

**Commerce and Migration in Arabia
before Islam: A Brief History of a
Long Literary Tradition**

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This contribution is devoted to an Arabic narrative tradition on “the markets of the Arabs before Islam” (*aswāq al-ʿArab qabla l-Islām*). This tradition describes an annual sequence of markets or fairs, moving in a clockwise spiral through the Arabian peninsula. It offers an unusual and, for us, unaccustomed view of Arabia on the eve of Islam. Here I wish to remind readers of Professor Windfuhr’s accomplishments, not only as a Persianist and Indo-Europeanist, but also as an Arabist and Semiticist. I also wish—partly for more self-interested reasons—to remind readers of his patience with historical and textual arguments that go in somewhat unusual directions.

Ever since this narrative tradition first appeared in print, scholars have considered it as one among many pieces of evidence for (or against) the growing strength of Mecca and its dominant clan, Quraysh.¹ However, I will argue that this tradition—which I will call, in its own phrase, the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* or “discourse on the markets”—stands apart from most other narrative sources in this area. The difference turns on the role of Mec-

¹ In particular, S. al-Afghānī, *Aswāq al-ʿArab fī l-jāhiliyya wal-Islām* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1960); M.J. Kister, “Mecca and Tamīm: Some Aspects of their Relations,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 8 (1965): 113-63; R. Simon, *Meccan Trade: Problems of Origin and Structure* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987); P. Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

ca and Quraysh, and also on the very nature of commerce and exchange.

In the following pages I will present an outline of the tradition, going through the market sites that it includes as well as some that it does not. Then I will consider its time frame and historical context, before proceeding to its transmission history: how it originated and was passed down, and something about its reliability and authenticity. Finally, I will ask what this tradition on the markets can tell us about the larger problem of Arabian trade and the rise of Islam. I have already discussed the “markets of the Arabs” in articles in *Festschriften* dedicated to two of my *Doktorväter*. One of these discusses the silence that accompanied some commercial exchanges in Arabia,² while the other places the market sequence in the context of the old Arabian calendar and the reformed, Islamic calendar which replaced it.³ Here I will avoid repetition of these earlier pieces, except for some necessary overlap in the following section.

What the tradition includes

The tradition exists in several versions, of which the earliest are in books by Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 245/860), al-Ya‘qūbī (d. around 900 CE), and al-Marzūqī (d. 421/1030).⁴ Here I will consider these three as a composite whole; later, when I come to the transmission of the narrative, I will try to account for some of the differences among them.

Dūmat al-Jandal. The sequence began at this site in north central Arabia, corresponding to modern al-Jawf, an important transit point between the Ḥijāz and both Syria and Iraq.⁵ Accord-

² “The Arabian Silent Trade: Profit and Nobility in the ‘Markets of the Arabs,’” in *Histories of the Middle East: Studies in Middle Eastern Society, Economy and Law in Honor of A.L. Udovitch*, ed. by R. Margariti, A. Sabra and P. Sijpesteijn (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 23-51.

³ “‘Time Has Come Full Circle’: Markets, Fairs and the Calendar Before Islam,” in *Scholars and Scholarship of the Islamic World: Studies in Honor of Professor Michael Allan Cook*, ed. by A. Ahmed, B. Sadeghi and M. Bonner (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

⁴ Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-muḥabbar* (Hyderabad: Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1941), 263-68; al-Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rīkh* (Beirut, 1960), 1: 270-1; al-Marzūqī, *Kitāb al-azmina wal-amkina* (Hyderabad: Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif, 1914), 2:161-70.

⁵ Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakrī, *Mu‘jam mā ista‘jam* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1998), 2:182; Yāqūt b. ‘Abdallāh al-Rūmī, *Mu‘jam al-buldān*

ing to the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*, this market took up all of the month of Rabi‘ al-awwal.⁶ The Arabs arrived there “from all directions” and stayed for varying amounts of time, after which “they went their various ways to other markets like it.”

