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Ninth-Century Abbasid Depictions

Of Jahiliyya Arabness

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Of Jahiliyya Arabness

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Ninth Century Abbasid

Depictions of Jahiliyya Arabness

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Abstract: Abbasid scholars began compiling complete histories of the Arab peoples for the first time in the eighth and ninth century. Prior to this, all histories of the Arab peoples had been passed down orally, through poetry and spoken histories. In compiling and writing these grand histories, ninth-century Muslim scholars were afforded a unique opportunity to editorialize historical Arab exemplars, and, by extension, editorialize Arabness. Armed with knowledge from the Qur'an, these Muslim scholars could imbue select famous historical Arab figures with Qur'an approved jahiliyya Arab traits while excising or modulating forbidden traits in order to present an ideal Arabness to which all Arabs might aspire. The three authors selected for this thesis are Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Ibn Hisham, and Ibn Sa'd. These authors all either wrote or edited grand scale historical compendia on the Arab people. The exemplars utilized by these authors all exhibited many ideal traits as per the Qur'an and Abbasid society in the ninth century, demonstrating retroactively that the Arabs were the perfect people to receive the final revelations of God. This thesis advances the theory that these ninth-century scholars' depictions of jahiliyya Arabness contributed to the ideal of Arabness today, and aid in our understanding of the relationship between Arabness and Islam.

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Introduction

The rise of Islamic historiography in the ninth-century C.E. marked a revolution in Islamic scholarship. Influential Islamic scholars began compiling complete histories of Islam, including extensive introductions of the peoples that first received the final revelations of God. Little had been written about the pre-Islamic Arabs prior to Islam because pre-Islamic Arab tribes passed their histories down orally. Muhammad as ruler, the four Rashidun Caliphs, and the Umayyad dynasty that followed were focused mainly on extension of the burgeoning Islamic empire and conversion of new peoples to the Islamic faith. By the ninth century, the Islamic empire had expanded considerably, and, after the transition of power from the Umayyad dynasty to the Abbasid Caliphate, saw the completion of the first universal histories (including those of *jahiliyya* Arabia). These depictions of the jahiliyya period in Arab history, that is, the period of "ignorance" before the inception of Islam, comprise the earliest collection of extensive writings about pre-Islamic Arab culture.

This thesis will focus on portrayals of Arab exemplars, which this thesis deems to be those Arabs portrayed as exemplary in conduct and personality, in the pre-Islamic period by various notable ninth-century Sunni Islamic historiographers who lived a significant portion of their lives in Baghdad. These exemplars will often be contrasted with foils that exhibit "negative" or undesirable pre-Islamic traits. Baghdad, founded in 762 C.E., was the capital of the Abbasid dynasty in the ninth century, during which time there took place a golden age of Islamic thought, writing, science and mathematics. Baghdad was, during the ninth-century, the undisputed center of this flourishing era, and many notable scholars began compiling, for the first time, a history of the Arab peoples and of Islam. The rise of Islamic historiography was tied to the rise of Islam.[1] In addition to *hadith* and commentaries on the Qur'an, several notable scholars compiled complete histories of the Arab people. This thesis asks: "how did these Muslim scholars, having the knowledge of the Qur'an, portray jahiliyya Arabs throughout history?" This question is significant because, as the first scholars to compile complete Arab histories, these scholars could editorialize the actions of prominent Arabs of the past, and thereby, to an extent, formulate *Arabness*, a concept of what it means to be Arab. As Franz Rosenthal pointed out in his work *A History of Muslim Historiography*: "The fact is that truth and falsehood are so ingenuously interwoven in Muslim antiquarian and early religious literature that no general rule can tell what is genuine and what is not."[2] Jonathan Berkey agreed with Rosenthal in his book *Formation of Islam*, noting that:

> In recent years, several scholars have cast serious doubt upon the accuracy of the traditional picture of pre- and early- Islamic Arabian society, much of it relying on those late Muslim sources. The problems with those sources, (beginning 150 years after the death of the Prophet) is that they were put together and used by Muslims to settle later controversies and to justify retroactively a Muslim heilsgechichte, and so reflect more what later Muslims wanted to remember than what was necessarily historically accurate. [He also references Patricia Crone's work here: *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* [203-30, 57-60]][3]

As Chase Robinson mentioned in *Islamic Historiography*, from the Muslim perspective, God was delivering the Arabs from jahiliyya.[4] The Arabic written narrative was highly anecdotal in nature[5], and Islamic scholars in the ninth-century could retroactively analyze exemplars from Arab history with the Qur'an as a guide to what pre-Islamic traits were magnified and what traits were forbidden or cautioned against.

The essay will focus primarily on the works of Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Ibn Ishaq by way of Ibn Hisham, and Ibn Sa'd. When considered together, the amalgamation of the analyzed selections in question will illustrate the first written depiction of pre-Islamic Arabness. Before commenting on the ninth-century portrayal of Arabness, it is vital to identify what Arabness refers to in this instance. Arabness, when defined in this thesis, is comprised of a combination of the intrinsic, inherently personal attributes of an Arab. A society of Arabs, then, naturally constitutes

Arab culture. This thesis will analyze attributes of Arabness in both the personal and the cultural context, but it will not offer an ethnic definition of an Arab or of Arabness. None of the writers in question ever overtly delineated Arab ethnicity. They referred to Arabs in their accounts with the presumption that the reader knew to what people they were referring.

Because the narratives analyzed in this work are so character oriented, this thesis will center on several prominent characters selected from each writer in question. Each selected character will be selected based on their representation of distinctly Arab traits, often with direct references to such traits as being *Arab*. The writers surveyed focus on these individuals as exemplars, to one degree or another, of the Arab before Islam. Once this Arab framework is established, it becomes clear that ninth-century Islamic historiographers intended a reader to acknowledge that the Arabs were noble, good-hearted people and were inherently worthy to receive the message of God. Any "flaws" the pre-Islamic Arab exhibited were merely due to the lack of Islamic refinement and guidance.

Defining "jahiliyya" and "Arab"

Jahiliyya has commonly been translated to mean "ignorance" and is a term which is defined by its opposite, Islam. Ignaz Goldhizer proposed that a more precise translation of jahiliyya is "barbarism" and compiled a significant amount of evidence from pre-Islamic poetry to support that definition. Before examining how Islamic scholars treated Arabness and jahiliyya in the ninth century, it is crucial to define jahiliyya Arab traits in detail.

> To the original audience of the Qur'an… it [jahiliyya] certainly referred primarily to the moral condition of those individuals and their society which led them to oppose the mission of the Prophet…It is also possible that the word was a kind of collective plural of "ignorant person" (jaahil), as has been asserted by F. Rosenthal.[6]

Whether the original antonym was *'ilm* (knowledge), as Goldhizer suggested, or *hilm* (moral reasonableness, self-control), *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* provides a long list of attributes which the Qur'an commonly ascribed to the Arabs of jahiliyya. Perhaps the most prominent jahiliyya traits of which the Qur'an was immensely critical was the fierce arrogance of the jahiliyya Arabs. According to the Qur'an, the jahiliyya Arabs were prideful to a fault and "wrongly suspicious of God, with a suspicion (zann) of the jahiliyya" (Qur'an 3:154). Those in the jahiliyya often associated al-Lat, al-'Uzza and Manat with Allah, which the Qur'an listed as the worst of sins, the one thing God would not forgive (Q4:48). Their prideful immutability extended not only to religious beliefs in gods and goddesses such as al-Lat, al-'Uzza, and Manat, but also to a sense of honor which they continually took too far. Even the slightest sense of injury to the sense of honor of a jahiliyya Arab would elicit an aggressive, often violent response. There was a distinct sense of stubbornness to this jahiliyya arrogance. While Muslims submit to God, jahiliyya Arabs were fiercely self-sufficient and independent, and many favored the traditions of their ancestors to monotheistic religions. A jahiliyya Arab was loyal first to tribe, then to religion, and many did not believe in the afterlife. However, not all jahiliyya traits were seen as inherently negative. Drinking alcohol and womanizing were two more jahiliyya traits that the Qur'an forbade. (Q5:90; Q17:32).

> The Qur'an, however, by no means rejects all the values of the pagan Arabs. At many points the concern is rather to redirect and moderate them. Nobility comes not from having noble ancestors whose deeds one emulates, but from deeds of piety as defined by God. (Q49:13)[7]

The Qur'an favors classically masculine traits such as courage, loyalty and fortitude. The Qur'an's response to the innate pre-Islamic sense of masculine honor is more nuanced. While honor was a virtue, that virtue could be taken too far and transformed into a vice if it led to honor-killings and blood vengeance. While retribution is permitted in the Qur'an, forgiveness is actively encouraged. Generosity and hospitality are two more pre-Islamic virtues that the Qur'an praises, but again they are moderated. One ought not to be so generous that the self is harmed by it. "Be neither miserly, nor prodigal" (Q17:29).

Review of Literature: Contemporary Scholarship

In 2014, Peter A. Webb, a PhD candidate at London University published *Creating Arab Origins, A Muslim construction of al-Jahiliyya and Arab History*. His doctoral thesis is well referenced and analyzes the construction of the pre-Islamic Arab by Muslim scholars dating from the death of Muhammad "from its stirrings post-Muslim conquest Iraq to the fourth/tenth century." While the three-hundred-fifty-five page work is insightful and engaging, the section pertaining to Baghdadi Abbasid scholars in the ninth century is fairly limited in scope. An important aspect of Webb's work is that he noted that "Arabic poetry itself gives little support to the idea of the inveterate "wretchedness" of al-Jahiliyya…they sing of honor, perseverance, generosity, martial prowess and even their good manners and hilm – supposedly the opposite of jahl."[8] Webb defends the notion that not all pre-Islamic Arab traits were negatively portrayed by early Islamic scholars:

> The pro-Arab agenda observed in al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba is a natural corollary of their explicit aim to defend Arabness, but several other third/ninth century texts on broader subjects narrate Arabian history before Muḥammad in a similar manner. Consider the long section on pre-Islamic Arabia in al-Yaʿqūbī's (d.275/888 or 292/905) world history, al-Tārīkh makes no derogatory associations with jahl.[9]

Rina Drory was an associate professor at Tel Aviv University. In 1996, Rina Droy wrote an article "The Abbasid Construction of the Jahiliyya, Cultural Authority in the Making." She traces the depictions found in ninth-century Baghdad through a series of Abbasid poets turned cultural anthologists. Droy asserted that because these anthologists were pressured to succeed in court, and because there existed during that time in Baghdad a sort of fond cultural remembrance of the desert and the desert way of life, these anthologists essentially fabricated a jahiliyya Arabness. Drory wrote:

> An increasing preoccupation with pre- Islamic erudition is discernible in eighth century Iraq, especially in its second half after the Abbasids came to power…The pre-Islamic past becomes an icon of "Arab" ethnic identity. Pre-Islamic poetry, which in classical Arab literature was long assigned the function of authentically representing the past, becomes a central prop for that icon, and consequently, a focus of literary attention and activity.[10]

Drory's focus in her article was centered on Jahiliyya poetry and historiographical works in ninth and tenth-century Baghdad. Apart from the work of the two aforementioned authors, there exists a surprising dearth of historiographical research on ninth-century Muslim historical portrayals of Jahiliyya Arabs. Most of the other published work on this subject is tangential, and often deals with depictions of jahiliyya in pre-Islamic Arab poetry, not in Muslim Arab penned histories.

This essay will contribute to the field of Islamic historiography by focusing on several scholars in ninth-century (and tenth-century) Baghdad specifically. Much of the philosophical side of modern Islamic historiography writers' work treats with the veracity or lack thereof of various hadith or Islamic histories. While this work is focused not on hadith, but histories, it is vital to provide some brief information on the various paradigms from which several contemporary Islamic historiographers operate. Insight from several Islamic historiographers will be interspersed throughout this work.

