Making war ethnic: Arab-Persian identities and conflict on the Euphrates frontier

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Chapter 3

MAKING WAR ETHNIC: ARAB–PERSIAN IDENTITIES AND CONFLICT ON THE EUPHRATES FRONTIER

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BATTLES AND ETHNIC identities seem natural companions in theory. Both engage strong emotions, both are conceptualized in binary oppositional terms of "us" versus "them," and via memories of battles, ethnic groups can plot their history in heroic terms explaining how "we" as a people emerged from the crucible of conflict, how strong "we" are, and how "we" have always fought "them." But the well-known vicissitudes of collective memory readily recraft past events to harmonize them with a community's present circumstances. In practice, therefore, battles may not always be as ethnically charged in the thick of the fight as they come to be memorialized afterwards. This chapter studies the memorialization of the Battle of Dhū Qār, a pre-Islamic clash on Iraq's Euphrates frontier ca. 610 CE, which acquired a prominent and evolving significance in Muslim historiography.[1]

Dhū Qār presents itself as a natural case study for war and peoplehood since its story has been told in explicitly ethnic terms for over 1,000 years. Arabic literature from at least the third/ninth century regularly references Dhū Qār as the "the Arabs' first victory over the Persians,"[2] or "the first time the Arabs showed themselves equal to the Persians,"[3] and the pre-Islamic battle is depicted as foreshadowing the imminence of the Muslim conquest of Iraq which extinguished the Sasanian Empire just a few decades later.[4] Muslim-era histories invoke an ethnic binary of "Arab" versus "Persian" to project

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1 An outline case study on Dhū Qār was published in Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 88–95; this chapter undertakes a fuller survey of the textual evidence and develops the conclusions.

2 Aḥmad ibn Abī Yaʿqūb al-Yaʿqūbī, *al-Tārīkh*, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 215, 225; Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, vol. 2 (Cairo: al-Maʿārif, 1960–69), 188–93.

3 Abū ʿAlī Aḥmad Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-umam wa-taʿāqub al-himam*, ed. Sayyid Kisrawī Ḥasan, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003), 158; al-Andalusī, Ibn Saʿīd, *Nashwat al-ṭarab fī tārīkh jāhiliyyat al-ʿArab*, ed. Nuṣrat ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, vol. 1 (Amman: al-Aqṣā, 1982), 286; Ibn al-Athīr, ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Abī al-Karam, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1979), 482–83.

4 Ella Landau-Tesseron, "Ḏū Qār," 574–75, at 575; Michael Morony, *Iraq After the Muslim Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 152–53, 220; Peter Heath, "Some Facets of Poetry in Pre-modern Historical and Pseudohistorical Texts," in *Poetry and History: The Value of Poetry in Reconstructing Arab History*, ed. Ramzi Baalbaki, Saleh Said Agha, and Tarif Khalidi

Dhū Qār as a crucial turning point in world history: under this worldview, Persian kings had dominated the Middle East for centuries before Muhammad, but Muhammad's Arab people were to end Persian supremacy once and for all via the Muslim Conquests. Hence Dhū Qār was the "beginning of the end," the turning of the tide, the moment when the Arabs first displayed their potential. According to these Muslim-era narratives, once the Arabs embraced Islam shortly after Dhū Qār, they could commence their irresistible conquest of the Middle East.[5]

The Arab–Persian divide is salient in Middle Eastern social history, and competition between partisans of both identities has persisted in varying degrees since early Islam to the present with Dhū Qār as the pivot point of the rhetoric. Iranian nationalists celebrate memory of an enlightened millennium of ancient Persian civilisation pre-Dhū Qār, lamenting the destruction by "Arab conquest,"[6] whereas Arab nationalists champion history from Dhū Qār onwards, expressly mobilizing memories of Arab victories over Persians in contemporary competition against Iran.[7] But if we leave nationalist discourses aside, a very different picture of the battle emerges. This chapter analyzes the preserved poetry and early prose narratives of Dhū Qār, ranging from poems composed at the time of the battle, poetry from the Umayyad era (ca. 660–750), and the first prose accounts written ca. 800–1000. The textual layers reveal varied memories as Dhū Qār's history was transmitted over time and across different communities, alongside a gradual emergence of its now-familiar Arab–Persian ethnic binary.

(Beirut: American University of Beirut, 2011), 39–60, at 48, 50–52; Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014), 118, refers to Dhū Qār as an "Arab" victory, but notes difficulties in the sources too (127).

5 The presentation of Dhū Qār as the "tipping point" is particularly explicit in Miskawayh, 1: 157–58; Ibn al-Athīr, 1:480–82. Not all premodern historians indulge the "tipping point" narrative to the full, for example Abū al-Fidāʾ, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif nd.), 56 does not narrate the portentous material, though he does nonetheless define the battle in binary ethnic terms of "Arab" versus "Persian" (1:72).

6 Mirza Fatḥ-ʿAlī Akhundzade, *Maktubāt: Nāmehā-ye Kamāl al-Dawleh beh Shāhzādeh Jamāl al-Dawleh* (Frankfurt: Alborz, 2006) and Mirza Aqā Khān Kermānī, *Seh Maktūb* (Frankfurt: Alborz, 2005) state the case explicitly. The rise of Persian nationalism in a form that casts the Arabs as binary enemies is detailed in Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). The 1979 Iranian Revolution rehabilitated the esteem for Islam, but without eradicating the Persian ethnic symbolism, and much of the Pahlavi-era rhetoric in this regard has persisted.

7 See Talal Atrissi, "The Image of Iranians in Arab Schoolbooks," in *Arab–Iranian Relations*, ed. Khair El-Di Haseeb (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1998); D. Gershon Lewental, " 'Saddam's Qadisiyyah': Religion and History in the Service of State Ideology in Baʿthi Iraq," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50 (2014): 891–910 and see the essays in *Writing the Modern History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political Challenges*, ed. Jordi Tejel, Riccardo Bocco, and Peter Sluglett (Singapore: World Scientific, 2012). The majority of twentieth-century politicised attention was focused on the Battle of Qādisiyya where Muslim armies defeated Sasanian imperial forces and opened the conquest of Iraq, but Dhū Qār featured too: Iraq's Baathist regime named their 7th Army Corps the "Dhū Qār Corps," Pesach Maloveny, *Wars of Modern Babylon: A History of the Iraqi Army from 1921 to 2003* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2017), 892.

Dhū Qār: The Battle and Its Sources

Dhū Qār is enveloped within the general cloud of historiographical uncertainty that covers much of Late Antique Arabia's history. The earliest written Arabic histories emerged between the later second/eighth and mid-third/ninth centuries, that is, 150–200 years after Dhū Qār was fought. The Sasanians had written records, but following the Muslim conquest in the 640s, much was lost, and no pre-Islamic Persian memories of Dhū Qār are extant.[8] It is therefore impossible to confidently reconstruct the action with maps and lines of troop movements as military historians like to draw, but from the perspective of identity, matters are not so bleak. Dhū Qār was mentioned in Arabic poems composed from the time of battle until the period of recording in the late second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, and while embellishment and manipulation reshaped old poems over time, it seems at least that much of the preserved poetry does reflect genuine survivals from earlier periods.[9] The poems furnish ethnonyms and sentiments that together offer a window into the kinds of communities which poets in late pre-Islam and Islam's first two centuries associated with the battle, and this chapter diachronically analyzes the complete gamut.

Alongside the poetry, we also possess prose accounts of the battle which accrued over successive generations of narration which historians of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries compiled into contiguous battle accounts. These Muslim-era histories are composites of multiple mnemonic layers, and they can be read alongside the poetry to permit critical diachronic analysis of the associations drawn between the pre-Islamic battle and Arab, Persian, and Muslim identities.

In the round, the prose accounts explain Dhū Qār as follows.[10] The Sasanian Empire had long appointed agents to guard its Iraqi frontier against Arabian nomadic incursions. These agents were powerful men with ties to groups within Arabia, and

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8 A tenth-century Persian view on the battle is preserved in Muḥammad Balʿamī, *Tārīkhnāme-ye Ṭabarī*, ed. Muḥammad Rawshan, vol. 2 (Tehran: Alborz, 1366–73/1987–94), 812–24; it is a Muslim-era Persianized memory, not a Sasanian one; it is considered below.

9 For a discussion of Arabic poetry authenticity, see Walid Arafat, "The Historical Significance of Later Anṣārī Poetry—I," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29 (1966): 1–11; Arafat, "The Historical Background to the Elegies on ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān attributed to Ḥassān b. Thābit," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 33 (1970): 276–82; Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 69. Alan Jones, "The Oral and the Written: Some Thoughts about the Quranic Text," in *Proceedings of the Colloquium on Logos, Ethnos, Mythos in the Middle East and North Africa Part One: Linguistics and Literature*, ed. Kinga Dévényi and Tamás Iványi (Budapest, 1996), 57–66, at 58, and Suzanne Pinckne Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 122, allude to the impact of "Abbasid guises" in shaping preserved poetry, but consider the bulk to be authentic; Said Saleh Agha, "Of Verse, Poetry, Great Poetry and History," in *Poetry and History: The Value of Poetry in Reconstructing Arab History*, ed. Ramzi Baalbaki, Saleh Said Agha, and Tarif Khalidi Khalidi (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 2011), 1–35, at 8 describes the retreat from earlier "vigorous" doubts about authenticity.

10 The following is derived from the most detailed sources on Dhū Qār: Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Naqāʾiḍ*, ed. Anthony A. Bevan, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1905–12), 638–48; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:188–93; Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, vol. 5, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 246–52; Abū al-Faraj al-Aṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, vol. 24,

by the early seventh century CE, two names—Iyās ibn Qabīṣa and Qays ibn Masʿūd—are memorialized as key frontier leaders, guarding the middle and lower reaches of the Euphrates, respectively. Nomads from several lineage groups of the Bakr ibn Wāʾil made incursions; the Sasanian shah was aggrieved, and summoned his frontier agents to action. Iyās ibn Qabīṣa mobilized Arabian groups of the Taghlib, Iyād, the Namir, the Quḍāʿa, the Ṭayyiʿ, and others; he was reinforced with Sasanian heavily armed cataphract cavalrymen under the Sasanian commanders Hāmarz and Hormuz Kharād,[11] and the combined force marched against the Bakr. The sides met at Dhū Qār. The Bakr were offered the option of either submitting or retreating beyond the frontier, but a warrior leader named Ḥanẓala of the Bakr's ʿIjl clan urged resistance, the peace terms were refused, and battle began. The fighting's duration is unclear; it may have spanned two days, but whatever the length, the Bakr emerged victorious, killing Hāmarz and Hormuz Kharād and some of the Persian-allied Arabian frontier leaders too.

