounding steppe (*bādiya*) while "Quraysh and merchants" owned the town (*ḥāḍira*).[49] The Banū Muzayna and the Quraysh co-owned al-Rawḥāʾ;[50] the way station at Fayd was apparently under direct local control, as the town's rulers (*wulāt*) were said to be from the Banū Nabhān.[51] The indications reveal increased co-option of locals and balances of power established between local and caliphal/Qurayshi groups expressed through land usage.

Viewed from a Najdī perspective, the stark contrast between the Abbasid energies and the dearth of Umayyad-era activity need be stressed. The experience of previous generations of Najdīs accustomed to the distant and theoretical power of the *sulṭān* was rapidly overturned under the early Abbasids into a scene of regular, more cooperative, and certainly more beneficial contact. Also unlike the Umayyads, the first Abbasid caliphs performed multiple pilgrimages during their reigns with large entourages, and thus the period of 132–193/750–809—the rise of the Abbasids to the end of al-Rashīd's caliphate—witnessed an extraordinary physical presence of the *sulṭān* in Najd alongside unparalleled availability of food and water.[52] While Abbasid energies can be appreciated as positively effecting Najdī populations and abetting security, follow-up consequences also bear consideration, particularly two issues regarding expectations of justice and ramifications of charity.

Concerning justice, it is noted that the Abbasid caliphs projected their legitimacy in venerable Mesopotamian terms as water givers and justice dispensers,[53] and in the context of this chapter, the Abbasids explicitly intertwined the Hajj into that traditional ideal-leader legitimization. Early Abbasid-era poetry evidences the connection through a sobriquet of the Abbasid house as "The tribe of the water-giver for pilgrims" (*Banū Sāqī al-Ḥajīj*), a hearkening of the Abbasids' ancestor Abū Ṭālib's right to provide water to Hajj pilgrims

49 Wakīʿ, *al-Ṭarīq* 76.

50 Wakīʿ, *al-Ṭarīq* 201–203.

51 Wakīʿ, *al-Ṭarīq* 62.

52 For lists of pilgrimages led by the caliphs in person, see al-Maqrīzī, *al-Dhahab*; for an analysis of their political significance, see Webb, Power.

53 Discussed in Darling, *History*; and Sperl, Islamic kingship.

on the eve of Islam. A verse by Marwān b. Abī Ḥafṣa (d. 182/798–799) praising al-Mahdī exemplifies the rhetoric's employment to underscore the caliph's legitimacy and righteousness:

> A new Caliph from the tribe of the Water-giver for Pilgrims,
> Upon his face the light of truth shines witness.[54]

Putting the rhetoric into practice, the manifold wells that the caliphs ordered dug into Najd seem physical manifestations of the discourse, and to this point, it is noteworthy that those wells were known locally by the name of the patron,[55] emphasizing the nexus between the person of the ruler and dispensation of water, invoking the paradigm of just provision. For the Najdīs the permanent presence of wells bearing caliphal names was also augmented via access the locals could enjoy to the caliph's person during those multiple caliph-led pilgrimages. Access to the ruler afforded opportunities to seek justice, further embedding legitimate connection between ruler and ruled, as illustrated in an anecdote in al-Masʿūdī's *Murūj al-dhahab* of a petition and act of caliphal clemency.[56] Further references to caliphal charity for populations on the Hajj routes via public distributions and lavish gifting on procession[57] suggest that the repeated Hajj pilgrimages of Abbasid caliphs did involve the typical performative acts of just rulership, and the Darb Zubayda in its totality may be readable in this light as dually (a) a practical project for Iraqi pilgrim transit, and (b) a venture of symbolic value addressed both to the caliph's Iraqi subjects whose pilgrimages were fundamentally facilitated by caliphal patronage, and to the Najdī constituency who were integrated into the sphere of the rulers' justice via raising expectations of access to justice, including water supply.

Explicitly, too, the performance of the Hajj conjoined with charity is a trope of Abbasid-era praise poetry that constructs the image of the caliph as divinely aided succour for his subjects, such as the second/eighth-century poet and poetry narrator Dāwūd b. Razīn's praise of al-Rashīd:

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54 Marwān b. Abī Ḥafṣa, *Shiʿr* 37. See *Shiʿr* 54 for the phrase's use in praise of al-Rashīd. For further discussion of water provision as power legitimization, see Zadeh, Early Hajj 55–60.

55 Consider, for example, the repairs at Zamzam identified with Umm Jaʿfar, after Zubayda, see al-Fākihī, *Akhbār* iii, 155; along the Hajj routes, the naming of wells after caliph sponsors is widely evidenced in Wakīʿ, *al-Ṭarīq*.

56 Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj* iv, §§ 2,514–2,517.