The histories that have been completely revamped and reconstructed by modern authors, such as *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* by Montgomery Watt[11], are fascinating works and often well referenced. They are, for the purposes of this essay however, not useful because they have been written completely by modern authors and any content drawn from the authors are seldom directly referenced/sourced directly in the text, if at all. Even if the historiographers in question are referenced, there is almost never an indication of what work the author is referencing, be it tafsir, historical collection or otherwise (or what section or page number for that matter). Because of these issues, this work will eschew Watt's "Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman" and other works of its kind.

The second category of re-touched works in this particular literary scope are those meticulously maintained as they were when they were first written, but those wherein modern commentary is offered prefacing each section as well as interspersed throughout the work. A good example of this sort of work is "The Making of the Last Prophet." This is a book edited and commented on substantially by Gordon Newby, with the majority of the text being derived or reconstructed from Ibn Ishaq's. Here we arrive upon an interesting situation. Ibn Ishaq wrote primarily in the eighth-century and much of his work, as it exists today, was edited and more widely dispersed in the early ninth-century by Ibn Hisham. Newby's work attempts to bypass the ninth-century reorganization by Ibn Hisham in order to ascertain the intentions of Ibn Ishaq more directly. This sort of work will also be avoided, as it is also too contemporary and subjective in the modern sense.

The third category of re-touched works were only reorganized and retouched by ninth-century scholars. This category consists of editions edited and published in the same century (or very nearly) that they were written. These were, of course, edited only by other Islamic scholars. This thesis will analyze one such work: Ibn Hisham's edition of Ibn Ishaq's *Biography of the Prophet Muhammad.*

Franz Rosenthal's main and longest work, this study on Muslim Historiography is divided into three principal sections. In the first section, Rosenthal asserts that Muslim historiography was a study born of continually evolving series of Islamic social processes. Rosenthal identifies these processes as the groundwork for his analysis of Muslim Historiography. The second two sections are basically his translations of Muslim historiographical works on Muslim history. This work will draw from the first section of Rosenthal's work, as well as acknowledge and utilize a version of his methodology.

Instead of focusing on what was written or taken down by Muslim historians throughout the history of the Islamic Empire, Chase Robinson examines why and how the process of Islamic history and historiography function. Why did the scholars write? How did they write? Robinson added much to the field of Islamic historiography by placing great emphasis on the social and political context of any Islamic historical text in question. While Robinson may have been somewhat reductionist as per his view on the "enormous" impact of the Sunni state in disseminating writings and shaping Islamic history, this work agrees that Islamic writings, especially those emanating from Baghdad in the ninth century, were impactful in shaping many Islamic and Arab perceptions today.

Objective

Little research has specifically analyzed the portrayals of jahiliyya Arabia by ninth-century Islamic Baghdadi historiographers. This thesis will place great significance on what the ninth-century writers thought because the goal of this thesis is to ascertain what knowledge was circulated throughout the Islamic academic communities of the ninth and tenth century and how such knowledge contributed to the first prevalent depictions of Arabness. This thesis isn't concerned with the reality of jahiliyya, only how ninth-century Muslim scholars sought to explain this era ex-post-facto.

When the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad, it carried with it a definition of *umma* that was linked with Arabness, as the Arabs were the chosen people onto which the final revelations were revealed. The Qur'an criticized many aspect of jahiliyya life, while praising others. Equipped with the knowledge of the Qur'an, scholars in ninth-century Baghdad were able to editorialize an ideal "Arabness" into Arab histories ex post facto, utilizing selected Arab exemplars. These exemplars exhibited ideal jahiliyya Arab traits as per ninth-century Islamic scholars, and were unilaterally receptive to monotheism, and to the teachings of the Qur'an.

Organization

The essay will be divided into three chapters, each devoted to one of the prominent ninth-century Baghdadi Sunni Abbasid scholars listed in the methodology section. Each chapter will consist of several sections, each based on historical narratives centered on one or more notable historical exemplars from the jahiliyya period. These characters will be analyzed in relation to how the depiction of each contributed to the ninth-century depiction of pre-Islamic Arabness. Modern authors' content or insight will be selected depending on the relevance of their work to the topic at hand.

Methodology

Abu Jafar Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari was born circa 839 C.E. and his work went beyond the ninth-century. He died in 923 C.E.[12] While this thesis will refer to all three authors surveyed as ninth-century Baghdadi scholars, it is important to immediately acknowledge that al-Tabari worked in both the ninth and tenth century. The first section of the essay will focus on his series, *The History of the Prophets and Kings*. Al-Tabari was a prolific ninth-century/tenth-century Islamic scholar and polymath who wrote about a wide range of subjects, from ethics to grammar and mathematics. While he studied many of the Islamic schools of thought, he never selected one to write from. He traveled extensively throughout the Middle East during his lifetime, but lived much of it in Baghdad. Al-Tabari's life work consists of forty volumes which chronicle the history of the Arab peoples and the progression of Islam up to the tenth century. The Prophet Muhammad is introduced at the end of his al-Tabari's fifth volume. After the revelations, and the advent of Islam, al-Tabari's narrative shifts from the Arabs of jahiliyya. This essay will draw primarily from tales of jahiliyya Arabs in his fifth volume as well his fourth volume. These two volumes contain four of the most pertinent and fascinating examples of al-Tabari's version of Arabness.

The section of the essay devoted to al-Tabari will be divided into four main sections, each outlining a different set of Arabness attributes. The first section will center on Jadhimah, al-Zabba' and Qasir and address the culturally Arab themes of wine, gender roles, and blood feuds. The second section will revolve around the Persian King Bahram, and relate intelligence, courage and valor to Arabness, juxtaposed with al-Tabari's depiction of Persians as effete, treacherous and cunning. The Abrarah (alternatively spelled Abraha) section will address the importance of the spirit of the law in a community, as well as establish the Quraysh as an honorable and worthy tribe. The section on Muhammad describes the ideal pre-Islamic Arab exemplar who exhibits a natural inclination toward monotheism.

Taken together, these sections will constitute al-Tabari's intended conception of pre-Islamic Arabness. The most favorably portrayed Arab traits al-Tabari portrays in his exemplars were later praised by the Qur'an, while the most negatively portrayed traits were forbidden by the Qur'an. In this way, al-Tabari knowingly and retroactively demonstrated the worth of Islam to the Arab people and the world, and substantiated Islam as the final refinement of monotheism.

Al-Tabari often referenced Ibn Ishaq in his *History of the Prophets and the Kings.* While Ibn Ishaq lived and wrote before al-Tabari, the thesis will analyze his work second. Ibn Ishaq was born in 704 C.E. in Medina. He spent much of his early life as a soldier and travelled extensively throughout the Middle East. He spent the remainder of his life collecting hadith and writing histories. He did operate extensively out of Baghdad after its foundation as one of the first noteworthy scholars to take up residence in the new Abbasid capital. Unlike in al-Tabari's *History of the Prophets and Kings*, Ibn Ishaq often directly referenced divine intervention in his histories.[13] Because of this, the intentions of his stories are less difficult to ascertain at times than those of al-Tabari.

While the works in this section will be those written by Ibn Ishaq, it should be noted that they were edited by Ibn Hisham, an influential Baghdadi scholar in the ninth-century C.E.[14] While the writing itself is centered on Muhammad, this thesis will place the greatest emphasis on the juxtaposition between the qualities of Arabs without Islam and those who were converted to Islam. Many of the same themes emerge surrounding such a juxtaposition emerged in al-Tabari's work, however, instead of referencing specific Qur'anic themes, the section on Ibn Hisham's edition of Ibn Ishaq's compendium will center on the depiction of how God preferred monotheists to pagans in pre-Islamic times. While al-Tabari focused not only on Arabia as a region but the whole of the Middle East in the pre-Islamic times, Ibn Ishaq seemed to focus more heavily on religious themes pertinent to Islam in the areas most pertinent to the beginnings of Islam.

Ibn Ishaq began his *Biography of the Prophet Muhammad* with a lengthy account of monotheistic history that predated Muhammad, including the creation story. Most of the material revolved around the life of the prophet or else the spread of early Islam and how it encountered resistance or did not within various Arab tribes. In this regard, the essay will examine Ibn Hisham's portrayal of several Arab exemplars, as well as how divine fire highlighted the piety of these exemplars and the truth of monotheism. As with the portrayals of Arabs in al-Tabari's work, clear themes emerge about what it means to be more Arab. While honor, lineage, beauty and wealth are consistently valued as noble Arab qualities, blood vengeance and petty jealousy emerge as poisonous traits. In this section we will observe two distinct sorts of Arabs, those who are more inclined toward monotheism and therefore hesitant and resistant to indulge in blood vengeance as well as Arabs that are recalcitrant, unwilling to accept the word of Allah without concrete evidence, and prone to murderous jealousy or blood vengeance. A large portion of the section on Ibn Hisham will be devoted to two central Arab figures, "The Tubba" and Qusayy. The Tubba was last of his noble lineage and he was the first Yemeni king to convert to monotheism and bring it to Yemen. The section on The Tubba will be classified under a classic motif that Ibn Hisham used over and over again, the divine trial by fire. The Tubba not only experiences physical trials (a sort of metaphorical trial by fire) but he also experiences a physical trial by fire, wherein the rabbis who converted him are thrown into a large furnace to determine whether or not the monotheist god is real.

The Qusayy section, while shorter than it will be in the Ibn Sa‘d section, is focused on a noble Arab other than Muhammad, who was a member and eventually leader of the Quraysh and who was a noble exemplar of Arabness and the natural Arab receptivity to monotheism. Qusayy rose from humble origins to become the leader of Mecca in all aspects.

Ibn Sa‘d was born in 784 C.E. and died in 846 C.E. He was a student of, among others, Al-Azraqi's tradition.[15] He was a Sunni Muslim scholar and Arab historian. Like al-Tabari and Ibn Ishaq, he lived much of his life in Baghdad. Unlike Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Sa‘d was known for almost exclusively utilizing material with *sahih* or *hasan* (sound or strong) *isnad*s (chains of transmission). This essay will select from his compendium of biographies those of Muhammad as well, and compare Ibn Sa'd's portrayal of Jahiliya predating and surrounding Muhammad with Ibn Ishaq's.

Ibn Sa'd's version of events often differs in slightly and yet interesting ways with Ibn Hishams' recounting of the same events. While this may indeed by innocent, little differences in the way certain stories are framed may indicate different processes between the two authors in how Arabness is defined and the amounts of importance placed on various factors. Overall, it appears that al-Tabari focuses on the nobility of the pre-Islamic Arab, placing the characters as central to the story. Ibn Hisham focuses on the receptivity of the pre-Islamic Arab to monotheism, placing the story as central to the characters, i.e. egos always take a back seat to events and to God's judgement. Ibn Sa‘d emerges as a medium between these two. Ibn Sa‘d's histories tend to be more character driven than Ibn Hisham's works, but more piety oriented than al-Tabari's narratives.

Chapter 1: History of the Prophets and the Kings by Abu Jafar Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari

This chapter will focus on the ninth-century Muslim historiographer Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari's portrayals of Arab exemplars in the pre-Islamic period that, when considered together, illustrate a pre-Islamic Arabness. This work will attempt to demonstrate that by arranging numerous depictions of pre-Islamic characters in al-Tabari's collection, a reader can glean al-Tabari's portrayal of the Arab as innately brilliant, classically masculine, courageous, and honorable, but in need of the divine guidance of the Qur'an to be perfected. This chapter will draw primarily from material in the fourth and fifth volumes of al-Tabari's collection. The first section will center on Jadhimah, al-Zabba and Qasir and address the culturally Arab motifs of wine consumption and blood feuds, how gender roles modulated the conception of Arabness portrayed by al-Tabari, and how al-Tabari depicts themes of Arabness that would be refined through Qur'anic guidance. The second section will revolve around the Persian King Bahram, and outline the personal Arab traits of classical masculinity, intelligence, courage and valor, juxtaposed with al-Tabari's ascribed Persian traits of effete trickery and cunning. The section on the Abyssinian Abrarah will compare lawfulness with the innate Arab sense of honor and establish the Quraysh as an exemplary, honorable tribe. The Quraysh were a tribe that continually increased their prestige and influence in Mecca until they became the de facto guardians, regulators and protectors of the city. The section on Muhammad describes the ideal pre-Islamic Arab exemplar who exhibits a natural inclination toward monotheism and is forthright, earnest and steadfast. Taken together, these sections will constitute al-Tabari's intended amalgam of pre-Islamic Arabness.