Situated on the desert frontier between the Byzantine and Sasanian empires, Dūmat al-Jandal had characteristics that set it apart from the rest of the sequence of markets. One of these was its disputed political sovereignty. Arab clients of the two empires made claim to its leadership, working out their rivalry in rather strange ways:

When the ‘Ibādīs [Christians from Sasanian Iraq] took over Dūma, Ukaydir took charge of it. And when the Ghassānids took over, they put Qunāfa in charge. Their prevailing custom was that the two kings would contend with one another in a riddle contest. When one of the two kings defeated his adversary by answering the question that had been put to him (*bi-ikhrāj mā yulqā ‘alayhi*), [the loser] would leave [the winner] alone with the market, and [the winner] would do whatever he liked with it.⁷

The winning king had the right to levy customs dues (*maks*) or a tithe (*‘ushr*) on the market.

Our other information on Dūma in this period relates to its conquest by the Muslims, over several years beginning in 9/630.⁸ The Ukaydir [b. ‘Abd al-Malik al-Sākūnī al-Kindī] named here appears elsewhere as a Christian with ties to al-Ḥīra,⁹ and as the ruler of Dūma at the time of its conquest.¹⁰

(Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1955-57), 2:487-89; Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 232-39; L. Veccia Vaglieri, “Dūmat al-Djandal,” *EI*² 2:624-26.

⁶ For chronology and the calendar, see Bonner, “Time Has Come Full Circle.”

⁷ Ibn Ḥabīb, *Muḥabbar*, 263-64. At Marzūqī, 2:161, the contestants play hide-and-seek and then come to blows.

⁸ al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān* (Leiden: Brill, 1866), 61-63; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wal-mulūk* (Leiden: Brill, 1879-1901), 1:2065; Bakrī, *Mu’jam*, 2:182; Yāqūt, *Mu’jam*, 2:487-88. Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 232-36, thinks that economic rivalry between Dūma and Medina led to military conflict. However, the evidence remains thin.

⁹ In one version, Ukaydir is evicted from Dūmat al-Jandal and moves to al-Ḥīra, where he settles at a site which he calls Dūmat al-Ḥīra. In an-

Another characteristic of Dūma that does not reappear in the sequence of markets is its specialization in slavery and prostitution. We are told that “most of the Arabs there were slaves” (*qinn*) and that people there “used to force their slave girls into prostitution.”¹¹ The Kalb, a dominant tribal group in the area, “practiced slavery more than any of the Arabs.”

al-Mushaqqar. The next market in the sequence took place at al-Mushaqqar in the region of Hajar, not far from the Gulf,¹² and lasted throughout Jumādā al-ākhira. The dominant tribal groups there were ‘Abd al-Qays (a branch of Azd), who kept their idol Dhū l-Labā there,¹³ and Tamīm. This territory fell under the protectorate of the Sasanians, who appointed “governors” from a local dynasty, the Banū ‘Abdallāh b. Zayd of the clan of al-Mundhir b. Sāwī, from Tamīm. These rulers, like those of Dūma, took customs dues or tithes for themselves. Other sources, however, tell of Persian governors.¹⁴ Caravans arrived at al-Mushaqqar bearing aromatics from South Arabia, and “the Persians would arrive there, crossing the sea with their merchandise.” Indeed, it was “such a lovely land that no one who saw it

other version, he begins at al-Ḥīra and moves on to Dūmat al-Jandal, Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 61-63; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 2:487-88. At al-Mas‘ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh wal-ishrāf* (Leiden: Brill, 1894), 248, Ukaydir has ties with the Byzantine emperor Heraclius; cf. M. Lecker, “Ukaydir b. ‘Abd al-Malik,” *EI*², 10:784.

¹⁰ Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 61; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 2:487-88.

¹¹ *Kānū yukrihūna fatayātihim ‘alā l-bighā’*, echoing Quran 24: 33, “Do not force your maidservants into prostitution if they desire chastity”; cf. Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 236-37.