The prose accounts elaborate upon the above framework with numerous details, yet with little concord and considerable contradiction. The precise trigger of the battle is a significant disagreement. The composite source of al-Aṣbahānī (d. 356/967) opens by narrating the battle firmly within the politics of frontier control: the Sasanian shah, Khosrow Parviz, executed the frontier guardian al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir, and into the ensuing power vacuum nomads of the Bakr began raiding. Khosrow Parviz charged Qays ibn Masʿūd to guarantee the border against the Bakr, but he was unable to control the most belligerent parties from the Shaybān and ʿIjl subgroups. The shah thus imprisoned Qays and commanded his other allies to fight the Arabian invaders.[12] This account seems rather lucid, but the majority of sources narrate a second version which places more stress on a backstory that al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir, just prior to his execution, deposited weapons, herds, and perhaps his family in the safekeeping of Hāniʾ ibn Masʿūd (of Bakr lineage). Khosrow Parviz demanded Nuʿmān's chattels, but Hāniʾ refused. Enraged, Khosrow decided to wipe out the Bakr in retribution.[13] This second version renders the Persians more as aggressors, and moreover, it places Dhū Qār within

ed. ʿAbd Allāh ʿAlī Muhanna and Samīr Jābir (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1992), 54–70, Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1:149–62; Abū Hilāl Al-ʿAskarī, *al-Awāʾil*, ed. Muḥammad al-Miṣrī and Walīd al-Qaṣṣāb, vol. 2 (Al-Riyadh: Dār al-ʿUlūm, 1981), 186–90; Balʿamī, *Tārīkhnāme*, 2:812–24; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 1:482–90.

11 Hormuz Kharād's name is recorded in the Persian Balʿamī's *Tārīkhnāme*, 1:819; Arabic accounts render his name variously, most have "Khanābazīn."

12 Abū al-Faraj al-Aṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 24:55–60.

13 Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-Naqāʾiḍ*, ed. Anthony A. Bevan, vol. 2 (Leiden, Brill, 1905–12), 638–39; Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *al-Awāʾil*, 2:186; al-Andalusī, *Nashwat*, 1:285. The version of Ibn al-Athīr is quite similar, but adds that a leader of the Taghlib, al-Nuʿmān ibn Zurʿa was instrumental in urging Khosrow to attack the Bakr (*al-Kāmil*, 1:488). Al-Aṣbahānī also narrates this story, but precedes it with the narrative detailed above (*al-Aghānī*, 24:60–62); in essence, al-Aṣbahānī narrates two separate triggers for the battle (this is not uncommon in composite Arabic literary texts).

a more personalized revenge story surrounding the famous hero of Arabic pre-Islamic Iraqi history, al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir, and the crux of this story turns upon vengeful Persian emotions and a stereotyped "Arab" trait of trustworthiness. Muslim literary accounts about pre-Islamic Arabia are replete with examples of "Arab morality" which include the Arabs' refusal to break promises—refusal to hand over weapons deposited on trust is particularly paradigmatic of this trope.[14]

The differences between the first and second versions involve contrastive narrative techniques and historiographical perspectives. The first suggests that a border raid by groups of the Bakr happened to defeat a force sent to repulse them; the story typifies the dynamics of settled-nomad relations, a story as old as the Euphrates frontier itself. It also fits Bosworth's suggestion that Dhū Qār was a "skirmish," not a momentous clash with wide historical ramifications.[15] The second version, however, elevates Dhū Qār into a grander narrative of Arab–Persian relations by linking the battle explicitly to important *dramatis personae* (al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir), and the invocation of stereotypes of Arab morality/fidelity fit the account ethically into an Arab story. According to the second version, Dhū Qār was no accident: it is glued to the history of the Arabs via intimate connection with al-Nuʿmān, and by pitting Arab fidelity against the iniquitous Persian shah's aggression, the narrative makes it clear where the heroism lies.

The second version suggests narrative expansion that changed the signification of Dhū Qār. Muslim-era storytellers converted memories of a raid by some subgroups of the Bakr into a key cog of pan-Arab history, and the fingerprints of their narrative manipulation over a period of generations emerge from scrutiny of the details. For example, the sources exhibit significant dispute over names: Abū ʿUbayda is rather adamant that the border agent was not Qays ibn Masʿūd, but instead his grandson, Qays ibn Hāniʾ ibn Qays ibn Masʿūd;[16] and al-Nuʿmān's chattels were either deposited with Hāniʾ ibn Qabīṣa ibn Masʿūd *or* Hāniʾ ibn Masʿūd ibn Hāniʾ.[17] The names of the Bakr tribal leaders who invaded Iraq are also reported with different options.[18] It is even reported that there were two battles of Dhū Qār; the first occurred when the Bakr were suffering from drought in the desert and invaded Iraq by necessity, defeating a Persian force thanks to the leadership of Ḥanẓala ibn Sayyār of the ʿIjl who staunchly defended his tent; whereas the famous Dhū Qār was a second battle in which a slightly differently named Ḥanẓala of the ʿIjl—Ḥanẓala ibn Thaʿlaba ibn Sayyār—was the hero who

14 For the archetype of this motif, see the story of al-Samawʾal, Ibn Nubāta, *Sarḥ*, 102–103.

15 Clifford E. Bosworth, "Iran and the Arabs Before Islam," in *The Cambridge History of Iran Volume 3(1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 593–612, at 608.

16 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:638.

17 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:639.

18 See al-Aṣbahānī's account of two different sets of raiding parties which do essentially the same thing (*al-Aghānī*, 56–58).

staunchly defended his tent.[19] The two-Dhū-Qār approach seems a rather blunt strategy of a later narrator to rationalize two versions of the one event by artificially separating them into separate battles. Other naming differences emerge in the narratives of the battle itself: for example, the first member of the Bakr to duel the Sasanian commander is named as either Yazīd ibn Ḥāritha, Burd ibn Ḥāritha, or Burayd ibn Ḥāritha—each possible misreadings of the Arabic orthography of his name.[20] All the above variations turn on such patently similar names that we can interpret that events of Dhū Qār were remote by the time Muslims began recording the story, and Muslim-era historians faced difficulties ameliorating different strands of stories that had emerged in association with similar-sounding names.

Furthermore, most details of the battle come with variations, often contradictory. According to some, Qays ibn Masʿūd languished in prison during the battle, yet others have him fighting for the Sasanians, while others narrate his defection to the Bakr in the middle of the battle as a key turning point.[21] Pluriform memories also shape the key motif explaining the Bakr's stand. According to the story, Ḥanẓala ibn Thaʿlaba cut the ropes of the Bakr women's palanquins from their camels, and so prevented the women from making an escape if the tide of battle turned against the Bakr: this was intended to motivate the men to fight to the grim end, but there are three distinct versions about the cutting of palanquin chords, and various sources narrate them all. Logically, Ḥanẓala could only have cut the chords once, but the memories about his act were pluriform, and our narrators amalgamated everything they had. While agreement across the extant accounts that palanquins were cut from the backs of camels indicates that the Dhū Qār was famed for this act of hazarding the Bakr's women, the details as to precisely how and when it transpired had already received multiple treatments by the time the stories were collected.

The organization of the Bakr army is also variably reported, and while the Sasanian force is more consistently described, there are disagreements: some say it included units of the Ṭayyiʾ, others not, and there are different identifications regarding the identity of the men who killed the Sasanian commanders, and disagreements over which Sasanian allies were killed as well. Deeper disagreements surround which of the Bakr's subgroups were actually present at Dhū Qār: the Shaybān and the ʿIjl are unanimously mentioned, and while some narrators claim that no other subgroups participated, others include reference to warriors of the Qays and Yashkur subgroups. Another point of dispute concerns whether the famous warrior al-Ḥawfazān participated in the battle or not: most accounts omit him, yet those which do include him ascribe him the pivotal

19 Abū ʿUbayd ʿAbd Allāh al-Bakrī, *Muʿjam Mā istaʿjam*, ed. Muṣṭafá al-Saqā, vol. 3 (Cairo: Lajnat al-Taʾlīf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1947), 1042–43.

20 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:643 has "Burayd" or "Yazīd"; al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:69 has "Yazīd"; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1:162 and Balʿamī, *Tārīkhnāme*, 2:821 have "Burd."

21 For elaboration of the imprisonment narrative, see al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:58–59; for the defection narrative see Balʿamī, *Tārīkhnāme*, 2:822.

role in the victory.[22] Concerning the tipping point of the Bakr's victory, some texts ascribe it to the flight of one of the Sasanian allies, in another, it was the charge of al-Ḥawfazān after an inconclusive day of fighting, and in a third, it was a succession of assaults first by the ʿIjl and then by the Shaybān against the exhausted and parched Sasanians; however, other accounts place this joint charge first, and identify single combat duels against the Sasanian commanders as the decisive turning point.[23]

In sum, the Dhū Qār narrative possesses a recognizable set of characters and events shared between all sources, but it is impossible to overlook the differences in the details. The sources proffer far too many permutations to enable us to *know* what happened at Dhū Qār beyond the generality of a successful incursion by some groups from the Bakr against the Sasanian border which resulted in a clear (and perhaps unexpectedly clear-cut) victory arousing local excitement. Beyond this, an array of different things may or may not have happened. Overall, such variations indicate the battle's importance as a site of memory in early Islam—many different voices wanted to tell Dhū Qār stories—but the memory was highly plastic, and narrators employed a free hand to portray the battle in ways that suited their purposes.[24] By the time the different versions were committed to writing in the third/ninth century, Dhū Qār was too remote for historians to know how to differentiate the panoply of variation, and they created composite narratives according to their own styles. In terms of peoplehood, however, the prose accounts do all emphasize the Arabness and Persian-ness of the opposing sides, but even this is deeply problematic on several counts.

Dhū Qār Narratives: The "Arabness Façade"

We noted that Muslim-era historians open their Dhū Qār narratives with the remark that the battle was the "first time the Arabs equalled the Persians." Ethnic difference is thus asserted upfront, and the narratives follow suit: the actions of the Bakr's foe are homogenously written as being undertaken by "Persians" (*ʿAjam* or *Furs*): for example, "the Persians advanced," "the Persians were defeated," "they killed the Persians."[25] As a matter of syntax, therefore, the texts compel interpretation of Arabs on one side fighting Persians on the other. Likewise, the Sasanian army is described in signature "Persian" and clearly "non-Arab" terms: for example, it has elephants, and its warriors

22 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:646–48; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd*, 5:248.

23 The three options are dispersed in the sources, see for the first, al-Andalusī, *Nashwat*, 1:285, for the second, al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:69, for the third, Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:644. See Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1:161 for the placement of the ʿIjl and Shaybān charges at the outset, with the single combat death of the Persian leader last.

24 Arabic literature often names the sources of historical anecdotes via detailing chains of authority of the stories' transmission, but in the case of Dhū Qār, these are unfortunately lacking, and so we cannot identify each of the original sources nor ascribe them to particular tribal narrations.

25 All narratives adopt this style of homogenously referring to "the Persians"; the examples cited here are from the earliest extant narrative, Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:643–44.

are described as *asāwira* (the Sasanian Cataphracts/knights).[26] However, despite the textual ethnic homogenization, the more detailed descriptions of the composition of the Sasanian force reveal that it was, at most, only one-third Sasanian soldiers under Persian-speaking commanders: the majority were Arabic-speaking frontier guards gathered from at least four tribal groups.[27] The Arabian presence in the Sasanian army accords with the prevailing Sasanian policy of maintaining the frontier via agents, but that practice contradicts the expressly ethnic divide asserted by the Muslim-era sources, and we can discern manifold narrative strategies employed to downplay the Sasanians' Arabian supporters.