The Many Lessons of King Jadhimah

In this section, we will observe al-Tabari's depiction of the Arab King Jadhimah. This is a good place to start, because it established both the positive traits that are naturally occurring in this exemplary Arab as well as exposed his blind spots, the ways in which he may have been aided by the wisdom of the Qur'an. Apart from drawing from the Qur'an and defining Arabness by its opposites, al-Tabari often seemed to frame his narratives with gender in mind. The story surrounding Jadhimah will also be useful in identifying and outlining many of the gender role motifs that pervade al-Tabari's writing and how they fit in with al-Tabari's portrayal of Arabness.

The Arab King Jadhimah was a ruler of a kingdom somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula. A wise and just ruler, he was universally revered within his kingdom and his people referred to him either as "The Illuminated One" or else the "The Speckled One," due to his leprosy. He was not only the political ruler of his people, but also held spiritual authority as a soothsayer. His throne was flanked by two religious idols which the people worshipped and petitioned for victory in battle. One evening, Jadhimah threw a party. His sister, Raqash, noticed a handsome young Arab named Adi at the party and introduced herself. Spurred by passion, Raqash immediately confessed her love to Adi and found it to be requited. She begged Adi to petition the king for her hand in marriage, but Adi refused her out of fear and respect for Jadhimah. Raqash was undeterred. She devised a plan to get Jadhimah drunk on his own wine. When Jadhimah was too drunk to be truly aware of his surroundings, Adi would petition him for his sister's hand in marriage. The plan worked and Adi received Jadhimah's drunken marriage blessing. The next day, when Jadhimah returned to his senses, he inquired after what had occurred the previous night. Raqash confessed her plan and Jadhimah was outraged by her deceitful trickery. Adi fled in fear of retribution and was never found. Raqash insisted that she had only attempted such a plan because she had no control over her life or power in making her own decisions. Jadhimah recognized her plea and forgave her.[16] Jadhimah, here, represented an Arab man who was honorable and merciful, but also susceptible to being tricked because he hasn't been properly instructed on personal conduct by the Qur'an.

Several verses exist in the Qur'an that are dissuasive of alcohol consumption, such as in the *Surat al-Nisa* which stipulates, among other things, that it is forbidden to pray while intoxicated (Q4:43). Some more pertinent examples can be drawn from the *Surat al-Baqara* and the *Surat al-Maaida*. A passage drawn from the *Surat al-Baqara* states: "They ask you about wine and gambling. Say, 'In them is great sin and (yet, some) benefit for people. But their sin is greater than their benefit.'…Thus Allah makes clear to you the verses [of revelation] that you might give thought" (Q2:219). In the *Surat al-Maaida* it is stated:

> O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, (sacrificing on) stone altars (to other than Allah), and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful. (5:91) Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling and to avert you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. So will you not desist? (Q5:90-1).

It is clear that if Jadhimah had been privy to, and adhered to, these passages, he never would have allowed himself to become drunk and the whole issue could have been avoided. Thusly al-Tabari illustrated that even the greatest, most venerable of kings was still in need of, and would have benefitted from, the divine guidance of the Qur'an.

Jadhimah was an ambitious, enterprising king and he decided to raid the lands of Amr ibn Zarib in modern southern Iraq. His forces scattered Amr's, and during the raid Amr was slain. Jadhimah and his men returned to their kingdom laden with riches pilfered from Amr's kingdom.[17] After the death of her father, al-Zabba ibn 'Amr reigned in southern Iraq. In the first few years of her reign, she set up a fortress on the Euphrates and went about making sure her reign was completely secure from within. After she was satisfied that she was cemented as ruler of her kingdom, she decided to attack Jadhimah in retaliation for the death of her father.[18] Jadhimah killed her father, and had therefore instigated a blood feud with al-Zabba, and she swore vengeance. Her sister, al-Zabibah, cautioned her against war, advising that it was too risky. Al-Zabba assented to her sister's advice and instead "approached the matter by way of duplicity, treachery and craftiness."[19] Al-Zabba's intrinsic Arab courage was not in question here. She was happy to go to war. But here al-Tabari's portrayal of her gender trumped his portrayal of her Arabness, and she decided to indulge in dishonorable trickery to attempt to achieve her ends similar to the feminine trickery employed by Raqash.

Al-Zabba wrote a letter to Jadhimah claiming that she wished to reconcile their two kingdoms by joining them. She offered for Jadhimah to join her in her kingdom so that she might hand power over to him personally. Jadhimah's astute advisor, Qasir, warned Jadhimah that it was obviously a trap and proposed that Jadhimah reply that al-Zabba come to Jadhimah's lands if she truly wanted to reconcile and unite. Jadhimah dismisses Qasir's warning by telling Qasir "you are a man whose opinion is cautious, not enterprising."[20] Jadhimah journeyed to meet with al-Zabba in her lands and al-Zabba betrayed his trust, slicing his wrist and murdering him in cold blood. An oracle had warned al-Zabba that if she didn't collect all of Jadhimah's blood as it fell before it hit the sand, then she would be killed in retaliation for her murder. Al-Zabba' attempted to collect Jadhimah's blood in her perfume container, but missed a drop and it fell to the sand.[21]

Amr ibn-Adi and Amr abd al-Jinn were the leaders of the two factions of Jadhimah's kingdom after Jadhimah's death, but the people eventually sympathized with and organized under the banner of Amr ibn-Adi. Amr ibn-Adi then recited a verse that Abd al-Jinn answered by acknowledging the sanctified Christ, son of Mary.[22] This indicates to us that al-Tabari favored the monotheist cause of Amr ibn-Adi and Amr abd al-Jinn thereafter because, as we will see continually throughout the essay, the ideal Arabs are naturally inclined toward monotheism. While Christianity and Judaism are considered religions “of the book” in Islam, they are considered Islam’s less perfect counterparts. Qasir, ever the faithful servant of his deceased lord, devised a cunning plan to get revenge against al-Zabba. It is vital to note that while Qasir’s plan for blood vengeance is based in deception, the same as al-Zabba’s, al-Tabari did not depict Qasir as duplicitous, treacherous or crafty like he did al-Zabba. Al-Zabba’s soothsayers make some mention of a vile, disloyal man taking vengeance on her, but it isn’t Qasir to whom they are referencing. Additionally, it is al-Zabba’s soothsayers who described the revenge-taker in such terms, not al-Tabari himself, as was the case with al-Zabba.

Qasir devised his cunning plan. He sliced off his own nose and ears and told ‘Amr ibn-Adi that he would pretend that he had been mercilessly punished for encouraging Jadhimah to meet with al-Zabba, the opposite of what he truly had done. After he gained al-Zabba’s trust, he planned to arrange an ambush where ‘Amr would be able to murder al-Zabba in vengeance. Qasir journeyed to al-Zabba’s lands and petitioned her for mercy, pitching her the story he’d crafted. She accepted him into her kingdom and treated him well. After a time, Qasir suggested that he begin to make journeys back to his homeland and return with luxuries to be imported. She agreed, and on the third return voyage to her lands from his, Qasir hid several men, including Amr ibn-Adi, in a series of body sacks meant to seem like caravan cargo. In a strategy not dissimilar to that of the Trojan Horse, Qasir smuggled the men into al-Zabba’s quarters and there they spring the trap. While al-Zabba attempts to take her own life by sucking poison from one of her rings, ‘Amr plunges his sword into her and kills her, bringing the blood vengeance full circle and demonstrating that al-Zabba’s feminine trickery ultimately brought about her own demise.[23]

Blood vengeance in this tale was harmful to all involved. Jadhimah’s people lost their beloved king, Al-Zabba lost her life, and Qasir lost his ears and his nose. While violence in the Qur’an seems to be permitted against unbelievers, as seen in a passage selected from the *Surat al-Anfal* (Q8:12), revenge killings and homicides that are not in defense of the faith are forbidden by the Qur’an. This is demonstrated many times throughout the Qur’an, but two notable examples are: “And the retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation - his reward is (due) from Allah . Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers (Q40:42) and “Who spend (in the cause of Allah) during ease and hardship and who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good” (Q3.134). Blood vengeance is a negative consequence of a positive, innate Arab trait: honor. It is thus that Islam refines Arabness by guiding that innate sense of honor.

Because al-Zabba was taking over for her father and ruling in his place, al-Tabari takes no issue with her on the point of rulership. She was merely guarding her father’s domestic holdings in his absence (death). However, when al-Zabba attempted to utilize duplicity and deceit, she meandered away from al-Tabari’s depiction of Arab forthrightness and courage, or perhaps demonstrated a distinctly feminine abuse power as something naturally occurring. Al-Zabba’s treachery is juxtaposed against a portrayal of Arabness by al-Tabari that is, in general, quite masculine.

King Bahram the Persian Turned Arab

As a babe, Bahram, son of the Persian king Yazdajird, was taken to Arab lands by one of the King's counselors, al-Mundhir, to be suckled by two Arab women known for their beauty and intelligence (and a Persian one) and raised in Arab lands. Bahram was, by al-Tabari's account, a handsome, strong, supremely intelligent youth.[24] Bahram summoned al-Mundhir one day when he was five years old and bade him bring forth from Persia the finest instructors in writing, archery, and the knowledge of law. By age twelve, Bahram learned so much from his Persian teachers that they all considered him smarter and more knowledgeable than they. Al-Tabari continually references Bahram's link to Arab culture and his development of Arab traits while living in the Arabian Peninsula. "His education was solely in Arab ways, so that his nature is like the Arab's nature, seeing that he has grown up among them."[25] Al-Tabari also highlighted Bahram's interest in Arab horses and their pedigrees. Bahram's link to Arab horses was drawn upon several times throughout the course of al-Tabari's narrative and his armies were always comprised of mostly if not all horsemen, usually Arab horsemen. While this isn't directly connected to Bahram's Arab traits, it does further link him to Arab culture.

When Bahram was apprised of Yazdajird's death, he was in the Arabian Desert. He was told that the Persians had gone ahead and elected a new king for themselves without consulting Bahram, who was in contention by bloodline for the throne. The Arabs had been comparatively well treated under Yazdajird, and Bahram reminded them of this, and of Bahram's own steady and strong governance in Arabia. Bahram raised an army of Arab cavalry, marched to the royal Sassanid cities of Ctesiphon and Bih-Ardashir, and demanded that he succeed his father as ruler of the Sassanid Empire. The head of Yazdajird's chancery, Juwani, came before Bahram. "The sight of Bahram's handsomeness and splendid appearance reduced him to a state of alarm and, out of confusion, he forgot to prostrate himself before Bahram. Bahram realized at that moment that Juwani had only omitted the prostration because he had been awe-stricken by his own outstandingly beautiful form."[26]

It is interesting to note that nearly all the exemplary figures representing Arabness are considered to be handsome. When the people beheld Bahram's classically Arab traits of "strength, bravery and boldness," they assented to listen to Bahram. Bahram suggested that he and the crown-prince-turned-king, Kisra, should both attempt to snatch a crown from between two lions to determine who the rightful ruler was. This was not only symbolic of a battle between Arab and Persian masculinity, strength, and honor, but considering the lion as a sacred symbol, it was also a test to see who was divinely ordained to rule.