¹² Bakrī, *Mu‘jam*, 4:97; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 5:134-35, citing Ibn al-Faqīh. The town is described as a stopping-place for the kings of Ḥimyar, at Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1927-61, repr. al-Hay’a al-‘Āmma al-Miṣriyya lil-Kitāb), 15:38, and as having been founded by Mu‘āwiya b. al-Ḥārith, a king of Kinda, at Bakrī, *loc. cit.* See also Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 197-99, 240-51; C.E. Bosworth, “al-Mushaqqar,” *EI*², 7:671.

¹³ Ibn Ḥabīb, *Muḥabbar*, 317.

¹⁴ Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1:984-86, mentions a Persian governor in Baḥrayn, appointed by Khusraw I and known to the Arabs as “the mutilator.” Cf. R.G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs, from the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2001), 29.

could stay away,” so that it “acquired [population] from every clan of the Arabs and even from non-Arabs.”¹⁵

In a well-known episode, some tribesmen of Yarbu‘, a subgroup of Tamīm, once attacked a caravan carrying aromatics from South Arabia. This attack infuriated the Persians who then, advised by their Arab ally Hawdha b. ‘Alī al-Ḥanafī, announced that a market would be held for the Tamīm at al-Mushaqqar. When the Tamīm arrived, ready for “provisions and gleanings” (*al-mīra wal-luqāt*), the Persian cavalry massacred them. Although this episode occurs in several sources,¹⁶ there is no hint of it in the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*. One likely reason for this is the association of the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* with the Tamīm, who must have had little desire to remember this event. Another reason is that this market was a *mīra*, set up to feed beduin and to allow them to exchange with the inhabitants of the oasis; it did not occur regularly and predictably.

Ṣuḥār and Dabā were the next stops, on the southwestern slope of the coast below the Straits of Hurmuz.¹⁷ These are described elsewhere as the “the [two] ports of the Arabs,” and “the antechamber of China, the storehouse of the East and Iraq for all manner of goods, and the succor of Yemen.”¹⁸ The *ḥadīth al-aswāq* describes them as governed by al-Julandā, another dynastic ruler appointed or confirmed by the Sasanians. Like the rulers of Dūma and Mushaqqar, Julandā took tithes or customs dues. These two markets took up all of Rajab, although this month’s sacred character finds no echo in the narrative.¹⁹ At Dabā, we

¹⁵ See the story of Muhalhil, held prisoner near Mushaqqar but receiving regular visits from his friend the wine merchant, at Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī*, 6:128.

¹⁶ Including Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī*, 16:45 (from Ibn al-Kalbī), 16:78; Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1:984-88; Yāqūt, *Mu’jam*, 5:135. See also Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 29; Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 87.

¹⁷ al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm li-ma’rifat al-aqālīm* (Leiden: Brill, 1877), 70-71, 92-93; Yāqūt, *Mu’jam*, 2:435, 3:394.

¹⁸ Muqaddasī, 70-71; Yāqūt, 3:394 (on Ṣuḥār), *dihlīz al-Ṣīn wa-khizānat al-sharq wal-‘Irāq min kull shay’ wa-maghūthat al-Yaman*.

¹⁹ On Rajab, see M.J. Kister, “Rajab Is the Month of God....” *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971): 191-223. Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 254, points out that holding these markets in the sacred month allowed travelers to arrive without “protection.” However, since coastal ‘Uman was already under the rule of Julandā and the Sasanians, no such protection was needed.

have the appearance of “merchants of India and Sind...also of China and the people of the East.” Its wares included “the merchandise of the Arabs and the merchandise of the sea.” At the same time, Dabā and Ṣuḥār featured locally-produced goods, especially fabrics, and peculiarly Arabian methods of sale.²⁰ Different kinds of trade and traders blended together, here and in the sequence as a whole.

al-Shiḥr. This name could denote a stretch of the coast of Ḥaḍramawt,²¹ but here it refers to a seaport dominated, then as now, by a mountain crowned by the grave of the prophet Hūd.²² The market here took up half of Sha‘bān. The direct route from Ṣuḥār and Dabā, across the Empty Quarter, would have been impossible, and the only way to arrive was the roundabout route by sea. However, the tradition says only: “Then they would go, together with all those who were present from among the merchants of the sea and the land, to al-Shiḥr....” Since al-Shiḥr was not under the control of any king or organized polity (*arḍ mamlaka*), those who went there had to “seek the protection” of the Banū Yathrib, a fraction (*taqallul*) of the dominant clan in the area, the Banū Mahra. Items of commerce included tanned hides, fabrics and other goods for local distribution; and frankincense, myrrh, and other aromatics, destined for markets far away.