For example, in narratives of the battle scenes, there is no mention of Arabian auxiliaries fighting alongside Sasanians; Balʿamī's history is even explicit that *all* Arabs mobilized by the Sasanians defected during the battle, leaving the frontier agent, Hāniʾ ibn Qabīṣa, "alone."[28] Al-Aṣbahānī's account (which maintained the frontier-incursion narrative as Dhū Qār's trigger) is the only source to name Arabian tribal leaders killed fighting for the Sasanians;[29] all other sources shift the focus squarely onto the deaths of Hāmarz and Hormuz Kharād, the Sasanian commanders. To further distance Arabness from the Sasanian ranks, some versions include a story that the Iyād tribe, which had been mobilized by the Sasanians, secretly informed the Bakr that they would desert once the battle began, thus assuring victory for their Arab brethren. That story, however, is not unanimously reported,[30] and there is no poetry supporting the Iyād's solidarity with the Bakr, which, given the salience of poetry in memorializing and communicating politicized messages, is suggestive that the side-switching did not really occur. The Iyād's defection is more likely a later device added to ethnically homogenize the belligerents, enabling narrators to eschew memorializing any killing between "Arabs," and focus exclusively on Arabs killing Persians.

In the same vein, some sources report that Qays ibn Masʿūd, one of the principal frontier agents of the Sasanians, also slipped away to join the ranks of Bakr (either before the fighting or between the battle's first and second days).[31] "Defection" deftly enabled historians to neutralize memories of Arabians allied with the Sasanians: memories such as Qays' presence with the Sasanians were thereby not obliterated, but instead reoriented to show how "Arabs" innately wished to aid their "brethren" against the Persians. In the case of Qays, however, pre-Islamic poetry (considered below) specifically chided him for *not* siding with the Bakr, and there are also reports that he led the centre of the Sasanian

26 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:640; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1:160.

27 See, e.g., al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:61–62.

28 Baʿlamī, *Tārīkhnāme*, 2:823.

29 Al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:70.

30 The Iyād's flight is central in the narrative of Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:642, 644, al-Andalusī, *Nashwat*, 1:285 and Ibn al-Athīr, 1:489–90; whereas neither the long account of al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:67–71 nor Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi's *al-ʿIqd*, 5:248 report it.

31 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:640–41; Balʿamī, *Tārīkhnāme*, 2:822.

army,[32] alongside contradicting reports that he was absent at the battle and died in Sasanian captivity.[33] What Qays actually did is thus irretrievably lost, but the plethora of options reveals that the defection story was one of several retellings, and it assisted textual "ethnic cleansing" of Arabs from the Sasanian force. While Muslim-era narrators contrived these stories to ensure that the narrative appeared as a binary Arab versus Persian contest, the original Battle of Dhū Qār, as has been argued by other scholars too, pitted Arabic-speaking nomads on one side against a Sasanian frontier force which was itself largely composed of Arabic-speaking patrols on the other.[34]

A deeper challenge to the putative Arabness of the Bakr forces is an abiding uncertainty over the nature of Arab identity itself at the dawn of Islam. Medieval-era Muslim historiography does not question the Arabness of any pre-Islamic Arabian group, and modern scholarship on Muslim historiography has been surprisingly lax in accepting those ethnic designations at face value. Despite the theoretical advances which have revealed the social constructedness of identities in manifold contexts across the globe and history, most studies until very recently did not seriously consider the constructedness of Arabness, nor did they use the available theory to investigate whether, or even how, Arab ethnic identity functioned among Arabian populations before Islam. Elsewhere, I examine the nature of Arab identity in pre-Islamic Arabia and early Islam via applying anthropological theories of ethnogenesis to the evidence, and at present it seems quite clear that the circumstances necessary to create a pan-Arabian sense of Arab community were absent at the time Dhū Qār was fought, and in support of, and in correspondence to the theory, there are almost no references to Arabness as an identity of "self" in pre-Islamic Arabia.[35] The form of Arabness which is familiar to us today was a creation of the Islamic period, emergent contemporaneous with the maturation of the source literature on Dhū Qār. The Muslim-era texts' adamant claims of the Arabness of the battle's participants accordingly need testing via evidence more contemporary with the battle—that is, the poetry of the combatants—and it should not be assumed that "Arabness" was, or perhaps could have been, on the minds of warriors when they appraised their foe.

The traditional presumption that pre-Islamic Arabians were "Arabs" also overlooks a yet more significant issue concerning the identity of pre-Islamic Arabians. Pre-Islamic Arabic-language poetry *did* have a term which poets used to refer to their own community, but it was not *ʿArab*; instead, it was called Maʿadd.[36] The contours of Maʿadd

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32 Compare Balʿamī, *Tārīkhnama*, 1:822–23 with Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd*, 5:248; Ibn al-Athīr names Qays as amongst the Persian force, but says nothing of his involvement in the battle itself (*al-Kāmil*, 1:489).

33 Al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:75.

34 Fred Donner, "The Bakr b. Wāʾil Tribes and Politics in Northeastern Arabia on the Eve of Islam," *Studia Islamica* 51 (1980): 5–38; Landau-Tasseron, "Ḏū Qār."

35 Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*.

36 Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 70–77.

as an Arabian social group at the dawn of Islam are detailed at length elsewhere,[37] but a brief summary is in order since Maʿaddite identity is essential to make better sense of the Dhū Qār poetry. Central Arabian nomads, including the Bakr, regularly summoned the name "Maʿadd" to refer to the largest imagined collective group, and as an express form of kinship among themselves. Importantly, the communal boundaries of Maʿadd *excluded* the main Arabic-speaking, semi-nomadic groups who served as imperial frontier guards. The Syrian Ghassān in the service of Byzantium, the Iraqi Lakhmids and Ṭayyiʾ allied to the Sasanians, and the southern Arabian Kinda allied to Ḥimyar were all deemed genealogically non-Maʿaddite. From the evidence of community expressed in pre-Islamic poetry, the Bakr would have been part of the Maʿaddite people, whereas their foes at Dhū Qār were a mix of Persians, non-Maʿaddite frontier guards, and other nomadic groups who would have been Maʿaddite too, but not close kin with the Bakr.[38] By the time Arabic literature began to be recorded in the second/eighth century, however, Maʿadd was no longer a functional label for a collective identity: it was being supplanted by "Arab,"[39] and hence the ethnicity of Dhū Qār's combatants could be retrospectively reworked and thoroughly Arabized. But quite how ethnicity functioned on the field at Dhū Qār itself is complex, and analysis in the following sections of Arabic poetry about the battle from pre-Islamic times to the Abbasid era will facilitate suggestions.

One final background consideration on identity concerns the Bakr itself. Heretofore, we have labelled the Sasanians' opponents as "Bakr," a tribal name connoting a northeast Arabian lineage group comprising several subgroups, notably the Shaybān, the Qays, the Dhuhl, the Taym Allāh, the ʿIjl, the Ḥanīfa, and the Yashkur. The subgroups were spread from the Gulf littoral to the fringes of the Syrian Desert: it is a vast region, and it bears questioning whether all the technical subgroups of the Bakr actually considered themselves kin and/or were capable of acting in concert. Fred Donner rejects the Bakr's putative pre-Islamic unity, arguing that the above-named clans were only collected under one "Bakr" tribal umbrella in the Umayyad era; thus Donner considers it is anachronistic to speak of "Bakr" as being present at Dhū Qār, and he would conceptualize the Sasanians' foe as an ad hoc coalition of the Shaybān, the ʿIjl, and perhaps other elements.[40] There is merit in Donner's argument: scholarship has too readily accepted the corporate unity of Arabian tribal groups, and in practice, subgroups likely felt autonomous enough to act according to their own interests before those of the macro-tribe.[41] In support of

37 Peter Webb, "Ethnicity, Power and Umayyad Society: The Rise and Fall of the People of Maʿadd," in *The Umayyad World*, ed. Andrew Marsham (London: Routledge, 2020), 65–102.

38 A prime example of this is the Taghlib who were Maʿaddite and technically related to the Bakr, though they were inimical, and a story of an ancient pre-Islamic conflict, the Basūs War, was memorialised as the explanation for the conflict between them notwithstanding their putative genealogical relation. For the Taghlib's aligments before Islam, see Lecker, "Taghlib b. Wāʾil," *EI*^{2}.

39 Webb, "Ethnicity, Power and Umayyad Society," 80–87.

40 Donner, "The Bakr b. Wāʾil Tribes," 28–36.

41 See Brian Ulrich, *Arabs in the Early Islamic Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), for a theoretical discussion of tribes and tribal unity in Arabia at the dawn of Islam.

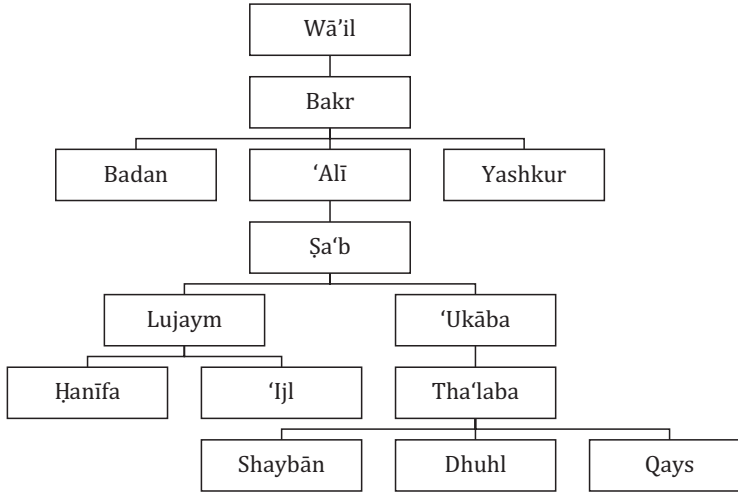

Figure 3.1 Outline genealogy of the Bakr ibn Wāʾil. Image by Peter Webb.

this view, it is noteworthy that *al-Ṣanāʾiʿ*, one of the five fabled squadrons of Lakhmid cavalry (*katāʾib*), were (according to Muslim sources) recruited from Bakr lineages,[42] and in the likelihood that they participated at Dhū Qār with the Sasanians, it follows that members of the same macro-lineage group fought for both sides. While Donner's argument could be extended to deny that the combatants at Dhū Qār were cognisant of sharing one "Bakr" tribal identity, pre-Islamic poets do proffer some evidence that the name "Bakr" connoted a group identity among subgroups. "Bakr" therefore did mean something before Islam, but the extent to which Bakr as a tribal identity functioned remains an open question.[43] At the present state of research, it seems that technical membership to "Bakr" via lineage was not of itself a decisive element of identity, nor did the Bakr *qua* tribe constitute a cohesive corporate body capable of effective collective action; however, members of several separate lineage groups did recognize some form of linkage via mutual claims of belonging to "Bakr."

Dhū Qār in Pre-Islamic Poetry: The Arabian Voices

To affirm Dhū Qār's lofty status in Arabian battle history, Muslim-era prose sources often cite Abū ʿUbayda (d. ca. 210/825), the early Abbasid-era collector of Arabian history and poetry, who counted Dhū Qār as one of the three greatest battles fought by

42 Muḥammad ibn Yazīd al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, ed. M. Aḥmad al-Dālī, vol. 2 (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2008), 606.