57 For examples, see al-Yaʿqūbī *Tārīkh* ii, 407; al-Dīnawarī *Akhbār* 562; al-Ṭabarī *Tārīkh* viii, 243; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam* iii, 207; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Dhahab* § 96.

Light shines in every land with Hārūn,
The straight path is his just method.
He is an Imam: his work directed to God,
His concerns are for Jihad and Hajj.
Men's eyes are blinded by his light
When graced by his serene appearance.
In God's protection, Hārūn the Generous
Gives the hopeful more than they ever hoped.[58]

Contemporary poetry reveals that the gift-giver image spread also to the high echelons of elite around the caliph, for example a woman from the Banū Kilāb praised the Barmakid vizier and governor Jaʿfar b. Yaḥyā (d. 187/803):

I went past al-ʿAqīq, and its people
Were complaining that their spring had no rain.
But a rain-less spring is really no worry,
If Jaʿfar is giving gifts![59]

While the elaborate displays of charity as demonstration of legitimate leadership was a cornerstone of the performative aspects of caliphal rule and highest-level elite identity, ordinary pilgrims were also enjoined by Islam to make distributions when traveling on Hajj, and Nadji locals benefitted from these smaller-scale distributions, too. Anecdotally, such distributions are attested, for example, in a story about a poet contemporary with the caliphates of al-Mahdī and al-Rashīd, Abū l-ʿAtāhiya, who encountered a Bedouin on the road to Mecca:

We saw a Bedouin in the shade of a milestone with a short woollen cloak which either covered his head and left his feet sticking out, or covered his feet and left his head bare.

Abū l-ʿAtāhiya asked him: "Why did you chose to live in this barren wasteland instead of good fertile land?"

The Bedouin responded: "Well, if God had not made some of his creation content to live in rough land, then the good land would become too crowded!"

"So how do you live?" Abū l-ʿAtāhiya asked.

58 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* viii, 243.
59 Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt* i, 330.

"From you Hajj pilgrims—you come by and we accept charity from you, and then you return and we accept more charity."

"But we only make the journey during one part of the year, how do you live the rest of the time?"

The Bedouin looked down, and then said: "By God, I don't know—I can only say [paraphrasing Quran 65:3] we are given sustenance from where we do not expect it, more than we make a living from where we expect it!"

Abū l-ʿAtāhiya turned and recited the following poem:

Oh seeker of worldly things!
Leave the world to your opponents.
Why do you bother with transient pleasure?
Isn't the shade of this milestone enough?[60]

Express association of Iraqi Hajj pilgrims with sustenance also materializes in Bedouin poetry composed about way markers and fire beacons that dotted the tracks through Najd. One poet contemplates the beacon at Umm Khurmān, where the Kufan and Basran Iraqi Hajj roads met:

Oh Umm Khurmān, raise up your flame
Do you see the men leading she-camels?
Your fire has long been extinguished,
Are you asleep, or do you need wood?[61]

A second poem, by a Bedouin from the Hudhayl, addressed the same beacon:

Oh Umm Khurmān, send up a flaming light
The porridge and flour have run out![62]

The verses indicate local reliance on trade from the Hajj caravans: the lighting of the fire tower emerges as a metaphor for the impending Hajj, the consequent influx of travelers, and hence the replenishment of cereals. In wishing for the beacon to be ignited, the poets allegorically express yearning for Iraqi pilgrim charity and eloquently demonstrate the integration of Iraqi and Arabian economies a millennium ago.

In 186/802, al-Rashīd performed the penultimate of his many pilgrimages, and on this occasion, in the presence of a great courtly entourage summoned

60 Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī* iv, 86.
61 Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān* i, 251.
62 Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān* i, 251.

to Mecca, he announced his succession plan, duly sanctified with inscriptions placed in Mecca and oaths sworn by his two successor sons in the Sanctum. Two years later, in 188/804, al-Rashīd led the Hajj again, reportedly covering the entire distance on foot;[63] and then, remarkably, after this climax of procession and piety, the denouement of the caliphal pilgrimage was abrupt. Never again would an Abbasid caliph perform the Hajj, and never again would a caliph make an in-person appearance along the Hajj roads. Najd, after benefitting from over 50 years of constant attention from the *sulṭān*, intensive building, and extensive food and water provision, fell from the caliphal gaze as the third/ninth century dawned. The long-term effects of the several-generations' worth of provision for Najdīs and their growing expectation of and, indeed, likely dependency on charity was met with near complete cessation of Darb Zubayda construction and maintenance. The stark contrast caused significant issues for generations of third/ninth-century Najdīs.