‘Adan (Aden) and Ṣan‘ā’. The port of Aden, described by the geographical writer al-Hamdānī as “foremost of the markets of the Arabs,”²³ receives lots of attention. A party of merchants traveled there from al-Shiḥr, “with the exception of the merchants of the sea: the only ones among them who moved on [to Aden] were those who had unsold merchandise left over. [These] would join the people at Aden, together with those who had missed the previous markets.” Unlike al-Shiḥr, Aden was “territory under the rule of a king and under jurisdiction,” *arḍ mamlaka wa-amr muḥkam*: formerly the kings of Ḥimyar, and more recently the *Abnā’*, Arabized Persians who ruled Yemen

²⁰ On methods of sale, see Bonner, “The Arabian Silent Trade,” esp. 30-33.

²¹ Bakrī, *Mu‘jam*, 3:65-66.

²² Yāqūt, 3:327; al-Hamdānī, *Ṣifat Jazīrat al-‘Arab* (Leiden: Brill, 1881-1901), 213; Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 266-67.

²³ Hamdānī, 53, *wa-ḥiya aqdam aswāq al-‘Arab*. See also Yāqūt, 4:89-90; Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 268-70.

after them. This ruling elite is praised, especially because they abstain from participation in the market. Commodities there included perfumes which were then transported overland to Persia and Byzantium. This market took up the first ten days of Ramaḍān. After Aden came Ṣan‘ā’ in central Yemen,²⁴ where the market took up the last half of Ramaḍān. Products exchanged included cotton, saffron, dyestuffs, other fabrics, and iron. Political control was held, as at Aden, by the *Abnā’*.²⁵

Rābiya. This obscure place, impossible to locate,²⁶ lay somewhere in the mountains of Ḥaḍramawt. As at al-Shiḥr, those who went there had to seek the protection of a local clan, the Āl Masrūq b. Wā’il al-Ḥaḍramī. Here the dominant tribal group were the Kinda, who, in the later fifth century, had split into two groups: those who briefly achieved glory and domination in the “kingdom of Kinda,” and those who remained in Ḥaḍramawt or returned there afterward.²⁷ We are told that the market of Rābiya coincided with ‘Ukāz, in the second half of Dhū l-Qa‘da, which is odd since the sequence of markets is otherwise consecutive.²⁸

‘Ukāz. This market receives the most attention of all. Several places called ‘Ukāz are attested for the early Islamic period, to the east and south of Mecca.²⁹ For the pre-Islamic site, however, the literary sources are neither unanimous nor clear.³⁰ ‘Ukāz came to life only for the annual fair, perhaps in different locations. Its market imposed “neither tithes nor protection.”³¹ The *ḥadīth al-aswāq* mentions the exchange of commodities there, including the “leather of ‘Ukāz,” but it shows more interest in various gift exchanges, including presents made by the “kings”

²⁴ Bakrī, *Mu‘jam*, 3:118-19; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 3:425-31; Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 271-74.

²⁵ Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1:270.

²⁶ Rābiya is not mentioned any Arabic geographical work of which I am aware.

²⁷ Olinder, *The Kings of Kinda*.

²⁸ Bonner, “Time Has Come Full Circle.”

²⁹ Kh. al-Muaikel, “Sūq ‘Ukāz in al-Ṭā’if: Archaeological Survey of an Islamic Site,” *al-‘Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 7.1(1995): 1-7.