43 For further discussion on the Bakr, see Webb, "Bakr b. Wāʾil", *EI*[3].

the pre-Islamic Arabs.[44] The opinion, however, does not tally with critical study of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. According to my survey of poets contemporary with the battle, Dhū Qār is sparsely mentioned: famous poets who lived at a remove from the Iraqi frontier, such as Labīd, ʿAmr ibn Maʿdī Karib, al-Huṭayʾa, and al-Shammākh al-Dhubyānī, are silent on the battle, and even poets directly connected with politics and the rise of Islam such as al-Ḥassān ibn Thābit and Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr make no mention of it either. These silences are noteworthy: if Dhū Qār really was as significant on a pan-Arab, pan-Arabian scale as subsequently claimed, we might expect Arabian poets to summon the glory of victory or at least allude to the successful expedition into Iraq. The fact that they do not suggests that inner Arabian poets did not attach significance to Dhū Qār, and, perhaps, at a remove of considerable distance from Iraq, some may have been unaware of the battle's occurrence.[45]

Another avenue to gauge the importance of an Arabian battle is to consider whether its victors were praised by itinerant court poets. Prominent leaders on Arabia's frontiers attracted poets who sought patronage by composing praise poems memorializing their patrons' battles. But again, in the case of Dhū Qār, there is scant evidence: my searches found neither praise of the men named as the heroes in the prose accounts (e.g., Hāniʾ ibn Qabīṣa or Ḥanẓala ibn Thaʿlaba), nor praise of the Bakr generally.[46] In its immediate aftermath, therefore, Dhū Qār did not resonate very widely, nor did the victory elevate the Bakr to dominate the frontier and attract praise poets to their assemblies.

When searching for pre-Islamic poetry that *does* mention Dhū Qār, we find references restricted to a few poems by poets from the Bakr's subgroups. Al-Aʿshā Maymūn ibn Qays, a celebrated pre-Islamic poet of the Qays branch of the Bakr, composed three poems mentioning the battle,[47] and a clutch of verses by poets of the ʿIjl and Taym Allāh

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44 Maʿmar ibn al-Muthannā Abū ʿUbayda, *Kitāb al-Dībāj*, eds. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sulaymān al-Jarbūʾ and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Sulaymān al-ʿUthaymīn (Cairo: al-Khānjī, 1991), 78–79.

45 Al-Aṣbahānī reports a three-line poem by an unnamed poet of the Rabīʿa mentioning Dhū Qār (*al-Aghānī*, 24:74), but the poem lacks reference to the Bakr or the Persians, and instead ties Dhū Qār whimsically with the memory of al-Nuʿmān. It is impossible to tell when this poem was composed: al-Aṣbahānī offers no indication, but given that the poet is unknown and given the proliferation of poetry about Dhū Qār in the Umayyad period (noted below), the anonymous lines may have emerged later. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd*, 5:251–52 narrates a poem "sent by Laqīṭ al-Iyādī to the Shaybān at the Battle of Dhū Qār," but the ascription is mistaken: Laqīṭ is famous in Arabic literature for warning his own people about a Sasanian attack, yet this occurred some hundred years before Dhū Qār; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi confused these facts.

46 There is a reference to Wāʾil's victory at the Battle of al-Ḥinw in a pre-Islamic poem ascribed to Shuraḥbīl ibn al-Ḥārith: Abū Tammām, *al-Waḥshiyyāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Maymanī al-Rājkūtī (Cairo: al-Maʿārif, 1987), 134; according to Abū ʿUbayda, al-Ḥinw was one of the alternative names for the Battle of Dhū Qār (Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:638), but Shuraḥbīl was a much more ancient figure: he is associated with battles about a century before Islam, hence his "al-Ḥinw" must intend a different battle.

47 Maymūn ibn Qays al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, ed. M. Muḥammad Ḥusayn (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍa al-ʿArabiyya, 1974), 233–35, 277–83, 309–11. There is a fourth poem (al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 358–61) which contains boasts about Dhū Qār, but Abū ʿUbayda considered this a false ascription, and he associates

(a.k.a. Taym al-Lāt) articulate similar boasts. Thus, the victors of Dhū Qār themselves considered the battle worthy of self-praise, but the battle's memory did not immediately escalate into an event cited by poets outside the Bakr. It thus appears that Dhū Qār was meaningful for the Bakr's own story, but that is as far as its fame spread within one generation. Our hunch is supported from closer examination of the poetry and the ways it articulates senses of peoplehood.

Al-Aʿshā's Dhū Qār poetry praises both his own subgroup, the Qays,[48] and, principally, the Shaybān in typical pre-Islamic warrior poetry style, whereby specific details are lacking in favour of generic tropes of vaunting bravery:

> Helms glistening, the host emerged from the valley
> Raising their banners aloft,
> They charged, we charged; Death was there
> Calamity swirled in full view.[49]

From the perspective of identity and peoplehood, al-Aʿshā once refers to "a furious wave of Wāʾil" to describe the Bakr's warriors:[50] Wāʾil connotes the Bakr's putative ancestor, and thus al-Aʿshā identifies the combatants via macro-tribal identity. "Clan Bakr" and "Bakr" are also specified by name in two Dhū Qār poems narrated by al-Aṣbahānī, and if these are authentic voices from pre-Islam, they further affirm that the combatants could be known by a "Bakr" identity. But al-Aṣbahānī's two poems are problematic: they are intimately tied with his prose narrative, and such poems bear higher risk of later fabrication to assist the narrative manipulation by subsequent storytellers.[51] It is difficult to ascertain, but what is clear from survey of the poetry is that the term "Bakr"

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these lines with a different poet of the Shaybān; we consider this poem presently. A fifth poem (al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 349–53) is of doubtful authenticity. It contains unusual vocabulary only common in Yemen [for example, the poem refers to the Sasanian commander as *qayl* (lines 12, 19]), and other sources actually ascribe the poem to Yemenis, particularly Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan, a Yemeni leader who opposed the Sasanian conquest of Yemen (Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, and ʿAbd al-Shāfī Shalabī, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d.), 88). Effectively, only one early narrator, Abū ʿAmr Isḥāq al-Shaybānī (d. 206/821), ascribed the poem to al-Aʿshā (see al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 348), but Abū ʿAmr's Shaybanid kinship is noteworthy here!

48 The Qays do not feature expressly in prose accounts of Dhū Qār, but one of al-Aʿshā's verses from this poem was adduced to prove the Qays were present (Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:644). The evidence is not very strong, however: the first-person plural verb reported in *al-Naqāʾiḍ* as proof that al-Aʿshā refers to his people as "us" at the battle is recorded as a third-person verb in al-Aʿshā's poetry collection where it reads "them", i.e., the Shaybān.

49 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 309 (translation by Peter Webb, as are all poems translated herein).

50 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 283.

51 Al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:63, 70. Al-Aṣbahānī narrates that a third poem mentions the Bakr by name (*al-Aghānī*, 24:64), but he expressly doubts its connection to Dhū Qār as it is ascribed to a poet whom al-Aṣbahānī considers had died some time before the battle was fought. Al-Aṣbahānī operated under the impression that the battle occurred in 624 CE, but most modern historians date it closer to 610, and hence the poem may actually be authentic, and constitute a real reference to "Bakr" as the means to identify members of the large tribe, but it is not certain.

was not the most common form by which pre-Islamic poets referred to the identity of the combatants: the majority of poems name individual subgroups. We have noted that al-Aʿshā particularly singles out the Shaybān, and this subgroup is one of the two dominant names associated with the battle,[52] the other is the ʿIjl. The preference for the clan names is suggestive of a more restrictive sense of identity whereby poets at the battle saw themselves representing their immediate kin, not necessarily the Bakr as a whole. For example, al-Aghlab of the ʿIjl only mentions his own subgroup in his Dhū Qār poems:

> On the Day of Hormuz Kharād, they knew:
> They knew when the tribes advanced,
> They knew when scabbards flew and swords drawn,
> They knew when we met: we are the ʿIjl![53]

We accordingly encounter two levels of identity at play: (i) in limited cases, unity of a broad group under the macro-tribal label of Bakr, and (ii) in the main, the combatants are identified by narrower lineage bonds of Bakr subgroups.

Another feature of the pre-Islamic Dhū Qār poetry is the quantity of poems composed by poets from subgroups of the Bakr in praise of warriors from different Bakr subgroups. For example, al-Aʿshā, from the Qays, devotes the majority of his Dhū Qār poetry to the Shaybān:

> May my camel and I be ransom for Dhuhl ibn Shaybān
> (Though we be meagre!) on the day of battle.
> At al-Ḥinw, Ḥinw Qurāqir,[54] they crashed blows
> Down upon Hāmarz's ranks until the rout.
> Blessed are the eyes of those who saw this band,
> As they beat down foes thrusting from the plain
> With gleaming white helmets under high flags.[55]

Poets from the Bakr's Taym Allāh praise the ʿIjl, such as Ḥuraym ibn al-Ḥārith of the Taym Allāh:[56]

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52 See Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:643.

53 Al-ʿAskarī, *al-Awāʾil*, 2:189.

54 These are apparently names for Dhū Qār. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:638 lists eight different names by which the battle was known.

55 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 309.

56 The authenticity of Ḥuraym's poem is not straightforward. An almost identical poem is cited in Arabic literature in a totally different Hijazi political context ascribed to ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ziʿbarā of the Quraysh: ʿAbd Allāḥ Ibn al-Ziʿbarā, *Dīwān*, ed. Yahyā Wāhib al-Jabūrī (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1981), 50. The similarity between the two poems has been noted, with an opinion that both may be authentic, on the basis that the line constituted a praise trope circulating amongst Arabian poets at the dawn of Islam: Johanna M. Coster, *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Allegiance and Authority in the Poetical Discourse of Muhammad's Lifetime* (PhD diss., University of Groningen, 2018), 92, 186–87. Alternatively, the correspondences could have been added during the Muslim-era process of collection, especially since the extent of crossover between Ḥuraym's poem and

The Lujaym are a folk of power and wealth,[57]
A clan of means, their ancient merits unassailable,
They protected our women at Dhū Qār,
As lords defend pregnant pure-bred camels.
Always answering the cry 'Advance!'
Can any but the Lujaym's best prevent ignominy?[58]

In terms of peoplehood, the corpus of intra-Bakr poetry suggests that members across subgroups of the Bakr recognized one shared kinship, and that members of a subgroup which did not fight at Dhū Qār felt that the victory of their combating kinsmen from the ʿIjl and Shaybān entitled all subgroups to share the honour, piggy-backing off the combatants' glory, so to speak. This suggests a degree of emotive significance attached to the idea of "Bakr" as a large-scale identity, but equally, the pre-Islamic poetry also reveals pushback from the ʿIjl and Shaybān against those non-combatant groups claiming a share in the glory. For example, Abū Kalba of the Taym Allāh expressly lauds the ʿIjl and Shaybān, but also mentions the name "Lahāzim" as part of the victorious force—the Lahāzim were an alliance that included the Taym Allāh alongside the ʿIjl and Shaybān. These verses apparently piqued the ire of al-Aʿshā, who composed a counter:

Someone inform Abū Kalba of the Taym
(By God they're an iniquitous group):
The Shaybān protected you from the fight,
While you were like a dog in a cave, barking.[59]

Herein is a noteworthy nebulosity of Bakr identity: on the one hand, it had a recognized set of subclans who knew of themselves as being related to each other as kin-Bakr, and some capitalized on this network by attempting to absorb credit from Dhū Qār for themselves by praising other clans, whereas the clans which did participate in the fighting seem less willing to share the glory with non-combatants, even if those were technically kin-Bakr. The tension tallies with anthropological observations of contemporary tribes, whereby shared lineage operates primarily as a potential force: it enables groups to act in concert on an ad hoc basis when necessary, but in no way does it guarantee cohesion or necessitate that one subgroup share equally with others.

In the same vein, Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi reports that the ʿIjl and the Shaybān contended that only their members fought at Dhū Qār, and they rejected claims of other subclans of the Bakr.[60] This squabbling occurred in the Abbasid period, and over the effluxion of

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Ibn al-Ziʿbarā's is inconsistently recorded, perhaps suggestive that the additions were added anachronistically to Ibn al-Ziʿbarā's poem. The question remains open, but at least Ḥuraym's verses bear no obvious signs of anachronism: they reflect the tenor of the more securely datable pre-Islamic poetry about Dhū Qār.