4 The Waning Darb Zubayda

Al-Rashīd's last pilgrimage did not instantly signal complete cessation of the Darb Zubayda, since pilgrimage by the general Iraqi populace continued, and al-Rashīd's wife Zubayda and Caliph al-Maʾmūn engaged in an intrafamily competition via sponsoring water-provision projects in Mecca in 211–212/826–827.[64] Zubayda also continued performing the Hajj after al-Rashīd's death, but sources do fall silent on infrastructural projects in Najd. Reasons for the stoppage naturally stem from the Fourth Fitna (193–211/809–827), the protracted and disastrous internecine struggle between al-Rashīd's cosuccessors, al-Amīn (r. 193–198/809–813) and al-Maʾmūn (r. 198–218/813–833), whose infighting resulted in the sack of Baghdad and devastation in the Iraqi countryside, with seriously deleterious consequences for Iraqi agriculture and economy, and which spread violence across the caliphate, including into Arabia. In 200/815 ʿAlid claimants rebelled against the Abbasids both in Mecca and in Zubāla, a station on the Hajj road in Najd; the ʿAlid aspirants mustered Bedouin auxiliaries, and almost simultaneously, a whole tribal group in Najd, the Banū Nabhān, rose in sympathetic revolt.[65] Al-Maʾmūn's forces defeated the threats in Najd and Mecca by 202/817; however, al-Maʾmūn remained in his eastern Iranian strong-

63 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Dhahab* § 95.
64 Al-Fākihī, *Akhbār* iii, 152–155.
65 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil* 541.

hold, only returning to Iraq in 204/819, and throughout the remainder of his reign, to 218/833, he never ventured into Arabia.

The end of al-Rashīd's caliphate and the reigns of al-Amīn and al-Maʾmūn, viewed from a Najdī perspective, translate into a 30-year absence of the caliph's presence. There had been no caliphal pilgrim processions with excessive charity, nor were more wells dug, or old wells expanded or vigilantly maintained. Given the symbolism of the caliphal patronage along the Darb Zubadya, this absence would have symbolic significance of seemingly abrupt abandonment. There were also practical ramifications. The water infrastructure of cisterns and canals was vulnerable to silt and sand and needed regular maintenance, yet there is no indication, amid the Fourth Fitna crisis, of substantial, or indeed any, work undertaken in Najd. From the perspective of the Bedouin rebels in Zubāla in 199/815, we behold a group who had witnessed more than a decade of relative neglect, which may have abetted local receptiveness to new claims of the local ʿAlid rebel to provide a more just rule for local interests.

Al-Maʾmūn's successor, al-Muʿtaṣim (r. 218–227/833–844) likewise is ascribed no works in Najd. This can be rationalized given that al-Muʿtaṣim's reign is famed for the construction of the new palace city in Samarra and the exponential growth of his slave armies purchased from the eastern borders of the caliphate. The extensive fiscal outlay to build a new private army and construct a new private palace city was incurred against the backdrop of declining Iraqi agricultural yields, hence there would be limited surplus for restoring infrastructure damaged during the Arabian unrest and the lengthy neglect after the Fourth Fitna. As for the Hajj, al-Muʿtaṣim's involvement was limited, too: he is said to have richly embellished a canopy over the Zamzam well in Mecca in 220/835, again performing the "ruler/water-giver" role,[66] but he made no plans to make the pilgrimage himself, and one anecdote suggests he planned for his slave army to make their Hajj around his new palace in Samarra instead.[67]

66 Al-Fākihī, *Akhbār* ii, 75–76.

67 The anecdote is only reported by the later geographer al-Muqaddasī (d. 378/988), *Aḥsān* 122–123; see discussion in Gordon, *Breaking* 65–66. While there are grounds for inferring an anti-Abbasid polemic in the account, it is not, on its face, part of an overt negative narrative. Al-Muʿtaṣim's efforts to enforce the strict loyalty of his personal guard are well-attested, and when read in light of the dearth of his Hajj infrastructural work, there may be more to al-Muqaddasī's anecdote than previously considered. Northedge, Qubbat 78–79 also considers al-Muqaddasī's story to have a factual background, and cogently evaluates it in light of extant archaeological evidence. While Northedge does not consider al-Muʿtaṣim's structure as an outright replacement of Mecca, I invite still broader analysis that interprets the project within the wider context of al-Muʿtaṣim's overall lack of attention to Hajj infrastructure and the rationale behind his expansive private army in Samarra.

By al-Wāthiq's caliphate (r. 227–232/842–847), therefore, Najd had experienced two diametrically opposed faces of the Abbasid Caliphate. The energy of the first 50 years was followed by 40 years of virtually no attention, and while the Hajj continued with the infrastructure of the early Abbasids coasting along, the lack of upkeep, in particular for water resources, would eventually lead to shortages, and this is precisely what transpired.