³⁰ al-Ya‘qūbī, *Kitāb al-buldān* (Leiden: Brill, 1892), 317; Bakrī, *Mu‘jam*, 3:218-21; Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam*, 4:142; J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1927), 88-91; Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 277-343.

³¹ Marzūqī, 2:165.

to the “nobles.”³² ‘Ukāz was also the site of competitions among poets, and an occasion for forging alliances, contracting marriages, fomenting wars, and warning about traitors:

It used to happen that when a man committed an act of betrayal or a grave crime, one of [his clansmen] would set out to raise the banner of betrayal for him at ‘Ukāz. In this way someone would rise to make a speech about this act of betrayal, saying, “Behold, so-and-so the son of so-and-so has betrayed. Know his face, do not attach yourselves to him through marriage, do not associate with him and do not heed anything he says.”³³

Responsibility for admission to the “fair” (*mawsim*) was allotted to fractions (*afkhādh*) of, once again, the Tamīm. All in all, ‘Ukāz, here and elsewhere, has a utopian character, as the site of a pan-Arab peace where the practices of generosity and competition have free rein.

Majanna, Dhū l-Majāz. These two sites, just to the west of ‘Ukāz, were similar to it in character. It is difficult to work out the timing of these three events,³⁴ but they amounted to a single, long fair. They also provided a link to the pilgrimage, which began at Minā, a day’s journey from Dhū l-Majāz. However, the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* does not consider Minā and ‘Arafā—and certainly not Mecca—as part of the cycle of “markets of the Arabs.”

Khaybar, Ḥajr al-Yamāma. The different versions of the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* disagree on how the sequence came to an end. Ibn Ḥabīb concludes with sites in central Arabia:

Then came the market of Dhū l-Majāz, which is close to ‘Ukāz. It took place from the first to the eighth of Dhū l-Ḥijja. Then they went on to Minā [for the pilgrimage]. Then the market of Nuṭāt took place at Khaybar, and the market of Ḥajr in al-Yamāma, from the day of ‘Ashūrā’ [tenth of al-Muḥarram] to the end of al-Muḥarram.

³² Bonner, “The Arabian Silent Trade,” 41-45.

³³ Marzūqī, 2:170.

³⁴ See the views ascribed to al-Aṣma‘ī, in Yāqūt, 5:55, 58-59; Bonner, “Time Has Come Full Circle.”

This Nuṭāt [of Khaybar] is obscure,³⁵ and the tradition says nothing about what went on there. Ḥajr was the chief town of al-Yamāma, afterward a center of resistance against Medina and the Muslims during the wars of the *ridda* or Apostasy.³⁶

Marzūqī, citing Ibn al-Kalbī, says that the sequence of markets ended in Syria, at Buṣrā and Adhri ʿāt. It is true that Arabs frequented both these towns while they were still under Byzantine rule. However, Marzūqī's information here relates to the late Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsīd period.³⁷ Accordingly, the most plausible solution is to follow Ibn Ḥabīb, and to say that the market sequence ended in al-Yamāma, the very heart of Arabia.

What the tradition does not include

The *ḥadīth al-aswāq* is as remarkable for what it leaves out as for what it includes. In fact, it omits several of the major Arabian emporia of the time.

Most notable for its absence is al-Ḥīra, a thriving town in the borderland of Iraq and the seat of the Lakhmid kings, Arab clients or vassals of the Persian empire from the fourth until the seventh centuries. Often mentioned as a commercial center,³⁸ al-Ḥīra is known to have traded with some of the “markets of the Arabs.” In particular, the last Lakhmid ruler is said to have sent a

³⁵ Yāqūt, 5:291, says that Nuṭāt here refers to a fortification (*hiṣn*) in Khaybar, or alternatively, a spring which watered palm groves and villages.

³⁶ Hamdānī, 139, 153-54, 180; G.R. Smith, art. “al-Yamāma, EI² 11:269. Ḥajr al-Yamāma should not be confused with Hajar (the region where al-Mushaqqar was located) or with al-Ḥijr (Madā'in Ṣāliḥ), in northwestern Arabia.