There is a short scene before Bahram's fight with the lions that depicts a juxtaposition between Persian and Arab traits and highlights al-Tabari's association of Arabness with manliness and Persian traits with effete cunning. Once the fierce, hungry lions were brought in, Bahram offered to Kisra that "you have first go at the crown and regalia!"[27] The exclamation point here implied a loud, confident tone. Bahram's offer that Kisra go first was generous, confident and honorable. Bahram was offering Kisra respect here by honoring Kisra's claim to the throne, and showing that if Kisra truly had what it took to be king, Bahram would follow him. Bahram was also asserting his masculinity by guiding the tense moment, making the first move and psychologically asserting his dominance over Kisra. Kisra, however, refused the manly offer. "It is more fitting that you should have the first attempt at getting them for yourself, because you are seeking royal power by right of inheritance, while I am usurper in regard to it."[28] It is possible that Kisra was being polite and attempting to be honorable himself, but from the context it is extremely probable that he was fearful for his life and did not want to risk it. Strategically, Kisra believed his approach to the situation to be superior. Bahram could stroll in and battle with the lions first. At best, Bahram would be killed and Kisra could finagle his way out of the contest because he would now be the undisputed king. Perhaps Bahram and the lions would have a long, drawn out fight, and after Bahram fell, Kisra could be there to kill the wounded lions, further solidifying his position as king by adding a sense of divine providence. While it was possible that Bahram prevails, to Kisra's mind, it probably seemed unlikely. Bahram possessed only a mace, while the two lions hadn't eaten in a long time… So we see an example where al-Tabari juxtaposed his depiction of Bahram's Arabness with his depiction of Kisra's Persian cunning and opportunism.

Bahram was unconcerned, however, because his version of strategy came not from a place of fear, but of strength, courage and self-confidence. "Bahram had nothing against his words because of his confidence in his own bravery and strength. He took up a mace and made toward the crown and regalia."[29] From this paradigm, Bahram may be seen as the superior strategist. He was optimistic to his core, and because of that, perceived the situation such that now he got first attempt at the lion and Kisra never had a chance. The outcome, then, was up to Bahram, if he was truly worthy of leadership.

Bahram boldly strolled into the lions' den and "kept on dashing its (the lion's) head against the head of the other lion on which he was riding until he had battered out their brains; then he killed them both by raining blows on their heads with the mace he had with him. This action he did before the eyes of Kisra and all the persons assembled for the occasion. After that, Bahram took up for himself the crown and regalia. Kisra was the first to call out to him, saying, 'May God grant you long life, Bahram…'[30] Another act of cowardly opportunism by Kisra. Now that it was clear that Bahram was powerful, and Kisra could do naught but submit. The way al-Tabari depicted this narrative, in the glory of true Arabness, al-Tabari's version of *Persianness* could do nothing but submit in awe. By placing value on such classically masculine positive traits like nobility, strength and valor, al-Tabari framed the Arabness that Bahram represented as stronger than, and considered superior to, the traits of Persianness with which Arabness was clearly defined by contrast.

The Abyssinian General and the Spirit of Honor

According to al-Tabari, after the Abyssinian invasion of Yemen, the Abyssinian forces occupying Yemen divided themselves into two principal factions, one under Aryat and the other under Abrarah. Abrarah, seeking to settle the matter in his favor, called out Aryat to face him in single combat. Al-Tabari does not offer any judgmental commentary or criticism against Abrarah here, even though Abrahah planned to use trickery similar to that utilized by al-Zabba'. It may be extrapolated that because Abrarah is a man, not a woman, al-Tabari allowed him to utilize a feminine sort of trickery, not unlike the pass which Qasir was granted earlier in al-Tabari's narrative. This favoritism of the male gender that al-Tabari exercised is consistent with his portrayal of masculinity as being a cornerstone of innate Arabness. In the narrative, al-Tabari merely identified that Abrarah planned to "act deceitfully."

Aryat agreed to come to the duel, which was isolated in the desert. Abrarah prepared his trusted slave, whom al-Tabari refers to only as '.r.n.j.d.h (perhaps his attempt at a phonetic transliteration of the name? As we will see in depictions of this same event by Ibn Hisham later in this thesis, such a suggestion is doubtful), to ambush Aryat while the two face off. When Aryat arrived, 'r.n.j.d.h. emerged from his hiding spot and slew Aryat. Abrarah's treachery is dishonorable, quite un-Arab, and an informed reader should know that this is foreshadow of Abrarah's eventual doom.

Abrarah was pleased by his slave's capability and informed his slave that any boon he desired, Abrarah would grant. "I claim the right to sexual intercourse with every woman of Yemen before her marriage with her husband." replied 'r.n.j.d.h. "Abrarah replied, 'I concede that to you.'" Here is the first prominent example of Abrarah keeping his word and honoring the letter of the law, while dishonoring the spirit of the law.

Abrarah disrespected both the women of Yemen and their newly-wed husbands by granting 'r.n.j.d.h. the privilege of *prima noctus.* 'r.n.j.d.h. continued to enforce this right for a long period, until the people of Yemen rose up against him and killed him, "(when) Abrarah said (to the folk of Yemen) 'The time has at last come for you to act as free men.'"[31] In this section, we note the first two instances of Abrarah acting without breaking any laws, but not within the spirit of the law. Abrarah, by tempting Aryat into the desert and luring him into a death trap, was breaking no actual law. He was, however, not acting in the spirit of his word and was being dishonorable. Abrarah never broke his word to 'r.n.j.d.h. directly, but instead encouraged the people of Yemen to rise up and murder 'r.n.j.d.h., and he praised their actions after the fact. It is highly probable that Abrarah encouraged the Yemenis to do this because 'r.n.j.d.h.'s pre-marriage rights were acerbic to public order, and perhaps also to the Yemeni Arab sense of honor.

Al-Tabari highlighted Abrarah as a counter-example to true Arab honor. The innate Arab sense of honor, which was both personally and culturally manifest, was the perfect precursor to Islamic law guidance because it sought the submission to not only the letter of divine law, but the spirit of divine law. Abrarah represented a non-Arab in Arab lands who was lawful, but not honorable, and thereby exposed the need for a set of honorable laws which reinforced the notion that one should act within the spirit of the law. Because Abrarah was a dishonorable man, no matter how lawful he was, no matter how he adhered strictly to the letter of his word, al-Tabari would eventually punish him.

Abrarah received word that his king was displeased and had sworn to punish Abrarah with death. Abrarah sent the king either a phial of his blood or a lock of his hair[32] as well as Yemeni earth in a jar and swore loyalty, claiming he broke no technical law. The King forgave him.[33] Eventually, Abrarah attempted to march, with his forces, on Mecca. Strangely, al-Tabari provided no clear reason for this, although as we will see later in the Ibn Hisham section, some Islamic scholars' accounts do make Abrarah's reasoning clear. Al-Tabari acknowledges that Abrarah could be magnanimous[34] in victory, sparing defenders of Mecca after several one-sided skirmishes before arriving at the gates.[35] Once Abrarah attempted to assault Mecca proper however, he was repelled by the prayers of the Quraysh, led by the handsome, honorable, brilliant Arab Abd-al-Muttalib (all of these traits are made clear in this section)[36], leader of the Quraysh. In response to these prayers, God sent birds that, when the stones they carried in their mouths touched Abrarah's forces, killed them on impact.[37] No matter how respectful, magnanimous and law-abiding Abrarah was, he was dishonorable at heart, and al-Tabari depicted his death in a gruesome way:

> As they retreated, the Abyssinian troops were continually falling by the wayside and perishing at every watering place. Abrarah was smitten in his body; they carried him with them, with his fingers dropping off one by one. As each finger dropped off, there followed a purulent sore in its place, which exuded pus and blood, until they brought him to San'a, with him looking like a newly born chick. (i.e. plucked and emaciated). They allege that, as he died, his heart burst out from his breast.[38]

Al-Tabari spared no expense with his ruthless and excruciating description of Abrarah's death, a death that obviously wasn't been caused by battlefield wounds, but by God's displeasure with him. Al-Tabari depicted the Quraysh as holy, distinguished defenders of Mecca henceforth. Although the Quraysh were guardians of the Ka'aba, and many at that time were not monotheists, al-Tabari depicted them as leading the prayer to the monotheistic God for aid against the Abyssinians.[39] There was no mention of any member of the Quraysh being anything other than a monotheist.

Muhammad before the Revelations

Muhammad is widely considered to have been an exemplary role-model for Arabs. This section will focus entirely on al-Tabari's portrayal of Muhammad prior to his reception of the revelations of God. Al-Tabari introduced Muhammad as a pious man with a loathing for the idols worshipped by the some within the Quraysh. His charisma and outspokenness led one pagan soothsayer to cry out that Muhammad should be murdered while young. "For by Allat and Al-Uzza', if you let him be and he reaches the age of puberty, he will most certainly subvert your religion, declare your minds and those of your forefathers to be deluded, subvert your way of life and bring forward for you a religion of whose like you have never heard!"[40]

Muhammad ibn Abdallah was born to Abdallah ibn Abd al-Muttalib, son of the hero of the Quraysh who drove back the Abyssinian forces from Mecca. Al-Tabari drew an interesting contrast between Abrarah and Muhammad's grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim. "Abd al-Muttalib b. Hashim vowed that if ten of his sons grew to manhood he would sacrifice one of them. He cast lots among them, and the lot fell on Abdallah b. Abd al-Muttalib, whom he loved more than any other. Then he said, 'O God, shall I sacrifice him or a hundred camels?' He cast lots between them and the camels, and the lot fell on the hundred camels." Finally the issue was heard by Marwan, governor of Medina at the time, and he said "No vow which contravenes God's commands can be binding."[41] Whereas Abrarah, an Abyssinian, was unredeemable because he followed only the letter of the law and not the spirit, Abdallah, an exemplary Arab, was willing to adjust his behavior based on the spirit of the law as opposed to rigidly adhering to the letter of the law, his original vow. Whereas Abrarah's dishonorable conduct won him a disgusting death, Abd al-Muttalib's merciful wisdom in revising his oath was in the spirit of the guidance of God, yet willing to overlook the initial letter of the law. Because of this, Abd al-Muttalib's son was spared and eventually became the father of the prophet. In other versions of al-Tabari's narration of these events, Abd al-Muttalib was prepared to carry through on his word and to sacrifice his son, when the community, and especially al-Mughira, stood up and told him that he should reconsider. And he did, and he prayed and prayed and casts lots again and again until finally he arrived upon the verdict that he shouldn't kill his favored son, and he adjusted accordingly.[42]

Al-Tabari offered several depictions of pre-Islamic Muhammad that were pivotal in describing him as the ideal Arab man. Al-Tabari thereafter began to portray Muhammad as "never tempted by evil" and honored by God.[43] Al-Tabari portrayed Muhammad as having had renowned "truthfulness, reliability, and nobility of character." He fell in love with Khadija, the exemplary Arab woman whom al-Tabari portrayed as "resolute, intelligent and noble woman...the most highly honored...wealthiest...most distinguished."[44] Fascinatingly, a subtle parallel was drawn here between Jadhimah's sister Raqash's plan to have Adi propose to Jadhimah while drunk, and Khadija's same plan but with Muhammad and her father. "She called her father to her house, plied him with wine until he was drunk...sent for the Messenger of God...and...her father married him to her."[45] Instead of portraying Khadija as conniving, al-Tabari portrayed her as well-respected, and afterwards when her father came to, he was thrilled that she has married the Messenger of God, because he was one of the greatest men of the Quraysh! Perhaps Khadija received no criticism by al-Tabari in this passage because of whom she was, and whom she was marrying. Raqash wanted to marry a man who didn't have the nerve to ask Jadhimah for Raqash's hand. Muhammad, here, by contrast, was not privy to the plot beforehand, but was invited over to the house and married to Khadija. It is also important to note that in the recounting of Khadija's plot to get her father's drunk permission, al-Waqidi (recounter of a different version of the story that al-Tabari offers) clarified that he believed the first version given here was an erroneous description of events. Finally, and also importantly, it should be noted that al-Tabari never portrayed Khadijah getting her father drunk from any recounting that he trusted very well.