Unlike the previous three caliphs, al-Wāthiq's court did manifest interest in the Hajj: al-Wāthiq's brother Ja'far led the Hajj in 227/842 (the highest-ranking prince to do so for a generation), and his mother traveled that year, too (though she died en route),[68] and while al-Wāthiq declared intention to make the Hajj himself in 231/846, by this time, circumstances had made it impossible. Water resources were at a crisis level, and al-Ṭabarī reports that a draught of water during the pilgrimage in 228/843 rose to 40 *dirham* (perhaps a 600% increase since al-Rashīd's reign), and food was also scarce: a measure of bread reportedly rose to one *dirham*.[69] Iraqi pilgrims at least could return to the relative prosperity of their urban environments after that arduous Hajj, whereas the Najd's Bedouin, on the other hand, had no such escape. Their voice is not heard in Iraqi chronicles, but they were clearly the most disadvantaged constituency under the new state of affairs as the life-yielding infrastructure created in Najd during the previous generations began to crumble. The new realities of Abbasid Iraq, where wealth centralized in Samarra and less reached the Hajj roads, tempered the charitable relationship between the *sulṭān* and Bedouin, and ordinary Iraqi pilgrims were now both poorer and (given the food and water scarcities) more focused on their own survival before considering charity to Bedouin. Unfortunate coincidences of the calendar added to the misery, as Hajj in the late 220s/early 840s occurred in the summer, entailing that pilgrim caravans faced crossing Najd in the hottest conditions.

Perhaps the most jarring aspect of the "lean" years for Najd was their proximity to the "good" first 50 years of the Abbasids. While the Umayyad-era Najd had been left largely to its own devices, such conditions were no longer the expected status quo of lived experience for Najdīs of early Abbasid times. The 50-year period when the *sulṭān* provided work and food, and when the caliph provided water, would have been fresh in Bedouin communal memory: Umayyad times were a distant memory, if recalled at all, whereas all would be aware of the better days, and psychologically speaking, frustration at the new state of affairs is a natural outcome. Given the reported scarcity of water

68 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* ix, 123.
69 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* ix, 124.

and food, the symbolic disappearance of the caliph thus coincided with a slip in resource availability below subsistence levels; such combination of nutritional lack with moral indignation is noted in studies from other contexts as a situation with high potential to transform discontent into actual violence.[70] Demographically, the problems were quite probably exacerbated given that the extensive charity, security, water provision, and integration with government works over the three generations of the early Abbasids would have combined to provide for an increase of the Najdī population beyond the natural limits of the land. Consecutive generations of Najdīs with increased opportunities for pasturing herds, and with unprecedented food and water security, would have experienced reduced child morality and perhaps even extended life expectancy for the elderly. Thus, the hungry and morally indignant Najdīs would also have been more numerous than usual, and by the period of al-Wāthiq's reign, the first generation of Najdīs to have lived entirely outside of caliphal attention to the Darb Zubayda would have been of military age (i.e., in their 20s).

The overflow of the potential for tension is graphically evidenced. In 231/845 the Banū Sulaym, on the edges of the Ḥijāz near Medina rose in revolt, defeating and killing the commander of a force sent against them by the governor of Medina, and fanning a wave of violence into Najd, including revolts by the Hilāl, Fazāra, Ghaṭafān, Murra, and Numayr.[71] Within a year, al-Wāthiq's generals had defeated the restive tribal groups, but a vicious cycle had commenced. Bedouin raids on government storehouses and markets may have alleviated short-term privation, but they damaged the already teetering infrastructure and also frightened would-be pilgrims (i.e., future sources of charity), and thus the increasingly desperate Bedouin made the underlying problems increasingly severe. The effects were already evident in the 232/847 Hajj, as water shortages became even more acute: a draught of water reached several *dīnār*, and al-Ṭabarī reports that pilgrims died of thirst in the intense summer heat around al-Rabadha.[72]

Al-Wāthiq's response attests to our hypothesis that a root cause of the Bedouin violence was indeed the collapsing infrastructure system, since al-Wāthiq's efforts in the wake of violence, beyond dispatching soldiers, was to arrange major repairs in Najd. In 230/845 he appointed two superintendents, ʿUmar b. Faraj over the track from Kufa, and Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Abī Kham-

70 Noting that rebellion is in fact a rare expression of discontent, Scott (*Moral economy* 114–156) considers the tipping points in agrarian contexts. Notwithstanding the different contexts, there are fundamental parallels to Najd in the mid-third/ninth century.

71 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* ix, 129–133, 146–150.

72 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* ix, 150.

īsa for the Basran route, and in the next year, al-Wāthiq proposed to make the Hajj himself, but water was still insufficient and so more funds were allocated for the repair of some 20 wells, the replacement of milestones, and easing of the track.[73] In the wake of the sudden flare of widespread violence, the actions of the government reveal an understanding that infrastructural conditions needed remedy, but in 232/847 al-Wāthiq died, and the fate of Najd was left in the hands of his successor al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/847–861).