57 "Lujaym" here refers to the ʿIjl; their genealogy was ʿIjl ibn Lujaym; see Figure 3.1.

58 Al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:72.

59 Al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:73. Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqā'iḍ*, 2:645 narrates another version of this exchange, with different poems.

60 Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi, *al-ʿIqd*, 5:248.

some 200 years since the battle, various poems were circulating (considered below) that expanded the range of subgroups alleged to have fought at Dhū Qār. The ʿIjl and Shaybān's "monopoly" was accordingly rejected by the later scholars, but if we consider the pre-Islamic poems alone, the names most commonly referenced are indeed just ʿIjl and Shaybān.[61] Moreover, the ʿIjl and Shaybān are also the chief protagonists in the prose accounts, and hence it seems most likely that they were in fact the only clans which actually fought at Dhū Qār. Perhaps this also explains why al-Aʿshā refers to the large-scale tribal identity of "Wāʾil" in his poetry: his immediate kinsmen of the Qays were not represented at Dhū Qār in sufficient numbers to legitimately claim honour for himself, hence he enthusiastically lauded the Shaybān both explicitly by name and implicitly along with the other Bakr kin-groups in a targeted attempt to curry favour and build bridges of real alliance from the theoretical bonds of kinship. The poets of the ʿIjl, however, had no need to appeal to the macro-tribal Bakr to affirm their glory, since their own warriors had physically fought at the battle.

Poetry's testimony thus reveals that the combatants at Dhū Qār conceptualized themselves as members of their particular clans above all else, but they were aware of a select body of other groups with whom they perceived kinship under an umbrella identity of Bakr. Belonging to Bakr opened a network of interrelations, though this did not translate into one cohesive corporate identity in practice. Dhū Qār's initial memorialization was as a triumph of the Shaybān and ʿIjl.

In keeping with poetry's expression of identity at clan levels of lineage, none of the pre-Islamic Dhū Qār poetry refers to an "Arab" identity. In contrast to the later Muslim-era prose claims of the battle's Arab–Persian ethnic binary, the pre-Islamic poets never invoke that dichotomy. The absence of any express large-scale identities in the pre-Islamic poetry is a crucial observation: it underlines that those who fought at Dhū Qār did not consider themselves representatives of the whole macro-tribe of Bakr, let alone any form of peoplehood greater than their own immediate clan. Whether or not they ever recognized themselves as "Arabs" is a question extending beyond this chapter, but the poetry is patently clear that the combatants left no express indication of Arabness when memorializing their victory. Given that many on the Sasanian side were Arabians too, the absence of perception of an ethnic divide between the opposing forces is not surprising, and must stand as a key corrective to the later ethnic interpretation of Abbasid-era historiographers.

As noted above, central Arabian poets at the time of Dhū Qār did widely express shared belonging to "Maʿadd" in terms indicative that Maʿadd was the "people" with whom they identified as a super-tribal identity.[62] In the case of Dhū Qār poetry, however, even Maʿaddite identity is muted: none of our poems refer to the combatants as representatives of Maʿadd, no poet claims victory in the name of the Maʿadd, and

61 They are the only groups repeatedly mentioned in the battle poetry recorded in Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:641–43; see also the notes above.

62 For details of Maʿaddite peoplehood, see Webb, "Ethnicity, Power and Umayyad Society," 66–71.

the name is in fact absent in all poetry barring one line by al-Aʿshā, which is itself of problematic ascription. It reads:

> If all of Maʿadd had mustered with us at Dhū Qār,
> There would have been glory for them.[63]

The verse intends that the honour won by the Shaybān at Dhū Qār was so great that even had all of Maʿadd fought at the battle, there would be enough glory to go round. This is of course hypothetical: only some clans of the Bakr were actually present, and hence the rhetorical purpose is to emphasize the prodigious amount of *excess* glory won by the Shaybān. The sentiment expressly renders Maʿadd as an audience: the poet invites them to behold his own clan's glory. While Maʿadd is invited to marvel at the victory, the actual combatants were representing themselves, and they do not intend to share the merit: their victory was for themselves alone.

The reference to Maʿadd does provide an indication of the group which the poet considers to comprise the largest possible collective. Rhetorically, the poet seeks to articulate that the honour of Dhū Qār was great enough to be shared among "everyone," and the fact that he summoned the name "Maʿadd" as the byword for "everyone" reveals the status of Maʿadd as the super-tribal community in the eyes of the Arabian poet. The verse's ascription to al-Aʿshā, however, is not certain: it occurs within a group of lines about Dhū Qār at the end of a long poem on a different topic,[64] and the modern editor of al-Aʿshā's poetry considers that the Dhū Qār section was originally composed by an Umayyad-era poet of the Shaybān, ʿAbd Allāh al-Nābigha al-Shaybānī, and only subsequently appended to al-Aʿshā's ode.[65] Evaluating authenticity becomes difficult since the fourth/tenth century al-Aṣbahānī does ascribe these verses to al-Aʿshā,[66] and so we are left with an open question. For our purposes of examining peoplehood, however, the verse attests that the largest social group mentioned in pre-Islamic Dhū Qār poetry is possibly Maʿadd, and if that line is anachronistic, then *every* reference to "self" in authentic pre-Islamic poetry revolves around the narrow terms of immediate kin groups. The operative identity of the Arabian combatants thus clearly skews toward clan, not macro-tribe (Bakr), let alone ethnos (Maʿaddite or Arab).

Pre-Islamic Poetry: The "Enemy" Identity

Given that recognition of ethnic identity takes shape via awareness of an "other" opposed to "self," the investigation into the identity of the pre-Islamic combatants at Dhū Qār need also consider how they depicted their foe, and herein the poetry proffers intriguing descriptions of the Sasanian force. Overall, there are few specifics: the poets

63 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 361.

64 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 361.

65 See al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 358. Such reworkings, and the adding and subtracting of lines, are quite common phenomena in early Arabic poetry.

66 Al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:75.

do not name the Arabian tribes whom they faced, and their handling of Persian-ness is both vague and tantalizing.

The pre-Islamic poems do not hearken Persian-ness in a materially "ethnic" sense, that is, actively "othered" to the Arabian warriors. There is neither intimation that the Sasanians lost because of ethnic inferiority, nor that Dhū Qār represented a culmination of protracted conflict between two different peoples, or a first Arabian victory over Persians. Such macro-historical vision was beyond the horizons of the pre-Islamic poets contemporary with the battle, and, pertinently, no poems represent the Sasanians as culturally different from the Bakr in appearance, habits, weaponry, tactics, or otherwise. The Bakr poets describe the battle in terms redolent with any inter-Arabian conflict, without evident "othering" of their foe. This is perhaps a function of (i) the large Arabian contingent allied to the Sasanians, and (ii) the fact that the poets of the Bakr subgroups do not express their identity in "Arab" or "Maʿaddite" terms. Arabness versus non-Arabness was not their concern: they were thinking primarily about clan, and took no discernible opportunity to remark upon the "ethnic" separateness of their foe.

The ways Bakr poets name the battle do indicate that they were fighting the Sasanians, however. The poets only infrequently summon the name "Dhū Qār" itself: they instead allude to it via terms such as *Yawm Kisrā*—the "Day of Khosrow,"[67] or (once) *Yawm Khanābazīn*—the "Day of Hormuz Kharād."[68] "Day" is the common Arabian byword for "battle," and so the poets are clear that they were engaged in a fight against the Sasanians, referenced either by the title of the shah or the name of his commanders. Similarly, Khosrow is the byword for the foe in two poems: first, by Abū Kalba of the Taym Allāh:

> The horsemen of the ʿIjl disdained
> To leave the field to Khosrow.[69]

The other, by al-Aʿshā relates:

> Who will inform Khosrow when my
> Dismaying messages come in:
> 'I say we will not surrender our boys
> As hostages to corrupt as he has done before.'[70]

Note here that the Sasanian monarch is a distant figure: neither poet intends that the Sasanian Empire was threatened by the battle, that Khosrow was the Bakr's intended target, and neither refer to traits of Persian-ness—Khosrow is simply the nomenclature for the foe. Similarly, the Sasanian commander Hāmarz is named in a pair of al-Aʿshā's praise poems of the Shaybān:

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67 Al-Aṣbahanī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:74.

68 Al-ʿAskarī, *al-Awāʾil*, 2:189. For explanation of the name, see above, note 11.

69 Al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:73.

70 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 279.

They were sufficient, when Hāmarz charged,
His flag fluttering above him, a diving eagle.[71]

Again, the poetry engages the names of Sasanian leaders without depicting them as different from the warriors of the Bakr.

The knowledge of the names of the Sasanian generals, coupled with the otherwise abiding lack of engagement with Persian-ness, entails that the poets articulate Sasanian *politics*, not Persian *ethnicity*. The poets knew the Sasanian Empire as the land of its shah and his commanders, but since their actual foe were a mixture of Sasanian and Arabian troops, the opportunity to perceive Dhū Qār as ethnic did not arise, and instead they chose to memorialize the conflict as one against the power of the Sasanian regime as a political entity.

The hypothesis finds further support in that terms expressly connoting "Persian" as people are strikingly absent in the pre-Islamic Dhū Qār poems. Arabic primarily refers to Iranians as either *Furs* (Persian) or *ʿAjam*/*Aʿājim* (non-Arabic speakers); the first term is absent, and a single reference to the second appears in the problematic poem noted above by al-Aʿshā, which is said to have been composed in the Umayyad era. It reads:

A mighty army of the vainglorious king
Of the *Aʿājim* with pearls in their ears
When they drew their hands to their bows
We clasped our swords and heads flew.[72]

The view of the editor of al-Aʿshā's poetry that deems the lines anachronistic seems right: the tropes invoked—reference to Khosrow's villainy and physical descriptions of Persians' axiomatically "non-Arab" garb—become established in Umayyad-era poems considered below, whereas such elements are lacking across all other pre-Islamic poems.

The style in which al-Aʿshā derides Qays ibn Masʿūd for siding with Khosrow is also noteworthy. We noted that Qays was a Sasanian border agent, and his status at the battle is unknown thanks to contradictory prose accounts; as for al-Aʿshā, he castigates Qays:

If you had been satisfied with Shaybān,
You would have spacious tents, a thronging tribe, and massed cavalry,
…
But you foolishly left them, though you were their leader.
I hope I hear no more from you![73]

These lines from a well-established poem suggest that Qays did fight for the Sasanians, and for our investigation, it is noteworthy that al-Aʿshā neither depicts him as a "traitor" who crossed ethnic boundaries, nor as a traitor at all; rather, Qays emerges as a fool for not trusting the might of Shaybān's warriors. And so the survey of poetry contemporary with Dhū Qār ends upon its most consistent theme: the Arabian

71 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 309. The second instance is noted above, note 54.

72 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 361.

73 Al-Aʿshā, *Dīwān*, 233–34.

combatants at the battle default to identifying themselves via clan allegiances. Even the macro-tribe of Bakr and the people of Maʿadd are not the primary labels which they used, and the putative difference between Arabian and Persian is not at all a salient feature. The magnification of Dhū Qār's significance on an ethnic level would take time and a seismic geopolitical change that shook the region over the following generations.