In this chapter we have observed a selection of case studies pertaining to al-Tabari's depiction of pre-Islamic Arabness. Certain cultural manifestations of this Arabness would later be treated by the Qur'an. Al-Tabari's portrayal of Arab culture pre-Islam depicts the Arabs as innately courageous and honorable but in need of guidance (as he perceived in the ninth-century) with regard to such themes as the consumption of intoxicants, the relationship between men and women, and blood feuds. Al-Tabari portrayed a potential Arabness which included attributes such as intrinsic courage, manliness, strength, valor, piety and honor. He did so through the use of many noteworthy exemplars, including Jadhimah, Bahram, Kisra, al-Zabba, Abrarah and the Messenger Muhammad who were either Arab in ethnicity, Arab in spirit, or delineated Arabness through contrast. Generally, Jadhimah, Bahram and of course, Muhammad, exhibited many qualities that in by al-Tabari's estimation were worthy of emulation.

Chapter 2: Ibn Hisham's edition of *The Life of Muhammad* by Ibn Ishaq

Ibn Hisham's edition of Ibn Ishaq's *The Life of Muhammad* is expansive. While the bulk of the narrative is centered on the events surrounding the life of the Messenger himself, the first hundred pages or so provide an introduction of the pre-Islamic Arab environment into which Muhammad spread the final word of God. Each time this essay mentions Ibn Hisham's work, it refers to Ibn Ishaq's work which Ibn Hisham compiled and edited. There exists a great deal of crossover between the histories compiled by al-Tabari and those edited by Ibn Hisham, and each scholar drew often from several of the same sources. This chapter will also analyze an exemplar that we observed in the writings of al-Tabari, Abrarah, and see how the two depictions compare.

This chapter will be divided into three principal sections, with each section consisting of several examples. These sections will be Ibn Hisham's portrayal of jahiliyya, the comparative analysis on Abrarah, and Ibn Hisham's portrayal of Arabs during the life of Muhammad. Like al-Tabari, Ibn Hisham offers several motifs, all consistent with the notion that jahiliyya Arabs were the noble yet unrefined people naturally receptive to monotheism and suited to the ultimate revelations of God.

This section of the paper will be focused on *The Life of Muhammad* as edited and published by Ibn Hisham, but as compiled primarily by Ibn Ishaq around a century before. Ibn Ishaq is renowned for publishing both sahih (sound) and *da'if* (weak) histories, in order to get everything put to paper, not to make sure everything was precise. Analyzing Ibn Hisham' work presents a unique opportunity in that the reader may see how a ninth-century scholar chose to interpret and present the work of an eighth century scholar. It bears mention that both al-Tabari and Ibn Sa'd drew upon Ibn Ishaq extensively as well. Because Ibn Hisham's edit of Ibn Ishaq is the only clear version of Ibn Ishaq available in present day, what Ibn Hisham chose to omit, change or preserve illustrates Ibn Hisham's ninth-century outlook on jahiliya.

Divine Fire: Evidence for the Truth of Monotheism

If monotheism, and in particular Islam, wasn't the correct religion, the receptivity of the Arabs to it, the inevitability of the belief in it, and the writing about its history on the part of the Baghdadi scholars analyzed in this work would lose its divine relevance and divine significance. There are many miraculous occurrences throughout the collections assembled, written, edited and revised in the ninth-century by Baghdadi scholars that provide anecdotal evidence of the divine truth of monotheism. These occurrences may generally be categorized as motifs. These divine motifs substantiated and further cemented the existing tradition of Muslim belief on the part of their Muslim readers, and highlighted to their contemporary readers the importance of reading these histories as a Muslim. A prominent motif in Ibn Hisham's work that substantiates monotheism with anecdotal proof is the motif of divine fire.

Fire is a suitable metaphor for the type of energy of a divine being. It can warm and give life, or it can burn life down to ashes. Divine fire is a persistent theme throughout Ibn Hisham's depiction of the jahiliya period. With Ibn Hisham's collection, Fire acts mainly as a punisher, a physical manifestation of God's divine wrath, and as an adjudicator, a judge by which all may witness the righteousness of monotheism, and the wrongness of polytheism.

Rabia ibn Nasr was a Yemeni king from an ancient and respected bloodline, the Tubba. He awoke from his dreams one morning after having experienced a terrifying vision in his dreams. As the dream persisted to bother him throughout the day, he summoned "every soothsayer, sorcerer, omen monger, and astrologer in his kingdom"[46] and related to them that he had had this terrible dream. They bade him tell them the dream, that they might infer its meaning. "'If I tell you it,'" the king whined, "'I can have no confidence in your interpretation, for the only man who knows its meaning is he who knows about the vision without my telling him.'"[47] One of the group of soothsayers suggested that the King seek the aid of Shiqq and Satih, because they were more knowledgeable than any of those currently assembled. The King summoned these two and Satih arrived first. While Ibn Hisham never has the king relay his vision onto the reader directly, the king proceeds to tell the vision to Satih.

"A fire you did see, come forth from the sea, it fell on the low country, and devoured all that be."[48] Satih replied. The king was naturally startled and further disturbed by this news. He barraged Satih with questions about when the disaster would happen, how it would manifest and from where it would come. Satih replied that "their kingdom would not last, but a pure prophet to whom revelation came from on high would bring it to an end; he would be a man of the sons of Ghalib b. Fihr b. Malik, b. al-Nadr. His dominion would last to the end of time."[49] The king asked Satih if time indeed had an end, to which Satih replied in the affirmative. Satih spoke to the King about the time of final judgement by which Ibn Hisham strongly suggests that Satih was a monotheist.

Next, Shiqq arrived and his interpretation of the king's dream was nearly identical to Satih's, even though the king did not tell Shiqq what Satih had said. "A fire you did see, come forth from the sea, it fell between rock and tree, devouring all that did breathe." Shiqq, however, added to the interpretation: "By the men of the plains, I swear, the black on your land shall bear, pluck your little ones from your care, Ruling from Abyan, to Najran, everywhere."[50] Here Shiqq predicted the upcoming invasion of the Abyssinians. Shiqq related to the king that a great and mighty prophet would save his kingdom and the Abyssinians will eventually be driven away. The divine fire imagery in this passage was quite clear. God's wrath would come, literally, in the form of an invasion and conquest.

A recurrent and noticeable motif portrayed by Ibn Hisham is the comparison of the truth of monotheism to the lie of polytheism. This competition often took the form of a challenge or a conflict, and there was generally a trial of sorts, pitting one faith type against the other. There were multiple instances where, often at the suggestion of the polytheists, there was quite literally a trial by fire to determine which religion was the correct one.

The king that reigned before Rabia ibn Nasr was considered the last true Tubba, and was commonly referred to as "The Tubba". The Tubba decided to travel, along with his army, near to Yathrib (now Medina). The noble king had decided that he would not lay siege to the town's residents or pillage their fields for his army, but he did decide to leave one of his sons there. News reached the Tubba that his son had been treacherously slain by some inhabitants of Yathrib over a squabble about food, and he turned his army around, intending to besiege the city after all. These two rabbis recognized that while the king was a good man, he would still seek vengeance on the town. Blood vengeance was an Arab tradition. The two rabbis warned The Tubba that if he sought retribution, that he would surely receive retribution from on high.[51] The Tubba, instead of reacting out of anger or distress, considered the words of these rabbis. He asked them why they thought this. They told him it was because they had seen that Yathrib would be the place of respite for the final prophet. The Tubba meditated upon this for a long time and then decided that he would not lay siege to Yathrib after all. The more time that the Tubba spent with the two rabbis, the more receptive to monotheism he became until at last, he decided to convert.

On the journey back to Yemen, the Tubba stopped his army at Mecca. Several Meccan idolaters tried to lure the Tubba to a false temple where he would be destroyed along with his army, but the rabbis managed to convince the king of the trap and the king, trusting the rabbis again, ordered that his guards cut off the hands and feet of the polytheist liars.[52] Later, when the Tubba planned to circumambulate the temple of Abraham, the rabbis once more warned him against it. While the temple of Abraham itself was holy, all the idols that the "unclean polytheists had set up around it presented an "insuperable obstacle"[53] The king followed the advice and guidance of the rabbis and instead shaved his head and circumambulate the Ka'aba. Again and again, we see The Tubba demonstrating his humility and his willingness to be led by a higher power. When the Tubba finally returned to Yemen, now a fully-fledged monotheist, he invited the people of his country to join him in conversion to worshipping the one true God. The people of Yemen, and in particular a tribe called the Himyarites, were outraged at the King's conversion and refused to grant his entry to Yemen. The Tubba, guided by his monotheist piety, restrained his anger and simply attempted to persuade the Yemeni people peacefully that they should accept monotheism on the grounds that it was a better religion than the various sects of polytheism that the Yemeni people then adhered to. The Yemeni people heard their king and decided this matter:

> Should be subject to the ordeal by fire. The Yamanites say that a fire used to settle matters in dispute among them by consuming the guilty and letting the innocent go scatheless. So his people went forth with their sacred books hanging like necklaces from their necks until they halted at the place whence the fire used to blaze out. On this occasion when it came out the Yamanites withdrew in terror, but their followers encouraged them and urged them to stand fast, so they held their ground until the fire covered them and consumed their idols and sacred objects and the men who bore them. But the two rabbis came out with their sacred books, sweating profusely, but otherwise unharmed. Thereupon the Himyarites accepted the king's religion. Such was the origin of Judaism in Yemen. [54]

Ibn Hisham's portrayal of this trial by fire is fascinating and nuanced. The polytheists were completely consumed by the fire, while the rabbis came out unharmed, but sweating profusely. That they sweated at all is significant in that it suggests that Judaism, while (along with Christianity) the best religion offered at the time, was not yet the perfected form of monotheism that Islam eventually would be. Because of this, the rabbis are not consumed by the fire, but neither do they emerge from it utterly unscathed, as would “the innocent”. Later on in this section, we will see an instance where Jews and Christians war with one another. This passage is pertinent to that conflict, because as neither religion is yet perfected, when each faces off, great damage can still be done and Allah doesn’t intervene. When the rabbis entered the fire here, it is strongly suggested that Allah is the one preventing these rabbis from being consumed by the fire like their polytheist counterparts. It is hinted, then, later on, that if this had been a trial by fire between Jews and Christians, both would emerge unharmed but sweating. It might even be speculated, although the knowing is obviously impossible both rabbis and priests would be consumed by the fire if tried against a Muslim after the advent of Islam.

Ibn Hisham provided a lengthy description of Najran. In Najran, they used to worship idols. Often prominent and wealthy leaders in the Najran community sent their sons to a sorcerer who lived a little ways outside the town in order to study sorcery. Al-Thamir, king of Najran, was one such father, and he sent his son, Abdallah ibn al-Thamir to the sorcerer every day for study. One day, Faymiyyun, a prominent Christian and miracle worker, travelled to Najran and set up his tent on the path between al-Thamir’s dwelling and the dwelling of the sorcerer with whom Abdallah studied. When Abdallah passed by Faymiyyun’s tent, he was immediately struck by the profundity and piety with which Faymiyyun said his prayers. Abdallah sat with Faymiyyun and listened and learned from Faymiyyun and was so impressed that he converted. Every day Abdallah went and sat with Faymiyyun and prayed instead of going to the sorcerer, as al-Thamir thought. Faymiyyun taught Abdallah many names by which to call God, but when Abdallah, ever curious, asked Faymiyyun which was God’s true name, Faymiyyun responded that it was not yet for Abdallah to know because Abdallah was not yet strong enough.

Abdallah decided to try an experiment. He gathered up some sticks and inscribed the name of God on one, and the name of different polytheistic gods on the others. When he tossed them in the fire, only the stick with the true name of God remained unburnt.[55] When he brought the news to Faymiyyun, Faymiyyun said "Oh my young friend, you have got it, but keep it to yourself, though I do not think you will."[56]

Abdallah was overjoyed at having discovered the true name of God and went around the town reciting it in order to convert and heal the sick and the impoverished. When King al-Thamir learned of this he became furious and summoned Abdallah. He chided Abdallah for having undermined his credibility as King by turning from the polytheistic religion of his father. Al-Thamir decided he would try to make a horrible example of his son by tossing him off a cliff. Abdallah survived the fall unharmed. Then al-Thamir threw him into deep water, but once again Abdallah emerged unscathed. Abdallah advised al-Thamir that if he converted to Abdallah's religion, he would be granted the strength to slay Abdallah. Al-Thamir complied, attempted to kill Abdallah and instead died himself immediately. The people looked upon this and accepted Abdallah as their religious leader and converted to Christianity. Years later, the army of Dhu Nawab arrived at Najran and invited the populace to convert to Judaism or perish. When the people refused, many were put to the sword, while a trench was dug and many were thrown into the trench where they were immolated alive.