Unlike al-Wāthiq, al-Mutawakkil does not appear concerned to make the Hajj as a procession for his legitimate rulership, but al-Mutawakkil did continue infrastructure work in Najd, though on a reduced scale—most references concern the repair of wells, which, in light of the water shortages, represents the most urgent work, and those which connect to the paradigm of justice, too.[74] One set of work was near the way station of al-Maslāḫ, where water was reportedly of poor quality (*mā' ghalīẓ*), and repaired wells were apparently shared with the local Banū Sulaym;[75] given their revolt in the previous decade, it is suggestive that the *sulṭān* well understood that restive groups should be appeased with attention to infrastructure. However, al-Mutawakkil's reign had fiscal restraints of its own, and he committed lavish funds to expand palaces near Samarra, hence there were limits to the amounts allocable to Najd. After this period, the official approach to managing the pilgrimage shows signs of increasing reliance upon militarization, as the Hajj superintendent's strategy came to involve employment of the *Shākiriyya*, a constabulary of several hundred Turkic soldiers to accompany the Hajj caravan for security.[76] These were not a police force for Najd, but rather an ad hoc accompaniment for Hajj caravans. The caravans apparently needed such security, for example under ʿAbdallāh b. Sulaymān the *Shākiriyya* warded off Bedouin raids during the 251/865 Hajj.

5 The Darb Zubayda's Nadir: The Late Third/Ninth Century

The prospects for reviving the early Abbasid infrastructure in Najd took a decided downturn with the assassination of al-Mutawakkil and the rapid deterioration of caliphal authority in Iraq throughout the third quarter of the

73 Wakīʿ, *al-Ṭarīq* 286–287.
74 Wakīʿ, *al-Ṭarīq* 73, 95, 98.
75 Wakīʿ, *al-Ṭarīq* 90, 98.
76 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* ix, 293.

third/ninth century. In this period, references to repairs to the road are scant,[77] while mentions of superintendents of the Hajj roads and Najd become sporadic and less organized. Names of officials in the mid-third/ninth century are recorded, but with considerable flux, suggestive of instability. The superintendent in 259/873 was killed by Bedouin raiders. In 260/874 Muḥammad b. Abī l-Sāj was appointed in charge of repairs, pilgrim security, and as governor of Mecca, but by 270–271/884 the road had a new superintendent, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭā'ī, and then it appears the post was vacant until 293–294/906. While the appointment of superintendents indicates the technical allocation of funds for improvements in Najd, the superintendents are also recorded as embezzling them, and competition over the post heightened as it became an opportunity for private enrichment.[78] Not surprisingly, conditions on the road spiraled downward: al-Ṭabarī reports that the 257/871 Hajj caravan turned back at the Najdī way station al-Qarʿā on account of water shortage, though he adds that those pilgrims who did push on alone reached Mecca.[79]

Again, underlying the economic hardship, which evidently affected Najdī communities in this period, we encounter a group of 50 Bedouin from al-Thaʿlabiyya joining the *Shākiryya* for cash,[80] and for so long as there was money to pay, the *sulṭān* could co-opt some military-aged Bedouin men into applying their energies to guard pilgrims, but this represents a dangerous militarization of the desert, and in the later third/ninth century, the caliphate did not have the same military resources to spare as al-Wāthiq had enjoyed when quelling the unrest in 230–231/845–846. As a result, several ʿAlid rebels appeared in the Ḥijāz to claim Mecca, such as Ismāʿīl b. Yūsuf, who mustered a "conglomeration of Bedouin" (*lafīf min al-aʿrāb*)[81] and engaged in a protracted conflict against the authorities, even attacking pilgrims performing the Hajj in 251/865.[82] Records of Bedouin raids on caravans and outposts in Najd also increase. In 259/878 the Banū Asad attacked pilgrims near al-Mughītha and killed the Hajj road superintendent. In 268/882 various Bedouin groups attacked pilgrims returning from Hajj between Tūz and Samīra. In 285/898 the Ṭayyiʾ attacked the returning pilgrims at al-Ajfar.[83] And in 286/899 the Shaybān marauded Iraq itself, and when

77 See summaries in al-Rāshid, *Darb Zubayda* 54–55.
78 The corruption of Ibn Abī l-Sāj is detailed in al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* ix, 371–372.
79 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* ix, 501.
80 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* ix, 293.
81 Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh* ii, 498.
82 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* ix, 346–347; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil* 669, 719; a slightly different version in al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh* ii, 498–499.
83 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* x, 67.

pursued by a large force, they retreated into Arabia where the central authority could take no punitive measures.[84] The Ṭayyiʾ launched further attacks on pilgrims in 287/900, 292/906, and 293/907.[85] Economic aspects of the unrest surface during the caliphate of al-Muqtadir (r. 295–320/908–932), whose governor ʿAlī b. ʿĪsā arranged for the employment of 5,000 tribesmen of the Asad to serve as a regiment of Hajj guards for the 315/927 pilgrimage, indicating Najdī willingness to cease raiding in return for employment. The large number involved further reveals the extent to which the decades of unrest had militarized the Hajj route.