³⁷ Marzūqī, 2:169.

³⁸ G. Rothstein, *Die Dynastie der Lakhmiden in al-Ḥīra* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1899); G. Jacob, *Altarabisches Beduinenleben* (Berlin: Mayer, 1897), 79; Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 374-89; M.J. Kister, “Al-Ḥīra: Some Notes on its Relations with Arabia,” *Arabica* 15 (1968): 143-69, repr. in *Studies in Jahiliyya and Early Islam* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1980, 2002); C.E. Bosworth, “Iran and the Arabs before Islam,” *Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. E. Yarshater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968-91), 3: 593-612, esp. 597-602; I. Shahid, EI² art. “al-Ḥīra,” 3:462-63. On a yearly market at al-Ḥīra, see Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 215; Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 29; and Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 97.

yearly caravan (*laṭīma*) to ‘Ukāz and Yemen, and to have demanded tribute (*itāwa*) there.³⁹

On the coast of the Gulf, al-Khaṭṭ does not appear in the tradition on the markets, even though it is often mentioned as the source of spears, imported from India into mineral and lumber-poor Arabia. In fact, however, this toponym usually refers to a stretch of coastline, and not to any particular port.⁴⁰

Less surprising—for reasons of chronology—is the absence of the capital of the early sixth-century kingdom of Kinda in south central Arabia, sometimes named as Ghamr Dhī Kinda.⁴¹ This may be the site now identified as Qaryat al-Fāw, which already lay in ruins at the rise of Islam, but which contained a marketplace, together with a palace and civic buildings.⁴²

Mecca’s role in peninsular and international trade has received much attention in recent decades. Here the argument has been over commercial activity, and not over a physical site or sites within the town itself. At any rate, while Quraysh and the pilgrimage are mentioned in the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*, Mecca appears there only once,⁴³ and not as part of the “markets of the Arabs.” Similarly, the tradition makes no mention of neighboring al-Ṭā’if,⁴⁴ Najrān⁴⁵ and Ḥubāsha.⁴⁶ Also missing are the south Ara-

³⁹ See previous note. This refers to al-Nu‘mān III b. al-Mundhir (580-602).

⁴⁰ Yāqūt, 2:378, says that al-Khaṭṭ comprises the entire coast of ‘Umān and al-Baḥrayn. But in Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*, 84, al-Mundhir b. Nu‘mān, an opponent of Islam during the *rida* wars, makes a stand at al-Khaṭṭ, here a fortified place on the coast of al-Baḥrayn, and is killed; or alternatively, he holds out against Khālīd b. al-Walīd, who breaks off the siege and proceeds to Iraq. See also A. Grohmann, “al-Khaṭṭ,” *EI*² 4:1130-31. Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 214, conjectures that the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* omits al-Khaṭṭ because it traded in the single commodity of spears.

⁴¹ Ya‘qūbī, *Ta’rīkh*, 1:247; Yāqūt, 4:211-12; G. Olinder, *The Kings of Kinda of the Family of Ākil al-Murār* (Lund and Leipzig: C.W.K. Gleerup and O. Harrasowitz, 1927), 34-35.

⁴² A.R. al-Ansary, *Qaryat al-Fau: A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilization in Saudi Arabia* (Riyadh: University of Riyadh and New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982). See also Olinder, *Kings of Kinda*; I. Shahid, art. “Kinda,” *EI*², 5: 118-20; *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 5, trans. C.E. Bosworth (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 122-23, n. 312.

⁴³ Marzūqī, *Azmina*, 2:167.

⁴⁴ Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī*, 4:133; 4:303; Afghānī, *Aswāq*, 27, 215.