Interestingly, here we see an example of where monotheists were not saved from the flames. This was almost certainly because they were perishing at the hands of other monotheists, and it was no longer a question of flame as an adjudicator of which religion type, monotheism or polytheism, was superior. It seems that God did not intervene in quarrels among monotheists, especially because neither of these religions were the perfected version of monotheism, which, according to Ibn Hisham, was Islam. It should be noted, though, that Ibn Hisham often mentioned how Umar Ibn al-Khattab reacted to a favorable statement about anyone that Ibn Hisham wanted to legitimate. Each time, when Umar's reaction is favorable and respectful, we know that the figure is to be revered by the reader. When Abdallah's body was exhumed by Umar's men, it was weeping blood from the head, its hands clasped together in prayer. Umar bade his men to leave the body out of respect for Abdallah's piety in life.

Honor and Arabness, Qusayy and the Quraysh

Ibn Hisham, like al-Tabari, portrayed Arabs as innately honorable. Perhaps no Arab tribe more so than the Quraysh. Qusayy was a member of the Quraysh who, through his laudable actions and steady nature became leader of the Quraysh, although he wasn't born into the position.[57] Qusayy was lauded as a uniter and brought all the various factions within the Quraysh together. He was an influential leader in Mecca, so much so, that his word had an almost religious authority to it, and when he gave orders, they became as religious mandates. Years later when a subordinate brought up Qusayy to Umar, regaling Umar with how great Qusayy was, Umar didn't gainsay him.[58]

Qusayy was both an honorable and a pious Arab. Ibn Hisham goes into detail on the *rifada*, a tax levied on the Quraysh, the proceeds of which provided provisions for pilgrims traveling to see the Ka'ba.[59] This won him immense popularity and fame both within Mecca and throughout the peninsula. When Qusayy was on his deathbed, according to Ibn Hisham, he named Abdul al-Dar as successor. Ibn Hisham was fairly clear that Qusayy named Abd al-Dar thus, and any question about this fact raised by other scholars should be laid to rest. However, Ibn Hisham also admitted that some considered Abdul al-Dar weak, and, although he was firstborn, that he wasn't fit to succeed his father. After Qusayy's death, a civil war brewed between two factions, those supporting the succession of Abdul al-Dar, and those supporting a coalition of his four younger brothers, led by Abdu Manaf. Abdu Manaf and his brothers met one day and dipped their hands in "a bowl of scent" and then smeared their scented hands on the Ka'aba, solidifying their alliance by adding an extra degree of solemnity to it. Because of this, they were known as "the scented ones".[60]

It may be in no small part due to such piety that “the scented ones” and the confederates were able to come to an accord without bloodshed. Whereas civil wars were common amongst the Arabs throughout Jahiliya, as we have observed in this thesis numerous times, this is a solid example of the ideal Arab’s receptivity to pious temperance. The Quraysh would have shed much blood, but instead they were receptive enough to the tenants of monotheism that they decided to avert bloodshed. The agreement that they reached seemed like an equitable compromise. Abdu Manak assumed charge of the rifada and its administration to pilgrims, whereas Adbul al-Dar gains control of the tribe’s armies and finances. Ultimately, Abdul al-Dar received control of earthly matters, while Abdu Manaf became the authority on spiritual matters.

The Hums

Ibn Hisham wrote that the Quraysh invented the idea of “The Hums.” “They said, ‘we are the sons of Abraham, the people of the holy territory, the guardians of the temple and the citizens of Mecca. No other Arabs have rights like ours or a position like ours. The Arabs recognize none as they recognize us.”[61] The Hums were the people of the sanctuary. The Quraysh were the Hums. The Hums introduced reforms and innovations about how to worship properly and enforced and recognized taboos.

“Nor could they circumambulate the house except in the garments of the Hums. If they had no such garments they had to go around naked.” If one felt uncomfortable circumambulating the Ka’aba without clothes, they could do so in regular clothes, but these close had to be thrown away afterwards. This is consistent with the prevailing beliefs of the time that holiness was osmotic and could contaminate something pure merely by proximity. Ibn Hisham is quick to point out that “this state of affairs lasted until God sent Muhammad and revealed to him when He gave him the laws of His religion and the customs of the pilgrimage” this is when it became clarified that one could wear clothes during circumambulation, and in fact eat and drink within a mosque.[62]

The important issue here is that, while it does indeed turn out that the Hums of the Quraysh were wrong about certain procedures regarding worship, they had the clout and influence among the citizens of Mecca and among the Arabs to be able to enforce such standards and to be respected. Here Ibn Hisham presented another example of the Quraysh as the tribe most venerated and honored among the Arabs.

Abrarah, Bahira and Khadija as recounted by Ibn Hisham

In this section, al-Tabari's portrayal of prominent and important characters in pre-Islamic Arabia will be compared to Ibn Hisham's. In this comparison, we will see that while certain aspects of their depictions are quite unique from one another, the main message is the same, that the Arabs' honor and other intrinsically noble traits distinguished them from other peoples and qualified them to receive the final revelations of God.

Abrarah (spelled Abraha in Ibn Hisham's edition of *The Life of Muhammad*) played a prominent role in al-Tabari's history of jahiliyya, as he was commander of the Abyssinian forces that attempted to lay siege to Mecca. Ibn Hisham's Abrarah also plays a prominent role in the jahiliyya section of "The Life of Muhammad". The two authors set the scene in a similar way, with two powerful and influential Abyssinians vying for control of the Abyssinian army locally while the King was too far away to properly delegate authority. In Ibn Hisham's version, Aryat was the man who is supposed to be in control, and Abrarah was his subordinate. In al-Tabari's version, both men were very muscular and strong, but Aryat was lithe and tall while Abrarah was short and stout, but still solidly built. Ibn Hisham also described Aryat as tall, strong and handsome (generally perceived to be intrinsically Arab traits by these authors) but he described Abrarah as short, fat, and of the Christian persuasion.[63]

This discrepancy is important because unlike al-Tabari, the only really admirable qualities that Hisham attributed to Abrarah were those commonly associated with Christianity, i.e. mercy, temperance, noble bearing. etc. Ibn Hisham also emphasized Abrarah's two-faced behavior even more so than did al-Tabari. Again, Abrarah employed a slave (in Ibn Hisham's version this slave is named Atawda) to murder Aryat during their fight, but in this narrative it is especially clear that, should the slave not have been present, Aryan would have easily prevailed. After Aryat's death, Abrarah wrote to Negus, king of the Abyssinians, to assuage his anger at the murder of Aryat. In his letter he claimed that Aryan and Abrarah were only settling a dispute about the nature of the king's orders regarding a matter of importance undisclosed to the reader. Abrarah wrote that he prevailed over Aryat because "I was the stronger, firmer man." Here is an instance where Ibn Hisham portrayed Abrarah as utterly duplicitous and without honor. Still, he was a Christian, a fact mentioned constantly throughout the narrative, and this seemed to make up for his lack of honor until such as time as he decided to march his army on Mecca.

In al-Tabari's version, the motive to march on Mecca was left fairly ambiguous, but in Ibn Hisham's version it is outlined clearly. Abrarah built a temple in Yemen to the Christian God in honor of King Negus. Again, this may be analyzed as a positive act, if Ibn Hisham didn't frame it in terms of Abrarah attempting to curry the king's favor. The ethics of the commission of the temple, then, is rendered fairly neutral.[64]

Ibn Hisham's portrayal of Abrahah remained fairly neutral until an Arab from Mecca traveled to Yemen and "defiled" (unclear how exactly) Abrarah's new temple. Abrarah was embarrassed and furious and, as was depicted in the al-Tabari section, and mobilized his army to march on Mecca. The section depicting the discussion between Abd al-Mutalib and Abrarah is nearly identical between al-Tabari and Ibn Hisham, and so it's not worth recreating here. Suffice to say that Ibn Hisham portrayed Abd al-Mutalib equally honorable, handsome and noble to how al-Tabari portrayed him.[65] Abrarah also met the same fate as he did in al-Tabari's version of the narrative, where birds swooped down and plucked out his eyes, his fingers fell off, and he died with puss-ridden sores all over his body. As with al-Tabari, Ibn Hisham's Abrarah met a horrendous fate in punishment for marching on Mecca. While he was portrayed as tolerant, merciful at times, and noble at times, ultimately nearly every time these traits were mentioned, they were mentioned alongside his Christianity. Abrarah himself was a dishonorable man, and while Ibn Hisham didn't directly say that, his version of Abrarah's actions make Abrarah's dishonor arguably more apparent even than did al-Tabari's. Ultimately, Abrarah's Christianity was not sufficient to save him. Perhaps if he had exhibited more Qur'an-approved traits, he wouldn't have let his jahiliyya-esque hair-trigger desire for vengeance against a perceived slight to his pride get the better of him. While Abrahah wasn't a jahiliyya Arab, his prideful manner exhibited all the negative side of jahiliyya honor as per the Qur'an, while he also lacked in the positive side of jahiliyya honor as per the Qur'an. It should come as little surprise then that according to both al-Tabari and Ibn Hisham, God send birds to pluck out his eyes.

Bahira's Recognition of Muhammad as Chosen

Bahira the monk inhabited what is only referred to in the text as a "cell", likely within a monastery of some sort, in Busra, Syria. Muhammad was on a journey alongside his uncle to Syria when Bahira spied them on the road. Bahira was "well versed in the knowledge of Christians" and had in his possession a mystic book of knowledge that had been added to generation after generation by the monks that inhabited the cell before him. This book had laid out an unspecified prophecy and Bahira recognized Muhammad as a man of extremely great significance, especially when Muhammad stopped to rest under a certain tree and the clouds that had been following him stopped when he stopped.[66]

Bahira rocketed out of his cell and profusely accosted the travelers with offers of a feast back in his home. Another traveler in Muhammad's caravan who had frequented these roads and passed by Bahira's cell many times saw this strange scene and called out to Bahira, asking what all the fuss was about and reminding Bahira that he never offered his food to others or held feasts. Bahira responded: "you are right in what you say, but you are guests and I wish to honor you and give you food so that you may eat."[67] The other travelers, all men of the Quraysh, talked among themselves and one man lamented that they hadn't brought Muhammad along on these excursions more often.

When the man of the Quraysh said this, he began his sentence with "by al-Lat and al-'Uzza". According to Ibn Hisham, Bahira took this to be a cultural expression, or perhaps one unique to the Quraysh (we may surmise that he was, perhaps, unaware that these were the names of gods at all). Later when Bahira got the chance to speak with Muhammad one on one, he prefaced his first question to Muhammad with "by al-Lat and al-'Uzza" because he had heard the Qurayshi man say it earlier and concluded that it must have been a Qurayshi custom. When

Muhammad heard Bahira begin his phrase thus, he admonished Bahira, telling him "Do not ask me by al-Lat and al-Uzza', for by Allah, nothing is more hateful to me than these two."[68] Bahira addressed him "by Allah" from then forward. Bahira proceeded to ask Muhammad various questions related to being a prophet, ie "Do you have strange dreams? What do you like? "What are your sleep patterns and habits?" etc. After Bahira was satisfied that Muhammad was to become a man of great spiritual potential, he advised Muhammad's uncle: "guard him carefully against the Jews, for by Allah! If they see him and know about him what I know, they will do him evil."[69]

It may seem at first glance like Bahira was being sycophantic and desperate to ingratiate himself with Muhammad because he resembled the prophet in Bahira's mystic book. However, this work concerns itself more with how Ibn Hisham chose to portray the interaction. Bahira reinforces Muhammad's significance as the ultimate exemplar, and Muhammad was thereby legitimized by being perceived as great, even before he received the revelations, by a learned religious scholar and monotheist. In the ninth century, culturally, scholars were venerated, but most Muslims did not spend their lives in a monastery reading sacred texts. Therefore, a monk who devoted himself to spirituality like Bahira legitimized Muhammad through his whole-hearted endorsement in a way that no other type of person could have. Ibn Hisham then proceeded to relate Muhammad's uniqueness clearly and specifically in the following paragraph.