Sources give the sense that the late third/ninth-century Bedouin were essentially unchecked along the former Darb Zubayda as there were no permanent guards for the vital wells, reservoirs and way stations. The *Kitāb al-Ṭarīq*, a detailed account written at end of the third/ninth century about the Hajj roads offers remarkable testimony about the number of former amenities—way stations, storehouses, and fortifications—which it identified as in ruins (*kharāb*), and wells and cisterns it describes as ruined and dry.[86] While the text does note good availability of water and supplies in relation to six locations, including "new wells" alongside older early Abbasid-era constructions,[87] and while there is specific mention that "people had afterwards returned" to a fortification at Maʿdin al-Qurashī destroyed in the ʿAlid uprising of Aḥmad b. Ḥasan b. Jaʿfar in 273/886–87,[88] there is no reference to any works of patronage after al-Mutawakkil, and the available resources are four-fold less than references to ruins. The continuously maintained Darb Zubayda of the previous century was largely a memory, and Hajj pilgrims approached Mecca with trepidation, in columns bristling with arms, across a hostile and unfamiliar desert.

6 The Rise of the Qarāmiṭa: Theoretical Help

The rise, the sensational violence, and the rapid success of the Qarāmiṭa in Najd coincides precisely with the spike in raids ascribed to Najdī tribes in the 280s–290s AH. Though the Iraqi historiographical sources portray the violence as "raids" and "plunder," these incidents resemble the category of "small wars"

84 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* x, 71–72.

85 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* x, 74, 24, 137.

86 Wakīʿ, *al-Ṭarīq* 41–110 details the route through Najd to Medina, expressly noting 23 ruins of former constructions.

87 Wakīʿ, *al-Ṭarīq* 67, 70, 82, 87, 107, 108.

88 Wakīʿ, *al-Ṭarīq* 78.

developed in contemporary theoretical scholarship: seemingly marginal and spontaneous uprisings that have little place in grand historical narratives, but contemporary historians realize they intersect with much more serious issues in the process of the evolution of societies. In the Najdī case, the rise of the Qarāmiṭa, which permanently cut central Arabia from caliphal control, did catch the attention of Iraqi historians, but it seems facile to interpret the Qarāmiṭa as a sudden game-changing force. Rather, they can be read as a step up in the escalation of the previous generation, and this entails that understanding the Qarāmiṭa's rise requires a reappraisal of those many raids and uprisings as more than just disturbances to order and security (as their scattershot portrayal in Iraqi historical narratives makes them appear). They suggest a 30-year sequence of "small wars," which, upon the rise of the Qarāmiṭa, finally caught wider attention.

Most scholarship on these kinds of smouldering conflicts with seemingly random smatterings of violence has focused on conflict in agrarian societies in the early modern world, but the aims are similar to those of this chapter: we confront the problem of reconstructing the history of peoples who left scant written testimony of their own, yet whose acts of violence transcend mere crime, as they merit being revaluated as forms of resistance and revolt. A common theme in analyzing such events is the lack of participant testimony, leaving historians to "infer what the participants thought from what they did";[89] and consequently, recourse to theory becomes helpful.

In the specific case of Najdī violence, the Bedouin's voice is indeed difficult to perceive. Glimpses into Bedouin interactions on the Darb Zubayda via the poems and anecdotes noted above are all mediated through the literature of Iraqi narrators who were little concerned with writing accounts of Najdī social issues. Moreover, once Najd became more dangerous in the later third/ninth century, urbanite scholars lost almost all access to the region, effectively closing our access to local sentiment, and Iraqi source impressions of the Bedouin fall into facile archetypes of bandits and troublemakers.[90] We are therefore unlikely to find "smoking gun" evidence in Iraqi texts to prove the reasons for

89 Scott, *Moral economy* 144–145.

90 Some fourth/tenth-century scholars who attempted the Hajj did interact with Bedouin, and the experience of the lexicographer al-Azharī is instructive: he records his capture when attempting the Hajj and enslavement among the Hawāzin for several years. As a philologist, however, al-Azharī left us no record of Bedouin social history, but rather relished his enslavement for the opportunity it offered him to hear "pure" desert Arabic in practice, al-Azharī, *Tahdhīb* i, 21. His writings thus preserve much of Bedouin *speech* as a matter of linguistics, but, unfortunately for the purposes of this chapter, nothing of Bedouin *thought*.