Dhū Qār in Early Islamic and Umayyad Poetry

Within two decades of Dhū Qār, Arabian armies again crossed the Euphrates, and this time, within the framework of Muslim conquest, they came to stay. A series of battles in Iraq, culminating at al-Qādisiyya in ca. 15/636 or 16/637 and Nihavānd in 21/642, drove the Sasanians over the Zagros, opened Iraq for the conquerors' settlement, and signalled the end of the Sasanian Empire. As noted at the outset of this chapter, medieval Muslim historiographers interpreted Dhū Qār as the portentous foreshadowing for the Muslim conquerors' success, but from the evidence of the sizable quantity of conquest-era poetry, it becomes difficult to maintain that the conquerors themselves actually had Dhū Qār on their minds or were cognisant of consummating the Bakr's earlier victory. According to my searches of al-Qādisiyya poetry, none draw connection with Dhū Qār: the oeuvre of the celebrated warrior poet ʿAmr ibn Maʿdī Karib, for example, contains two poems vaunting his prowess at al-Qādisiyya, and refers to the ethnonym *ʿajam* to express the Persian-ness of his foe, yet the poet makes no allusion to Dhū Qār.[74]

The absence of Dhū Qār in the conquest poetry tallies with our observations of Dhū Qār's status in pre-Islam. We saw that pre-Islamic poets did not memorialize the battle as an Arab victory over Persians, and at the dawn of the conquests, Dhū Qār simply did not yet exist in memory as an exemplar of Arabian frontier victory. Moreover, Dhū Qār was memorialized among the subclans of the Bakr, and during the Muslim conquest of Iraq, a sizable contingent of Bakr forces fought with the Sasanians.[75] Accordingly, the identity of the Muslim conquerors was not in fact aligned with the identity of the victors of Dhū Qār: the conquerors were not from the Bakr, and therefore they had no actual connection to or claim over Dhū Qār's memory. Though a grand sweep of Arabian-Persian history sees superficial similarities between the battles of Dhū Qār and al-Qādisiyya, the crucial consideration of peoplehood differentiates them. The battles involved different communities: Dhū Qār engaged clans of the Bakr, whereas al-Qādisiyya was won by Muslims from an array of different lineage groups. While the Bakr and the Muslims seem sufficiently homogenous as all "Arabians" from an outsider's perspective, they possessed different traditions and senses of community, and the absence of reference to Dhū Qār in poetry composed contemporaneously with al-Qādisiyya illustrates the

74 ʿAmr ibn Maʿdī Karib, *Shiʿr ʿAmr ibn Maʿdī Karib al-Zubaydī*, ed. Muṭāʿ al-Ṭarābīshī (Damascus: Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya, 1985), 114–15, 172–74.

75 Donner, "The Bakr b. Wā'il Tribes," 28–30.

separateness of communal memories, and thereby the differing identities of Arabian groups in nascent Islam.

Dhū Qār appears to have remained proprietary to the Bakr in the early Umayyad era too. The battle is not frequently mentioned in poetry, and is only found in poems ascribed to poets from the Bakr subgroups. Akin to the pre-Islamic context, the early Umayyad-era Bakr subgroups made competing claims about participation at Dhū Qār, epitomized in the example of a poet of the Yashkur, Suwayd ibn Abī Kāhil, who, around the time of ʿĀmir ibn Masʿūd al-Jumaḥī's governorship in Kufa (ca. 60–65/680–684), lampooned the Shaybān, claiming, among other boasts, that a warrior of the Yashkur killed Hāmarz, the Sasanian commander at Dhū Qār.[76] As noted above, the identity of Hāmarz's killer was unevenly reported in the sources, and the only evidence that he was felled by a member of the Yashkur is this poem. The Yashkur are otherwise essentially absent in the other battle narratives, and so this seems yet another attempt of a Bakr subgroup to muscle into memories of Dhū Qār. The continued dispute over the battle's memory demonstrates that Dhū Qār remained a memorable part of the Bakr's story in early Islam, though the details were sufficiently open-ended to permit creative reinterpretation.

By the late first/seventh century, however, and contemporaneous with the rise of the Umayyads' Marwanid dynasty, poetry does begin to reveal a novel proliferation of Dhū Qār's memory with new significations. For example, al-ʿUdayl ibn Farkh, a Marwanid-era poet of the ʿIjl, boasts:

> When the people recount all the battle days,
> None I hear are more glorious than Dhū Qār.[77]

In contrast to the pre-Islamic poets of the Bakr, al-ʿUdayl explicitly compares Dhū Qār to other Arabian battles.

ʿAdīl's choice to compare Dhū Qār with the victories of others is indicative of a novel communal context whereby groups marshalled their past victories in efforts to jockey for status. The Marwanid-era Bakr are no longer alone and Dhū Qār is no longer an intra-Bakr matter: the battle became a means to boast against non-Bakr groups.[78] Dhū Qār thereby becomes part of a larger pool of collective memory, and this process finds further expression in a line composed by a Marwaind-era poet of non-Bakr lineage, al-Marrār ibn Saʿīd of the Faqʿas, who cites Dhū Qār metaphorically, comparing his pangs of lovesickness to the travails of fighting at Dhū Qār.[79] No previous poet cited Dhū Qār apolitically or proverbially as a generic "great struggle"; the fact that the battle can stand as a decontextualized metaphor indicates a newfound currency of its memory among non-Bakr groups.

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76 See al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 14:117–20.

77 Al-ʿAskarī, *al-Awāʾil*, 2:190.

78 The importance of the Marwanid period for early consolidation of different Arabian identities into a more cohesive sense of Arabness is discussed in Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 126–56.

79 Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad Thaʿlab, *Majālis Thaʿlab*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Maʿārif, 2016), 208.

Reference to Dhū Qār by poets from non-Bakr lineages becomes a salient feature in the Marwanid period. One of the era's greatest poets, al-Farazdaq of the Dārim (d. ca. 110/728) expressly invokes memory of Dhū Qār to praise the Shaybān, and al-Qaṭāmī of the Taghlib (d. ca. 101/719) likewise expressly names Dhū Qār when extolling the Bakr as a macro-lineage.[80] The pair of poems is doubly noteworthy for our purposes. First, both poets use the exact same half-line to open their praise verses:

> They [the Shaybān] dismounted at Dhū Qār and fought steadfastly …

Both poets continue the line with their own compositions, but we witness here the emergence of a poetic stock phrase to signal praise of the Shaybān, revealing that Marwanid-era poets were sharing material about Dhū Qār, entailing that the battle was becoming established in cultural repertoire. Second, al-Qaṭāmī's clan, the Taghlib, had been enemies of the Bakr at the time of Dhū Qār and fought with the Sasanians, yet al-Qaṭāmī makes no reference to his own people's historic opposition to the Bakr: his lines only mention the "battalions of Khosrow" (*katā'ib Kisrā*) as the Bakr's enemy. In the same poem, al-Qaṭāmī cites other past events that evidence brotherly relations between the Taghlib and the Bakr, and thus, at a remove of only seventy years from the battle, the memory of enmity between Taghlib and Bakr was being overlooked, and emphasis instead placed on unity between the former foes, abetted by memorializing common antipathy toward the Sasanians.

Further seminal changes in Dhū Qār's status in memory and community appear from a poetic duel recorded between the two great poet-rivals, Jarīr (d. 111/729) and al-Akhṭal (d. ca. 92/710), wherein al-Akhṭal chides Jarīr's kin:

> Did you assist Maʿadd on the ferocious day,
> Like we supported Maʿadd at Dhū Qār?[81]

Al-Akhṭal elevates Dhū Qār to the status of Maʿadd's signature collective victory. Akin to Shakespeare's transformation of Henry V's St Crispin's Day escapade into a retrospective national triumph which any able-bodied Englishman should wish to have attended, al-Akhṭal's version of the battle presents it as waged by Maʿadd, in order to deride Jarīr's Ma'addite tribe for not participating. It is an obvious departure from the earlier poetry which clearly restricts Dhū Qār to subgroups of the Bakr, and moreover, al-Akhṭal was from the Taghlib—they had fought *against* the Bakr at Dhū Qār, but al-Akhṭal reverses this since the Marwanid-era Taghlib and the Bakr were both part of Maʿadd and their interests were unified under the Caliphate; hence Dhū Qār was reimagined as a victory of Maʿadd.

Jarīr's response to al-Akhṭal engages an even more extraordinary twist by inserting his own tribe, the Tamīm, into the memory of the battle:

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80 Al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 21:385; Al-Qaṭāmī, *Dīwān*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrā'ī and Aḥmad Maṭlūb (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1960), 125–26. See also ʿAli ibn al-Faraj al-Baṣrī, *al-Ḥamāsa al-Baṣriyya*, ed. ʿĀdil Sulaymān Jamāl, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Khānjī, 1999), 75.

81 Al-Akhṭal, *Dīwān*, 421.

I am a Muḍarī at root.
You cannot hope to vie with me and my prestige!
We sent the horsemen to battle at Dhū Bahdā and Dhū Najab
And we stood out on the morn of Dhū Qār.[82]

Jarīr's claim puzzled the later commentator Abū Tammām (d. 231/845)[83] who wondered how a Tamīmī tribesman could assert connection to the battle. Abū Tammām reasoned that there must have been a separate battle of the same name pitting the Tamīm *against* the Bakr,[84] but Abū ʿUbayda (d. ca. 210/825) attempted a bolder justification, citing a narrative that some Tamīm tribesmen were captured by the Shaybān before Dhū Qār, and, on the eve of battle, they offered to fight in return for their freedom, and, according to Tamīmī partisans like Jarīr, they acquitted themselves manfully.[85] This anecdote harmonizes with the other poetry of the Marwanid era evidencing a novel allure of Dhū Qār alongside wholesale reworking of its memory that raised the battle's reputation to a pan-Maʿaddite achievement into which different lineage groups sought to insert themselves in any way possible, even by claiming that they arrived at the battle as prisoners. Extending the St. Crispin's Day analogy, Jarīr's poem is reminiscent of Pistol's duplicitous intention to rebrand ignoble wounds as scars from Agincourt!

Al-Akhṭal's poetry also contains embellishment intoning that Dhū Qār achieved total victory over the Sasanians:

The squadrons of Khosrow approached enraged,
But we annihilated them, destroying all tyrants![86]

The Khosrow reference reflects the language of pre-Islamic poetry in which the shah's name was a byword for the Sasanian army, but al-Akhṭal's tone is more vehement. His reference to the Sasanians' annihilation could be standard poetic bombast, but the engagement of stronger emotions and stress on Khosrow's tyranny are themes which pre-Islamic poets did not elaborate; with al-Akhṭal enmity against the Sasanians is elevated, and the fact that the non-Bakr poet al-Akhṭal counts Dhū Qār as his people's primary victory underlines that the battle's memory was shifting toward pan-Maʿaddite glory against a now more uniformly projected Persian-Sasanian foe.

Explaining the shift has a straightforward logic. Marwanid-era poets lived at two generations' remove from the Muslim conquest of the Sasanian Empire, and poets such as al-Farazdaq, Jarīr, and al-Akhṭal were employed by the descendants of the conquerors. As the Marwanids looked back into the past, they possessed sufficient

82 Abū Tammām (attrib.), *Naqāʾiḍ Jarīr wa-l-Akhṭal*, ed. Anṭūn Ṣāliḥānī (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿ al-Kāthulīkiyya li-l-Ābāʾ al-Yasūʿiyyīn, 1922), 143.

83 Though ascribed to Abū Tammām, the book in which this opinion is contained is problematic, and may instead have been written by his contemporary al-Aṣmaʿī.