> God protecting him and keeping him from the vileness of heathenism because he wished to honour him with apostleship, until he grew up to be the finest of his people in manliness, the best in character, most noble in lineage, the best neighbour, the most kind, truthful, reliable, the furthest removed from filthiness and corrupt morals, through loftiness and nobility, so that he was known among his people as "the trustworthy" because of the good qualities which God had implanted in him.[70]

Ibn Hisham echoed al-Tabari in his praise of Muhammad, obviously, but Ibn Hisham's descriptions were more extensive and straightforward. Ibn Hisham went on to relate a story about how Muhammad in his youth was playing with other boys of the Quraysh. Muhammad and the others were playing with stones, when an unseen figure slapped him “most painfully,” admonishing him, and instructing him to put his shirt back on. Thereafter that day the other boys had their shirts off, but Muhammad had his shirt on. The shirt is clear symbolism for Muhammad being unique or “selected” from the Quraysh. As we have already observed, the Quraysh were the selected among the Arabs, and the Arabs selected among the peoples of the earth. The above description offers a perfect and clear description, then, of the attributes resulting from the fusion between the Arabness seen in the al-Tabari, and the refinement that Islam would eventually bring to the Arabs. Ibn Hisham portrayed God as directly honoring Muhammad with this combination of traits which made him an example of how Arabs could potentially become after they were blessed with the refinement of the Qur’an and Islam.

Chapter 3: *Kitaab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* by Ibn Sa‘d

Ibn Sa‘d was another prominent ninth-century Baghdadi scholar who compiled one of the first comprehensive historiographical works in the Muslim world. Like the other two authors analyzed here, Ibn Sa‘d wrote extensively on the lives of the prophets such as Moses and Noah, but this chapter will focus on those portrayals of Arabs in jahiliyya that weren’t considered prophets. Ibn Sa‘d, like Ibn Hisham, focused less on jahiliyya outside of the Arabian Peninsula, and actually shared little with al-Tabari in terms of subject material they covered before the time of Muhammad. Most of the comparisons here, then, will be with Ibn Hisham’s work. Ibn Sa‘d wrote extensively on Qusayy and his direct lineage. This chapter will be divided into three sections: Ibn Sa‘d’s depiction of Qusayy himself, Ibn Sa‘d’s depiction of Qusayy’s lineage, and Ibn Sa‘d’s depiction of Abd al-Muttalib’s vow to kill his son. The first section will be compared minimally with Ibn Hisham’s section, although because Ibn Sa‘d’s section on Qusayy is much more extensive, this section will nearly stand alone. The section on Qusayy’s lineage will also be analyzed in conjunction with Ibn Hisham’s work. The section on Abd al-Muttalib will be analyzed alongside al-Tabari’s version of events.

The patterns recognized across the previous authors reviewed hold true with Ibn Sa‘d as well. Yet again, we will observe the notion that the Arabs were the people selected by God to receive His final revelations because of their intrinsic potential. Analysis in this chapter will be performed on Ibn Sa‘d’s *Kitaab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir* often referred to in English as *The Big Book of Classes.* This is arguably Ibn Sa‘d’s most important work, and his longest. As mentioned in the introduction, Ibn Sa‘d is said to have relied mainly on sahih (sound) histories.

Qusayy ibn Kilab, the pinnacle of Arabness

While Qusayy's older brother, Zuhrah ibn Kilab, was born in Mecca and inhabited the city, Qusayy was born much later to the same father, but the father passed away and his mother took him along with his new guardian, a man of the Qudaah tribe, back to Syria where the Qudaah made their home. Qusayy's birth name was Zayd, but his mother called him Qusayy, which may be interpreted in Arabic as "distant". It should be noted that Qusayy's actual birth father was in dispute.[71] When Qusayy was a young lad, he "competed" with another member of the tribe of the Qudaah named Ruqay. Qusayy won this competition by overpowering the other boy. Ruqay became "heated" about his loss, and enmity was born between them. Ruqay' bitterly told Qusayy to go back to his own people. Qusayy immediately went to ask his mother who his father was.[72] This passage is noteworthy for two principal reasons. The first is that Qusayy is immediately introduced and posited as inherently strong and victorious, which, as we have seen, are intrinsically "Arab" traits. Because Qusayy triumphed, the reader may already suspect that Qusayy is going to be portrayed as an Arab exemplar. Secondly, and intriguingly, Qusayy going immediately to his mother to ask about his true lineage suggests three things: first, that Qusayy was unaware until then that he wasn't naturally a member of the Quda'ah, second, that others, even other youths, within the Quda'ah were aware of at least a dubiousness surrounding his birth, and third, that Qusayy himself probably already wondered whether he was truly his mother's son. When Qusayy initially posed the question to his mother, she lied to him, but when he insisted that others in the tribe ostracized him, she came clean and admitted that "in fact you are nobler and more honorable both in your individual capacity and also by birth and descent...your father was...of the Quraysh tribe...in Makkah close to the Ka'bah, the vicinity of which is respected."[73] Here Ibn Sa'd has Qusayy's mother frame Mecca as a venerated place, which of course it was, and the

Quraysh as the most honorable and venerated tribe of Arabs. Here Ibn Sa‘d legitimized the Quraysh as the most noble of the Arabs, and because Qusayy was actually Quraysh, it makes sense that he would have an intrinsic sense of nobility, strength, and honor.

After Qusayy's hajj, he decided to stay in Mecca. He sought out Zuhrah, who had grown old and blind. Zuhrah felt Qusayy's face and recognized his features and voice. How this is possible is left unexplained, since, according to the logic of the narrative, they never would have met. Perhaps Zuhrah merely recognized similarities to his own face and voice. Qusayy immediately set to work establishing himself as a force in Mecca. He married a high status woman, bint Hulayl Ibn Hubshiyyah, whose father happened to be administrator of most of the higher-up affairs in the city. Interestingly, instead of Qusayy inventing the Rifada, as Ibn Hisham suggested, Ibn Sa‘d presented a version where Hulayl already received a tax from pilgrims. One year, Hulayl was frustrated because the tax had been leaner than it was most years. Qusayy took this as an opportunity to invite Hulayl over to his house and get him drunk. Once he had inebriated Hulayl sufficiently, he purchased the Kaaba from Hulayl for a few camels. Here again we see inebriation causing the downfall of a powerful Arab. It was also said, according to Ibn Sa‘d, that he purchased the Kaaba for a water-skinful of wine. Regardless how Qusayy came to swindle Hulayl, the most fascinating part is that Hulayl proceeded shortly thereafter to name Qusayy as his heir, and then promptly perished, while "the descendants of Qusayy spread and his wealth increased and he rose in honour."[64][74] Following Hulayl's death, Qusayy immediately moved to wrest complete control of the administration of the Kaaba from two other prominent tribes, the Khuza'ah and the Banu Bakr, citing superior lineage as the reason they should cede it to him. Qusayy and the Quraysh gained victory over the two rival tribes after a fierce struggle and from then forward, Qusayy was in charge of administering religious rituals in the city.[75] This victory was not sufficient to

Qusayy. Qusayy decided to sue the two tribes for damages to the Quraysh and was found to be in the right by a local qadi. The defeated Khuza'ah and Banu Bakr were then forced to pay the diyah, "blood money" for every person of the Quraysh and of their allies the Kinanah that they had slain.

According to Ibn Sa'd, Qusayy, from the humblest of origins, made himself both the political and the religious leader of the Quraysh and of Mecca itself.

> He was the Sharif of Makkah and there was none to dispute that claim. Then he erected Dar al-Nadwah (Council Chamber), its door facing the Ka'bah. All the affairs of the Quraysh were discussed and decided there e.g. marriage, war, and the consultations about other affairs, even such minor things as the attaining of puberty by a girl and her changing the shirt; her shirt was cut there and then she was sent to her family. The banner of war offensive or defensive was hoisted in the Dar al-Nadwah. No caravan of the Quraysh set out on its journey but from it, nor returned but alighted in it, as a mark of respect to him and for being blessed by his advice; this was in recognition of his excellence. They followed his orders like commands of the faith; without his sanction nothing was done in his life, nor after his death. He had combined in his person the offices of al-hijabah (the custody of the Ka'bah); al-siqayah (to supply drinking water to the pilgrims); al-rifadah (to feed the pilgrims); al-liwa (hoisting the banner of war); al-nadwah (council) and the administration of Makkah. He used to receive tithes from all persons entering Makkah but not from its residents.[76]

This paragraph is long and dense, but it offers clues both as to Qusayy's standing in the Quraysh and to the Quraysh's standing amongst the Arabs of Mecca. Firstly, established that, without a doubt, the Quraysh were the supreme tribe in Mecca at this point. Secondly, it showcases just how extreme Qusayy's influence among the Quraysh was. All of the affairs of the Quraysh were discussed and decided in his home. That encompasses a wide scope, and Qusayy must have been busy nearly every moment of every day administering various judgements! The people of the Quraysh followed Qusayy's decisions as if it were their religion. Not all members of the Quraysh were monotheists at this point. This solidifies the point that Ibn Sa'd made here: Qusayy set the example, and is the exemplar for the monotheist who is supreme among the Quraysh. Qusayy is the humble yet supreme Arab man who is chief over the most influential Arab tribe. Irfan Shahid's book *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* touched on Qusayy and would make excellent further reading on the subject. Shahid researched Qusayy Ibn Kilab extensively and noted the possibility that Qusayy may not have been a monotheist, as the primary sources depict.

> On the other hand, there is some evidence that Qusayy was not a pure Ishmaelite monotheist, as the primary sources portray him. For example, the names of his sons, Abd al Manaf and Abd al Uzza, betray pagan influence…In defense of his monotheism, it might be suggested that he gave these names to his sons before his conversion to monotheism, and that they continued to carry them even after their father's conversion.[77]

While this is an interesting tangent, it is not directly relevant here; Qusayy was portrayed by the primary sources as a monotheist, and it is his portrayal as an Arab exemplar and a monotheist in the ninth-century which matters to the argument presented in this work.

Near the end of the section on Qusayy, there is a long paragraph about the question of succession. Back in the Ibn Hisham chapter, we observed that Abd al-Dar and his brothers, including Abd Manaf, eventually resolved any outstanding issues and united the family together with a compromise and decision to split ruler-ship. Ibn Sa'd's version is quite different. Ibn Sa'd devoted the final half page of his narrative on Qusayy to explaining how Qusayy had firmly and clearly ruled that Abd al-Dar should be his sole successor. Instead of being apprehensive about Abd al-Dar taking over after his death due to his weakness, (we aren't informed as to whether this is weakness of character, physical frailty, or a combination of the two.) Qusayy decided to name Abd al-Dar sole successor because of this weakness. He informed his son that when he assumed control over Mecca and the Quraysh, the power of the position would even out his relationships with his younger siblings. After Qusayy died, Ibn Sa'd set up the next scene differently than Ibn Hisham did. While Ibn Hisham continued the narrative in an objective way by framing the conflict neutrally, Ibn Sa'd introduced Abd Manaf himself, devoted a few pages to him, and then began to narrate a section on his son, who was not only named in Ibn Sa‘d’s version, but ascribed a nickname and long section of his own. While it could be merely a choice of chronology, Ibn Sa’d’s narrative, by offering a large section on Hashim ibn Abd Manaf, seems to bring the reader to the coming conflict between Hashim and Abd al-Dar from Hashim’s perspective and thus frames Hashim, Abd Manaf’s son, as the protagonist.[78]

Hashim ibn ‘Abd Manaf

Grandson of Qusayy, Hashim travelled often in his youth, and met with both the king of Abyssinia as well as Julius Caesar himself. Once when the Quraysh faced a famine that had lasted for several years, Hashim went to Syria and loaded up a caravan with bread. He returned to the Quraysh, stripped his camels of the bread, broke it into small pieces and then handed it out to the Quraysh. After the Quraysh had eaten to their satisfaction, the rains came in abundance.[79] While Ibn Sa‘d didn’t specifically write that this was a sign of God’s approval, it doesn’t seem like a stretch. This is how Hashim (the word roughly translates to pieces of bread) received his nickname. Ummayah became jealous of Hashim and publicly challenged him. Hashim demonstrated his humility by attempting to refuse Ummayah’s challenge out of respect for his age. This is an important measure of which to take note. Instead of brashly rushing to defend his honor, a jahiliyya trait of which the Qur’an is critical, Hashim was willing to temper himself with humility and respect for the elderly. Hashim was eventually coerced by the Quraysh into facing Ummayah. Hashim agreed on the condition that Ummayah, who was still in charge of the Quraysh and was a wealthy man, agreed to sacrifice fifty camels and go into exile for ten years should he lose to Hashim. Hashim defeated Ummayah, and Ummayah left the city bound for Syria. Hashim was magnanimous in victory, glorifying the one God with sacrifice instead of heaping glory unto himself as he could have. Once again we are met with the motif where the jahiliyya Arab penchant for victory combines with a monotheist’s humility and produces an Arab exemplar.