the Najdīs' actual discontent, but the levels of violence testify that forces greater than straightforward criminality, greed, and brigandage were at play. We have noted that the Ghanī directed their violence toward a piece of Umayyad infrastructure that had infringed their interests, and in Najdī attacks on the eve of the Qarāmiṭa's rise, the Hajj was their primary target. The actions of the Qarāmiṭa's Najdī constituency thus suggests a *hostility* that boiled over into violence and had specific targets in mind that had symbolic connection to their perceived causes of discontent. Modern theoretical work invites interpretation of such hostility as a meaningful historical act, howsoever rudimentary and/or "pre-political"[91] it may seem, and with a consideration of the potential of applying modern theory to the Najdī context, we close this chapter.

Key theoretical contributions have been noted above, particularly Hobsbawm's "social bandit" and Linda Darling's "circle of justice." We may imagine some of the early restive tribal leaders corresponding to Hobsbawm's model: small-scale and local acts of self-help in societies with a surplus population and suffering an economic crisis that entails widescale pauperization, with the intent to restore an older, more secure order.[92] The Qarāmiṭa, on the other hand, fit less easily: they did not emerge from Najd (Hobsbawm considers the social bandit as hailing from within the aggrieved population), and their long-lasting achievement and considerable territorial control raise them a structural level or two above the usual categorization of social bandits.[93] Likewise, Darling's thesis applies to Najd only so far, inasmuch as Najdīs were neither subject to tax burden, nor were they dependent on Abbasid military for security. Abbasid water provision and access to the caliph are indeed at the core of the "just ruler" archetype set out by Darling, but the Bedouin were not so structurally bound within the circle of justice as were agrarian or urban populations, who needed the state's provision of the military to maintain prosperity. The disappearance of caliphal attention would entail that the Bedouin no longer were given the opportunity to view the caliphs as legitimate authority, but the level of hostility they expressed suggests deeper factors than simply a rupture in the circle of justice.

The particularities of the Nadji situation do share fruitful parallels with Scott's explanations of agrarian violence based on the theory of "moral economy." Though subsistence food production, state exploitation, and taxation exchange between agrarian communities and the authorities are the primary ingredients of the revolts that Scott analyzes, his model, which attempts to

91 Scott, *Moral economy* 124.

92 Hobsbawm, *Bandits* 24–30.

93 Hobsbawm, *Bandits* 106–111 explores the limits of social banditry's organization and scope.

explain why violence only occurs at particular moments (as opposed to all the time) facilitates broader application. At the core of Scott's theory is the idea that subject populations develop a tradition of a morally articulated relationship with the authorities, and that the maintenance of this tradition curbs violence. If, however, structural change overturns the tradition, and if the conjunction of that change also leads to extreme privation and other crises, violence as a form of "self-help" becomes a viable option for the subjects, and the most extreme manifestations of such violence can coalesce around religiously defined movements, with particular indignation articulated against the authorities' abandonment of the former traditions of the moral arrangement.[94] This chapter has endeavored to demonstrate how the rise and fall of the Darb Zubayda can be read as a cataclysmic structural change that induced Najdī hostility and finally culminated in their willingness to support the Qarāmiṭa.

Whereas the Umayyad-era Najdīs had existed on the very periphery of the *sulṭān*'s control and suffered a degree of exploitation, the first three generations of the Abbasids rewrote the relationship, effectively canceling Najdī fiscal obligations and providing for Najdī food and welfare on a historically unprecedented scale. Never before (nor since, until the modern era) would a state invest so heavily in the infrastructural transformation of Najd into a well-stocked and effectively-watered region. While the Darb Zubayda is heralded as a great engineering achievement of the Abbasids, the social effect of such infrastructure in Najd is an overlooked angle, given the paucity of Najdī sources. Over the course of three generations Najdī populations experienced caliphal authority as an overwhelmingly net giver of resources and security, which enabled Najdī populations to grow beyond the natural resources of the land. I suggest also that the continual charity created a tradition of a moral relationship between Najdī and Iraqi, the type that became part of the "memory" of the local in Scott's sense and creates standards of justice.[95] When the caliphs ceased giving ca. 190/805, the infrastructure still maintained the locals, but in a declining capacity, and by ca. 230/845 there was a congruence of a real water and food shortage, with the first generation of essentially unprovided-for Nadjis reaching military age. The world their fathers remembered—when the caliph made personal appearances, when water and food were mostly secure thanks to infrastructure and charity, and when locals were employed in the quotidian functions of the Darb Zubayda infrastructure—had passed. In their place, Najdīs experienced effective abandonment, lost expectations of justice, and had a hungry, over-swelled

94 Scott, *Moral economy* 140–152, 166–181.

95 Scott, *Moral economy* 175–179.

population. From their perspective, the failure of justice entailed they could legitimately seek redress. The Najdīs' form of self-help took the most basic and violent forms of pillaging and raiding, and it was crushed, but Caliph al-Wāthiq did also organize elaborate efforts to restore the old moral order. Scott would note that such an outcome is precisely the aim of the morally indigent hostility, and the curb in violence for nearly two further decades suggests its success.