84 Abū Tammām (attrib.), *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 143–44.

85 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:646.

86 Abū Mālik Ghiyāth ibn Gawth al-Taghlibī al-Akhṭal, *Shiʿr al-Akhṭal (Riwāyat al-Sukkarī ʿan Ibn Ḥabīb)*, ed. Fakhr al-Dīn Qabāwa (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1996), 421.

hindsight to alight upon Dhū Qār as marking the "beginning of the end" of Sasanian power, and hence Marwanid-era poets and patrons were in a position to elevate the battle's significance beyond what its actual combatants could have imagined. In terms of peoplehood, it is noteworthy that al-Akhṭal and Jarīr invoke Maʿadd without mention of "Arab" to describe the victors at Dhū Qār. This supports the hypothesis that Maʿaddite identity only gradually evolved into "Arab" in early Islam: communal boundaries had changed by the Marwanid era, such that glories associated with individual tribes in pre-Islam were now counted as the property of a much wider super-tribal identity, but the primary sense of Marwanid-era peoplehood was Maʿaddite, not Arab.[87]

Other Marwanid-era poems exhibit similar shifts, emphasizing Dhū Qār as a grand Persian defeat without assertion of the Arabness of its victors. Ibn Ḥabīb records two poems attributed to minor Muslim-era poets from the ʿIjl that refer to Khosrow as *jabbār* (the despot), reflecting influence of the Qur'anic portrayal of Moses's Pharaoh to whom Khosrow was linked in Muslim literature.[88] The poets also paint the victory as a crushing blow to Persian imperial might:

> We took their booty, our cavalry was grim,
> On the day we stripped all Khosrow's knights (*iswār*) of their armour.[89]

Pre-Islamic poets neither referenced the evil of Khosrow, nor the whole might of Sasanian Iran, and they did not detail the Sasanian army in terms that "othered" it from the Bakr; the Marwanid-era poetry's *iswār*, *asāwira* cataphracts hearkens a term which Muslim-era literature summoned as a byword for Sasanian nobility. The ascent of express Persian-ness and reference to crushing defeat of the Sasanian Empire situate Dhū Qār within a sense of conquest history, and the poetry's vocabulary embedding the stereotypical *topos* of vainglorious Persian shah versus plucky Arabian warrior (Maʿaddite, not yet Arab) helps propel the foreshadowing of conquest in the memorialization of the pre-Islamic battle.

A final consideration relevant to late Marwanid-era poetry arises in a poem by Abū al-Najm of the ʿIjl (d. ca. 130/748). Abū al-Najm enumerates his clan's glory, and, in keeping with the venerable tradition of the ʿIjl dating back to pre-Islam, he accords Dhū Qār pride of place, with these verses:

> On the morn of battle, when ranks are drawn
> We are leading from the back, and defending the back.
> On the day of Dhū Qār, we outshone all the Arabs.[90]

His summoning of the ethnonym "Arab" to boast of the ʿIjl's performance appears to be the earliest verse in which Dhū Qār is explicitly associated with Arabness. Drawing

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87 For more details on the transition of Maʿadd to ʿArab as an ethnonym and term of self-identity, see Webb, "Ethnicity, Power and Umayyad Society," 74–84.

88 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:646.

89 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:646.

90 Abū al-Najm al-ʿIjlī, *Dīwān*, ed. Muḥammad Adīb ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Jumrān (Damascus: Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya, 2006), 87.

conclusions is difficult, however, since the entire poem runs to twenty-two lines, and it is only reported in a fragmentary fashion in premodern Arabic literature. No source contains the whole poem, and the poem's modern editor consolidated its verses from a wide array of sources. While many of the poem's lines were recorded in numerous sources, abetting confidence of their authenticity, the line mentioning Dhū Qār and "Arabs" is solely narrated in the late source, *al-Ḥamāsa al-Shajariyya*, complied by Hibat Allāh ibn ʿAlī ibn al-Shajarī (d. 542/1148).[91] As the line is a unicum from a sixth/twelfth-century text, whereas much of the rest of the poem is well and repeatedly represented in earlier literature, there is a strong possibility that the particular line was not originally composed by Abū al-Najm, and its reference to "Arabs" is anachronistic, and not the earliest poem to memorialize Dhū Qār as an Arab battle; especially since all other Marwanid-era poets associate Dhū Qār with Maʿadd. However, the end of the Marwanid-era was a period of shifting ethnonyms in Arabic poetry, and the first mentions of "Arabs" in poetry to intend a people do legitimately date from the early second/eighth century too, when "Arab" was also beginning to supplant "Maʿadd" as the term for the Caliphate's elite community. It would not have been unprecedented, therefore, for Abū al-Najm to identify the people at Dhū Qār as "Arabs," but even if the line is genuine, he would nonetheless be the only extant Umayyad-era poet to do so: the effective and express association of Dhū Qār with Arab identity was achieved under the Abbasids.

Dhū Qār in the Abbasid Period

The first explicit Arabness association with Dhū Qār can be dated to the late second/eighth century. The compiler of Arabian history, Abū ʿUbayda, is identified as the narrator of a hadith reporting the Prophet's words that Dhū Qār "is the first battle in which the Arabs have become the Persians' equal."[92] The hadith lacks *isnād* (chain of authorities), and so it is almost certainly an Abbasid-era invention, but it spread during the third/ninth century, acquiring both *isnād* and narrative additions along the way. Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845) reports Muhammad saying: "On this day the Arabs diminished Persian kingship,"[93] and Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ (d. ca. 240/853–854) further elaborates Muhammad's words: "Dhū Qār is the first battle in which the Arabs became the Persians' equal; they were granted victory through me."[94] This Prophet-assisted representation of Dhū Qār was included in the hadith collectors Ibn Ḥanbal's *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba*[95] and al-Bukhārī's *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, though neither collector included the hadith in their

91 Hibat Allāh ibn al-Shajarī, *al-Ḥamāsa al-Shajariyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿīn al-Malūḥī and Asmāʾ al-Ḥimṣī, vol. 1 (Damascus: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1970), 147.

92 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:640.

93 Ibn Saʿd, Muḥammad, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, vol. 7 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997), 54.

94 Ibn Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1993), 43.

95 Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍāʾil al-Ṣaḥāba*, ed. Waṣī Allāh ibn Muḥammad ʿAbbās, vol. 2 (Mecca: Markaz al-Baḥth al-Islāmī, 1983), 1045–46.

Musnad and *Ṣaḥīḥ* (collections which were compiled according to stricter standards of hadith authenticity).[96] Despite the dubious authenticity, subsequent historians would repeat the hadith, giving it a canonical footprint in the battle's memorialization.[97] The explicit Arabization of Dhū Qār's memory was thus expressed in tandem with prophetic history, and by the fourth/tenth century, this dual underpinning became more salient, for instance in a new and colourful anecdote (without *isnād*) which al-Aṣbahānī narrates:

> The battle was made manifest before Muhammad's eyes while he was in Medina, and he raised his hands and prayed for victory for the Shaybān (or the Rabīʿa). He continued making the prayer until he was shown the Persians' [*furs*] defeat.[98]

Al-Aṣbahānī also narrates a new account for the battle's beginnings, claiming it was sparked by the Arabs' collective "anger" (*ghaḍab*) at Khosrow's murder of the Arab frontier guard al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir.[99] The anachronisms are patent: no pre-Islamic poetry mentions that the Bakr's warriors were seeking revenge for al-Nuʿmān, and most of the Sasanian force were Arabians in any event; al-Aṣbahānī's rationalization of Dhū Qār as a manifestation of Arab anger could only have emerged once memories of the battle had been wholly Arabized, and once ethnic lines of division had been back-projected into the pre-Islamic past.

To further enhance the Arabization of Dhū Qār, Abū ʿUbayda and later narrators insert into the Dhū Qār narrative a poem attributed to the otherwise unknown pre-Islamic poet Bukayr al-Aṣamm, which includes the verse:[100]

> They attacked the *Banū Aḥrār*[101] on that day
> With sword thrusts to their heads;
> Three hundred Arabs against a squadron
> Two thousand-strong: Persians (*aʿājim*) from *Banū Faddām*.[102]
> Ibn Qays found a battle
> The fame of which was heard from Iraq to Syria.[103]

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96 Muḥammad al-Bukhārī, *al-Tārīkh al-kabīr*, vol. 2 (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1941–64), 63. Pointedly, he also reports the hadith without Muhammad's promise of future victory (8:313).

97 al-Yaʿqūbī, *al-Tārīkh*, 1:215, 225; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:193 (in a second version of the narrative copied from Abū ʿUbayda, al-Ṭabarī relates the hadith without Prophetic promise of victory, 2:207); see also al-Masʿūdī, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn, *Murūj al-dhahab wa maʿādin al-jawhar*, ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut: al-Jāmiʿa al-Lubnāniyya, 1966–79), § 648; Miskawayh, *Tajārib*, 1:160; al-Andalusī, *Nashwa*, 1:286; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 1:482.

98 Al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:76.

99 Al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 2:120.

100 I found no mention of Bukayr al-Aṣamm in the major poetry anthologies nor in the biographical dictionaries of poets. Reference to him in *al-Aghānī* is restricted to poems about Dhū Qār.

101 The "free born," a sobriquet of the Persians and a reference to their stereotyped nobility.

102 *Faddām* allegedly refers to the veils (singular *fīdām*) which Zoroastrian wine-servers would wear when pouring wine, and it became a (rare) sobriquet for "Persian."

103 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:645; see also al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:211; al-Aṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 24:73.

While it is impossible to prove the verse's Abbasid-era fabrication, there are several red flags. We have seen that "Arab" was not the ethnonym associated with the battle in earlier poetry, and certainly not in the pre-Islamic poems about Dhū Qār. Bukayr is also an entirely unknown figure, and an easy target for false ascriptions of poetry. Moreover, on a lexical level, the references to the Islamic-era nomenclature *Banū Aḥrār/Faddām* for Persians and to Iraq and Syria (a specifically Islamic-era division of space) resonate with Muslim-era tropes,[104] suggesting a Muslim-era date for the poem's creation. Accordingly, the poem's reference to "Arab," in distinction to the narrow tribal poetry of pre-Islam and the repeated Maʿaddite references of the Marwanid-era poets, seems yet another indication of its Abbasid-era invention to facilitate the Arabization of Dhū Qār's memory.

Dhū Qār's association with Muhammad was further entrenched via a new date postulated for the battle by the fourth/tenth century al-Aṣbahānī. Like all Abbasid-era narrators, al-Aṣbahānī is explicit in placing the battle within a narrative of Arab versus Persian, but he also dates Dhū Qār as contemporary with Muhammad's victory over the pagan Meccans at Badr in 2/624, elevating Dhū Qār to a pendant piece of Islam's most famous victory.[105] The story is almost certainly anachronistic—historians before al-Aṣbahānī were less specific and less symbolic as to the battle's chronology: Abū ʿUbayda dates it loosely to the period of Muhammad's prophecy (with no mention of Badr or Muhammad's *hijra* in 1/622), neither al-Yaʿqūbī (d. ca. 284–292/897–905) nor al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) date the battle, but al-Ṭabarī precedes the battle narrative with a telling section detailing signs of the Arabs' impending destruction of the Persian Empire. Al-Ṭabarī's placement of Dhū Qār as a significant way-marker in world history was replicated: both Miskawayh (d. 421/1030) and Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) situate the battle within a broader narrative of Persian doom. Al-Masʿūdī (d. 346/956), a historian contemporary with al-Aṣbahānī, likewise connects Dhū Qār to symbolic dates of the Prophet's career: either forty years after Muhammad's birth, shortly after the *hijra*, or four months after Badr.[106] In sum, the fourth/tenth century marked the period when Dhū Qār's association with both prophethood and conquest had been comprehensively articulated.