As noted, Abd al-Dar was not mentioned in any sort of way as having received authority over the Quraysh by Ibn Sa’d, but in this section, Abd al-Dar reigned over a faction of the Quraysh, the Banu ‘Abd al-Dar ibn Qusayyi. Indeed, Abd al-Dar retained control of many of the politically legitimizing institutions according to Ibn Sa‘d, the rifada, the siqayah etc. In Ibn Sa‘d’s version of this narrative, Hashim allied with several of his cousins and attempted to seize these institutions from Abd al-Dar. They did so because “they considered their right to be stronger on account of their superiority and excellence among their people.”[80]

At first glance this seems like a complete reversal from the Hashim seen on the last page who was humble, pious and only hesitatingly violent. However it is possible to interpret this aggression as righteous, because Ibn Sa‘d portrayed Hashim and the other “scented ones” as primarily concerned for the well-being of the Quraysh. If Ibn Sa‘d hadn’t spent several pages cementing Hashim’s piety, humility and honor in the reader’s mind, it is possible that this aggression might be interpreted as hostile and impious. This is not the case, and the reader now faces Hashim’s decision to attempt to wrest control of the Quraysh from a weaker leader’s hands in a more favorable and sympathetic light.

In this version of the narrative, as with Ibn Hisham’s version, the coalition of cousins is referred to as the scented ones, but in Ibn Sa‘d’s narrative, Abd al-Dar’s alliance referred to as al-ahlaf: The sworn allies. Al-ahlaf, instead of scented oils, dipped their hands in blood to signify their unbreakable bond. For this, they were also referred to as “the Lickers of blood.”[81] Once more, peace was established before blood was shed. Similar terms were reached and Hashim took possession of both the siqayah and the rifada.

A comparison of the way these narratives were arranged by the two authors is crucial to understanding how the stories may have been received by the ninth-century Muslim audience, and the two portrayals of the events following the death of Qusayy make for a good example. Remember that these two authors had lived and died around the same time, with al-Tabari living and dying a bit later. Therefore it makes sense that these two authors would have drawn upon one another whereas al-Tabari would have drawn upon them both. As noted above, both authors gave stories wherein all the major facts were consistent with one another. In both versions, Qusayy named Abd al-Dar as undisputed successor. In both stories, Abd al-Dar was challenged by a coalition of his brothers and their supporters who called themselves the scented ones. In both stories, a peace accord was reached before blood was shed wherein the rifada and siqayah duties were afforded to the son of ‘Abd Manaf and the earthly governance duties to Abd al-Dar. However the recounting of the versions and the frames from which the readers were intended to read were quite distinct. With Ibn Hisham, the portrayal is over quickly, with little backstory given. Hashim is referred to simply as the son of ‘Abd Manaf and it seemed that it was the younger brothers’ aggression that caused the conflict. In Ibn Sa‘d’s story, any hostile feeling the reader may feel towards the son of ‘Abd Manaf were mitigated by a thorough backstory of him. ‘Abd Manaf’s son was referred to as Hashim and his piety, humility and ability to gain victory all show through prior to the conflict. It is thus that in Ibn Sa‘d’s narrative, Hashim ibn ‘Abd Manaf’s aggression toward ‘Abd Manaf’s older brother seems a lot more realistic, practical and justified than it does in the Ibn Hisham. This may be attributed to a fundamental difference in the approaches of the two authors. As noted in the introduction, Ibn Hisham seems to place piety and the narration of events as central to his narrative, while Ibn Sa‘d seemed comparatively more character driven. It should be stressed that these authors were not at odds with one another, only that they sometimes chose to frame events differently.

Muhammad as Blessed, The Destiny of the Ideal Arab

Much attention has been paid to Muhammad before the advent of Islam in this work. As we have seen time and again, Muhammad brings together all of the positive innate traits of the jahiliyya Arab as per the Qur'an and combined them with humility and a deep receptivity to monotheism. While both al-Tabari and Ibn Hisham portrayed Muhammad as a profound man, Ibn Sa'd went into great depth on the profundity of the man. To read Ibn Sa'd's depiction of Muhammad is to see the Arab exemplar in terms of how he comported himself throughout his life, but also as he was blessed and destined to be great by God from the time he was born.

The wet nurse named Halimah and her husband came upon a lone orphan in an orphanage. They decided out of compassion to adopt the lone orphan (the prophet).

> She placed him in her lap and gave her breast to him which was too full of milk to leak out. The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, sucked milk to satisfaction and his foster-brother also sucked, till then he could not sleep because milk was inadequate. His (Prophet's) mother said: O noble and compassionate nurse! Be careful of your child who is destined to attain prominence...She (Halimah) said: By Allah! I took the best child that I have ever seen, and he is a blessing. They said: Is he the child of 'Abd al-Muttalib? She said: we had not yet departed from this place when I perceived jealousy in certain women. [82]

Here we see Muhammad as a babe, before he could be judged reasonably for his own actions. This passage illustrated Muhammad's natural proclivity toward greatness far before his ability to reason sets in. He was selected by Allah and Ibn Sa'd's Halimah referred to him as a blessing. Ibn Sa'd portrayed Muhammad here as *destined* to attain prominence. If Muhammad was indeed the exemplar of the Arab people, and of the Quraysh specifically, as we will see shortly, then Muhammad was a symbol for the way the Arabs themselves could aspire to be.

When the prophet was young, he would journey out with his siblings to spend time amongst the sheep in the neighboring plains.

> Here two angels came to him and cleft his chest and took out a black clot which they threw away and washed his heart in ice-water in a golden tray; then they weighed it against one thousand of his followers and he out-weighed them; one of them said to the other: leave it, because he will out-weigh even if he is weighed against the whole ummah. [83]

Unlike al-Tabari, who for the most part completely eschewed any metaphysical overtones in his writings, Ibn Sa‘d related here that angels descended from the heavens and weighed Muhammad's heart against one thousand of his followers and found it to be greater in weight. Indeed Muhammad's heart was "greater" than that of the entire umma combined. As Muhammad grew older, he continually laid claim to being the most eloquent and truest among all the Arabs, due in part to his being a member of the Quraysh.[84]

Conclusion: The Modern Day Significance of Arabness

A relative lacuna exists in research about pre-Islamic jahiliyya and depictions of this era in early Islamic scholarship. Extensive and focused study of jahiliyya Arab culture is important for a myriad of reasons. By analyzing ninth-century depictions of jahiliyya in context of the Qur'an and Islam, one will gain insight into a ninth-century paradigm of what Muslim scholars deemed important moral lessons for Arabs to consider. When studying ninth-century scholars such al-Tabari, Ibn Hisham and Ibn Sa'd, one gains insight into the original shapers of Arabness and a greater understanding of Arabness written from a historical Arab paradigm.

It should be noted that the Abbasid Caliphate was a Sunni Caliphate. All the writers analyzed in this essay are Sunni writers. It is vital to note this primarily out of respect for other factions of Islam such as the Shi'i. Secondarily, it is important to note this distinction because the essay itself is analyzing an Islamic perception and shaping of "Arabness", not *the* Islamic perception and shaping of "Arabness". Armed with the knowledge that all the writing observed and analyzed in this essay is Sunni writing, we will be better informed about the specific Sunni patterns seen in the scholarship, or else, in some cases, such as the case with al-Tabari, Sunni-specific or Sunni-biased interpretations of some events or personalities.

With competitions such as Arab Idol and Superstar captivating the Arab world each season, it is apparent that the quality of Arabness remains as prized by the Arab world in the present day as it is elusive to define.[85] Many shows in the Arab world highlight the competition, either subliminally or overtly, of being the "most Arab." To gain victory in Arab Idol, similar to its progenitor show American Idol, a contestant must gain the most votes, the great majority of which are submitted throughout the Arab world. While many of these voting competitions are quite nationally charged, i.e. if a contestant is Jordanian then Jordanians are peer pressured into voting for her or him, in the end, the victor is crowned the Arab idol of that year. Semantics aside, this prize is essentially about recognizing an ideal perspective of what it means to be Arab. There is no question that the competition to be “the most Arab” is grounded originally in a shared notion that the ideal Arab naturally exhibits certain noble qualities. Through an analysis of the first written depictions of Arabness, this thesis has attempted to ascertain what qualities exactly comprise the ideal Arab from historical perspectives.

The significance of Arabness as portrayed by al-Tabari, Ibn Hisham, and Ibn Sa'd

This essay selected for analysis these three Islamic historiographers because they were among the most prominent scholars in their time. Their compiled histories comprise many firsthand accounts of happenings that were passed down generation to generation. Because these scholars were so prominent, their works are valuable sources for modern historians as well as modern historiographers. The prominence of their names signifies the prominence of their works nowadays, but even more importantly, the importance of their works within the time period in which they lived.

What is an Arab? It seems an innocent enough question. However one will encounter numerous answers to the question depending on who is asked. Being Arab can refer to an ethnicity in and of itself. An Arab can be someone in whose blood purportedly flows the blood of Abraham. An Arab can be one who speaks Arabic. Often there is a perceived link by the majority of Arabs between Islam and what it means to be Arab, although this link is, for obvious reasons, nebulous. While Muhammad was indeed Arab and the revelations of Islam were revealed directly to Muhammad, there are many Arabs throughout the world who do not self-identify as Muslims. Through an analysis of Arabness as portrayed by early Muslim historiographers, we observed an Arabness as it was when combined with and refined by the Qur'an. In the works of al-Tabari, we observed how Arabs were seen as naturally noble, strong and admirable, but could be prone to rash actions and folly because they weren't guided by a higher power. In the Ibn Hisham section, we observed numerous instances of the proof of God's favor of the monotheistic Arab, as was often demonstrated by Ibn Hisham through literal trials by fire. In the Ibn Sa'd's work, we observed certain Arab individuals who exhibited both intrinsically noble Arab qualities *and* humble piety, and these Arabs were favored and honored by God and rose to achieve great things. The manner in which the exemplars highlighted by these authors were portrayed minimized or justified their faults, flaws, and mistakes while highlighting and maximizing their triumphs and often implied that these triumphs were the will of God.

The significance of this research is manifold and useful to all who engage in debate about the origins, source and meaning of Arabness today and throughout history. There does seem to be an assumed ethnic component to Arabness, though it went unmentioned by any of the three authors in study here. However, to be “Arab” is often used to describe someone in the Arab world, and is universally used by Arabs to signify high praise in the Arab community. If a lanky, geeky, Caucasian language student studying abroad is labelled “very Arab” by his host family, it is not a suggestion that he is ethnically Arab, but indeed that he is possessed both of the innate capability of an Arab and the humility of an Arab. It is a profound compliment. This insight into what may lie at the heart of the nebulous concept of Arabness can go a long way in terms of understanding Arab cultural identity and its origins.

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