Since al-Mutawakkil's successors spent nothing on Najdī infrastructure and merely afforded military accompaniment for Hajj pilgrims, the moral issues of perceived caliphal misfeasance returned. The *sulṭān* had again ceased to perform its obligations as a result of profound changes in Iraqi politics and economy that entailed widescale structural changes in how the Abbasids could govern. Marginal groups in Najd were likely unaware of the reasons, but they experienced the structural change in their everyday lives. The 40-year funding of the Darb Zubayda and the several years' blip of al-Wāthiq and al-Mutawakkil's repairs were fundamentally unsustainable from the later third/ninth century on, and there was no possibility of the old moral order being restored. Unfortunately for the Najdīs, the generous charity of previous generations became an expectation and a dependency for swelling Najdī populations, and they would therefore seek new patrons to restore the "traditional" moral economy.

The Qarāmiṭa, with their religious message and promise of economic relief at the expense of Iraqi Hajj pilgrims, would have naturally appealed. However, their success was not guaranteed—history is not so neat. In the early stages, Zakarawayh reportedly encountered difficulties trying to rally support among the Tamīm and the Ṭayyiʾ in 289/902, even though the Ṭayyiʾ were, at that point, beginning their raids against the central authority.[96] However, when Zakarawayh gained strength some years later and could present himself as representing a more established *sulṭān* in his own right, Najdī groups did join, and certainly when Abū Ṭāhir al-Jannābī appeared a decade later with a full-fledged state, Najdī acceptance was markedly greater. The Qarāmiṭā, once established as a state, were also an administrator of justice, and there is evidence that Najdī groups specifically appealed to the Qarāmiṭa in their disputes. The people of Najdī Ḍariyya sought Qarāmiṭa aid in their protracted conflict with the people at al-Rabadha, on the borders of Najd and the Ḥijāz, and Qarāmiṭa assistance was decisive, reducing al-Rabadha and forcing its surviving population to flee.[97] And fiscally, the Qarāmiṭa also created a new form of economy

96 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* x, 94–95.

97 Al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ* iv, 83–84.

for Najd: after sacking Mecca in 317/930, the Qarāmiṭā permitted the Hajj to resume in 320/932–933 in return for a heavy protection tax (*maks*) levied on Iraqi pilgrims, reportedly of five *dirham* per pilgrim and seven *dīnār* per palanquin.[98] The extent to which the Qarāmiṭa shared such funds with local Najdīs remains to be probed, and some Najdīs appear to have continued to apply a mechanism of self-help of their own, as attested by an ʿAlid leader, Abū Jaʿfar al-Mūsawī from Zubāla, who, in the late 330s AH used to attack pilgrims and demand protection money, before becoming the officially sanctioned leader of the Hajj in 340/952.[99] The Hajj also remained dangerous: during the pilgrimage in 366/977, a Buyid princess performed a lavish pilgrimage with much charity, though her brother was killed on the same Hajj; she distributed the value of his blood money as *ṣadaqa* charity.[100] But despite the dangers, the degree of stability obtained by Iraqi Hajj caravans paying heavy protection tax does suggest that the Qarāmiṭa-run Najd was more stable than during the previous generation.

In conclusion, the effort to "materialize" the Qarāmiṭa reveals a stark lack of material comfort in Najd on the eve of the Qarāmiṭa's rise. Najdī populations were struggling with a "post-Darb Zubayda" structural change in their economy, in their relations with authority, and in the very survival of their populations. Najdī hunger naturally could be interpreted as the result of caliphal abandonment of the traditions established by the early Abbasids, and the locals would be amenable to the aggressive policies of the Qarāmiṭa, which promised material relief from their suffering by attacking the infrastructure created by the locals' erstwhile providers. Sectarian divides between the Qarāmiṭa and the Iraqi pilgrims may have aided the construction of difference and the fury of violence against Hajj caravans, but equally it would seem that the ferocity of attacks against pilgrims also represented the final unwinding of Najdī experience with the Darb Zubayda and the fallout from the collapse of their former integration with the *sulṭān*.

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98 Al-Hamadhānī, *Qiṭaʿ* 317–318.
99 Al-Hamadhānī, *Qiṭaʿ* 320.
100 Al-Hamadhānī, *Qiṭaʿ* 322–323.

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