Dhū Qār was also memorialized in the Abbasid era in entirely non-historical, non-political contexts, which augment our considerations of the battle and peoplehood. The libertine poet Abū Nuwās (d. 195/814) twice names Dhū Qār, first in irreverent fashion:

> What's better than having camped at Dhū Qār?
> Camping at a tavern in the Anbār![107]

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104 For the signature Muslim-era emphasis on spatial narratives dividing along the Euphrates between *al-Shām* and *al-ʿIrāq*, see Peter Webb, "Pre-Islamic *al-Shām* in Classical Arabic Literature: Spatial Narratives and History-Telling," *Studia Islamica* 110 (2015): 135–64, at 158–60.

105 Al-Aṣbahānī dates Dhū Qār "a few months" after Badr (*al-Aghānī,* 24:72).

106 Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Naqāʾiḍ*, 2:640; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh*, 1:215, 225; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2:188–93; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, § 648.

107 Abū Nuwās, al-Ḥasan ibn Hāniʾ, *Dīwān*, ed. Ewald Wagner, vol. 3 (Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2012), 168.

The sentiment reflects the anti-heroic discourse typical of Abū Nuwās, who so frequently played the role of ritual clown and composed subversive poetry inverting heroic ideals and boasting of the glory of his bouts of drinking over the prototypical warrior poets' boasts of bouts of fighting.[108] The lines follow this trope: Abū Nuwās mocks poets who had boasted about Dhū Qār by countering that drinking at a tavern in al-Anbār (the region near Dhū Qār) would have been a worthier pursuit. Implicitly, however, we can tell that Dhū Qār must have enjoyed the status as one of the great battles in Abū Nuwās's cultural context, such that he would choose it as the specific vehicle for his satire.

Abū Nuwās's second Dhū Qār reference is equally subversive:

> The wine remembers Ṣiffīn, the Battle of the Camel
> And Dhū Qār too, with Hormuz the hero.[109]

He intends his wine's exquisite age: that is, it was already in the cask during the battles of the Camel and Ṣiffīn (36–37/657), even since Dhū Qār. Ṣiffin and the Camel were two of the most seminal battles of early Muslim history, and thus their citation to describe the antiquity of wine is highly irreverent parody, and again, the fact that Abū Nuwās chose to include Dhū Qār in the list indicates that the battle had attained the loftiest levels in the community's memory of its military past. Dhū Qār's transition into an object of satire by the late second/eighth century is, ironically, perhaps the clearest indication of the point when the battle had at last matured in collective memory as a pan-communal symbol of "great battle." Abū Nuwās was contemporary with Abū 'Ubayda's narration and the first appearance of the prophetically endorsed Dhū Qār hadith, and hence we can propose that the integration of Dhū Qār within a cohesive sense of Arab communal history was established some 175 years after the original battle.

Dhū Qār and Persian-ness

In closing, we visit the other side of Dhū Qār's ethnic binary: the Persians. Heretofore we have relied on Arabic testimony, but Abū Nuwās's poems connect us with counternarratives, particularly via his mention of Hormuz as the "hero" of Dhū Qār. Abū Nuwās presumably meant Hormuz Kharād, one of the Sasanian leaders killed at the battle, and while this seems a curious choice, it does squarely harmonize with Abū Nuwās's penchant for subversion. Counter to the energies expended by early Abbasid-era Iraqi historians to emphasize Dhū Qār's significance in both the Arab and Muslim story that established the battle as a cornerstone in the origin mythology of the ethnic and confessional identity of the Abbasid elite, Abū Nuwās again acts the ritual clown and aligns himself and his wine with memory of the Persians. The effort accentuates his

108 Andras Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 44–90.

109 Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, 5:528.

oft-repeated favouring of libertine life in taverns to Arabic poetry's stereotyped ways of the Arabian warrior hero. With a wink between the lines, Abū Nuwās's reference to the Persian commander at Dhū Qār as his "hero" betrays this rejection of Arab heroism, and thus again indicates, in reverse, what must have been the maturation of a "canonical" approach to conceptualizing Dhū Qār. The satire could not have worked unless a pro-Arab narrative had already been established, and his verse accordingly marks a cogent *terminus ante quem* for the widespread recognition of Dhū Qār as an "Arab victory." Abū Nuwās's professed support of the Persians also uncovers a role of Persian-ness in resistance against the norms of early Abbasid-era Iraq, thereby affirming that the status quo had been predominantly structured around Arabness and its triumphant opposition of Persians epitomized in the Dhū Qār story.

Abū Nuwās's satirical nostalgic reference to the bygone Persian heroes at Dhū Qār is a witty means to chide elite Arabness, but it remained a minority voice among all other poems and historical narratives of the Abbasid era which established Dhū Qār at the "beginning of the end" of the Sasanians, and at the beginning of triumphant Arab and Muslim hegemony. Against this backdrop, the next Persian-partisan voice emerges in the late fourth/tenth century with the Eastern Iranian historian Muḥammad Balʿamī (d. before 366/977). Balʿamī composed a New Persian translation of al-Ṭabarī's Arabic *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, the universal history from creation to the early fourth/tenth century, which, as noted above, situated Dhū Qār within narratives of the Sasanian Empire's collapse. Balʿamī's choice to translate al-Ṭabarī into Persian is an early sign of the rise of new Persian identity within the Muslim world, and his approach to al-Ṭabarī's Dhū Qār narrative offers unique insight into how Persians confronted the centuries of Arabic memorialization of the battle. Balʿamī does not follow al-Ṭabarī verbatim: he adds two highly pertinent passages to explain the Persian defeat.

First, Balʿamī explains that Khosrow selected the commander Hāmarz to lead the attack against the Bakr commander Hāniʾ ibn Qabīṣa on the basis of divination. According to Balʿamī, the divination of the name Hāmarz equalled "rise up" in Middle Persian (*Pārsī*), whereas Hāniʾ equalled "sit down"; hence, by appointing Hāmarz, Khosrow felt sure of victory.[110] Such forms of divination were common in the courts of rulers, both pre-Islamic and Muslim, but the insinuation in Balʿamī's narrative is that human divination was not capable of understanding what would transpire at Dhū Qār: a higher power was involved.

Balʿamī is explicit about this higher power in his narrative of what transpired in the Bakr's camp between the first and second days of the battle. He relates that the Bakr leaders, Hāniʾ ibn Qabīaṣa and Ḥanẓala ibn Thaʿlaba, received news of Muhammad's victory at Badr, and while neither Hāniʾ nor Ḥanẓala were yet Muslim, they were made aware that anyone who enters battle declaring Muhammad's name would be assured victory. In the morn, they instructed the Bakr to proclaim Muhammad's name as

110 Balʿamī, *Tārīkhnāme*, 2:822.

they charged the Persians, and this carried the day.[111] We can discount the account's historicity, but the effect of the story firmly places Dhū Qār within Arab salvation history, and Balʿamī's succeeding pages continue the theme: they report Gabriel informing Muhammad about the victory, and Muhammad's dispatch of a letter to Khorsow urging him to embrace Islam.[112]

Intriguingly, no Arabic narrative, either before or after Balʿamī, is so explicit that the Bakr's warriors themselves knew about Muhammad and/or expressly invoked the new faith at Dhū Qār. Perhaps this blatant Islamisation was a step too far and too unbelievable for Arabic historiography, but Balʿamī is unabashed in ascribing the victory to the Arabs' pseudo-embrace of Islam. Why Balʿamī chose this unique narrative is perhaps best explained from considerations of peoplehood. For a Persian speaker who evidently prided his Persian identity (given his decision to write history in Persian for Persian-speaking courtly patrons), Dhū Qār is technically an uncomfortable memory: it saw nomadic Arabians defeat the Sasanian Empire, and, as had been established by Balʿamī's day, it was the turning point after which Persian power was utterly eclipsed. The whole enterprise is unavoidably embarrassing if one was a Persian partisan; however, Balʿamī was also Muslim, and his narrative offers a reconciliation of two forms of identity. By projecting Dhū Qār as an essentially Muslim victory, Balʿamī can overlook the ethnic issues involved in Sasanians being defeated by Arabs—his version makes it clear that the Persians were not really fighting Arabs, they were instead on the wrong side of God's will. God had chosen the Arabs for victory under the name of Muhammad, and by invoking Muhammad's name, the Bakr appealed to divine power before which even the most august earthly power of the Sasanians was impotent.

Balʿamī thus saves face. He presents Dhū Qār as a battle between Arab and Persian, but he intones that the victor was God, and hence there was no *ethnic* winner and loser, but rather the religious force carried the day, the same religious force which the conquerors at al-Qādisiyya and Nihavānd would use again to defeat the Sasanians for the final time. Balʿamī thus reveals Persian partisanship: he evidently was uncomfortable enough with the established narrative of the Arabs' martial superiority such that he added an overt Islamisation of the victory. He thereby enables Dhū Qār to sit more comfortably within the collective memory of Muslim Persians of his day: they need feel no shame from memory of the defeat of their "ancestors" since Muslim Persians, via their embracing of Islam, had entered on the divine side too, and are thus assured to avoid the fate of their ethnic, but non-Muslim, forebears. Moreover, the lessons of Balʿamī's Dhū Qār narrative imply that once anyone (including Persians) embraces Islam, they join the right side of faith, and, at such a point—perhaps—the historic ethnic superiority of Persian-ness can come into play anew.

111 Balʿamī, *Tārīkhnāme*, 2:823.

112 Balʿamī, *Tārīkhnāme*, 2:824–25.

Conclusion

The stages of Dhū Qār's memorialization reveal a 300-year process whereby dim and mutable reflections of a pre-Islamic battle were gradually reshaped to convert a frontier clash waged by a limited group of subgroups of the Bakr against a composite force of Sasanian border guards into new guises that changed in step with the evolving organization of elite community in the Middle East. First, in the Umayyad period, the Caliphate's military elite imagined themselves as the people of Maʿadd, and they harnessed memory of Dhū Qār, reshaping it into a collective achievement, amenable to their efforts to unify the Caliphate's elite. Hence they could reorient memory of the battle from the narrow confines of the glory of a single tribe, or even just particular branches of that tribe, into a glory of Maʿadd, and as a harbinger of the Sasanian collapse from which the Marwanid-era elite derived their worldly authority. Then, as the Marwanid dynasty gave way to the Abbasids, senses of peoplehood were changing, as Maʿaddites and others were being reorganized into a new form of Arab community, underwritten by the now well-articulated doctrines of Islam. In turn, Dhū Qār was re-memorialized as a victory for the Arab people with explicit connections to the Prophet Muhammad and Islam's rise.

As groups who memorialized Dhū Qār and made its memory their own became more powerful and better articulated the trappings of ethnic identity, so the macro-historical significance of the battle increased. The story of Dhū Qār's historiography thus takes us to the heart of early Muslim-era myth-making which reconfigured memories of the past not just to explain the rise of Islam, but also to create an antiquity for Arab identity formed by consolidating tribal histories into a composite ethnic story of all Arabs. And in sum, Dhū Qār is a prototypical site of memory: its permanence in history has little relation to what actually transpired, but instead derives from the staying power of the people who later laid claim to it.