⁴⁵ Yāqūt, 5:266-71; I. Shahid, *EI*², 7:871-72.

bian markets known as Ṣafariyya which, like the treacherous *mīra* which the Sasanians held for the Tamīm,⁴⁷ were intended to prevent local beduin from starving and/or marauding, apparently in the month (or two months) of Ṣafar.⁴⁸

An especially interesting omission is Badr, near the Red Sea, famous as the site of the first battle of Islam in 2/624. Books of *sīra* and *maghāzī*—narratives about Muḥammad, the earliest Muslim community, and their military campaigns—describe Badr as “one of the yearly fairs of the Arabs” (*mawsim min mawāsim al-‘Arab*).⁴⁹ However, these sources disagree over what went on there. According to al-Wāqidī (d. 207/827), this was an occasion for feasting and boasting, as we see in the speech made by the Meccan leader, Abū Jahl, on the eve of the battle:

Abū Jahl said, “By God, let us not return [to Mecca] until we have stopped at Badr.” At the time Badr used to be one of the yearly fairs of Arabia before Islam (*min mawāsim al-jāhiliyya*) where the Arabs would come together; they had a market there. [Abū Jahl went on,] “In this way the Arabs will hear of us and our journey. We will stay at Badr for three days, slaughtering camels, giving feasts and drinking wine, while the singing-girls perform for us. Then the Arabs will be in awe of us ever afterward.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ḥubāsha, situated between Yemen and Ḥijāz, was, according to al-Azraqī, the last of the “ancient markets” to be closed down in Islamic times: al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka* (Mecca: Dār al-thaqāfa, 1385/1965), 1:191-92; see also Afghani, *Aswāq*, 258-60.

⁴⁷ Above, n. 16.

⁴⁸ Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, ed. Ch. Pellat (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmi‘a al-Lubnāniyya, 1965-78), 2:346, § 1303; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 99; Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 83, 163. On the two months of Ṣafar, see Wellhausen, *Reste*, 95, n. 2; Bonner, “Time Has Come Full Circle.”

⁴⁹ Ṭabarī, 1:1307, 1460; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. al-Saqqā and others (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1980), 2:170; al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-maghāzī* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 1:43-44; Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt* (Leiden: Brill, 1904-40), 2.1: 42-43; Afghānī, *Aswaq*, 211-13; Jacob, *AltArabisches Beduinenleben*, 147; Wellhausen, *Reste*, 83f.

⁵⁰ Wāqidī, *loc. cit.*; cf. Ṭabari, *Ta’rīkh*, 1:1307.

However, Wāqidi's disciple Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845) gives a different sense of the occasion:

Badr of the desert was a meeting-place where the Arabs would meet, and a market which took place on the new moon of the month of Dhū l-Qa'da. The market was set up on the morrow of the new moon and they stayed there for eight days, selling whatever merchandise they had produced, gaining a dirham of profit for every dirham [invested]. Then they went on their way.⁵¹

Instead of feasting, drinking and singing-girls, we have sober commerce and turning of profit. Ibn Sa'd seems aware of the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*, since he times the fair of Badr in a way that might (with some stretching) fit into its chronological sequence.

Finally, the absence of Yathrib, known afterward as Medina, seems strange because a considerable amount of information is available on the market, or rather, markets of Yathrib before and during Muḥammad's residence there.⁵²

Why do these places not appear in the sequence of "markets of the Arabs"? First of all, whatever the purpose of this narrative tradition may have been, it was not to provide an exhaustive list of Arabian markets. For this we must look to the *Description of the Arabian Peninsula* by al-Hamdānī (d. 334/945), which includes around fifty "ancient markets of the Arabs,"⁵³ as opposed to the dozen or so in the various versions of *the ḥadīth al-aswāq*. Hamdānī includes our "markets of the Arabs" (from Dūma to Yamāma, with the exception of Rābiya), together with the places just mentioned (Hīra, Badr, Yathrib, etc.), as well as others, some of them quite difficult to identify.

We are left, then, with two basic questions. To what extent, if at all, does the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* describe events that actually happened? And what was the purpose of this sequence of mar-

⁵¹ Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:1:42-43.

⁵² Michael Lecker, "On the Markets of Medina (Yathrib) in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic times," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 133-47; M.J. Kister, "The Market of the Prophet," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 8 (1965): 272-76, repr. in *Studies in Jahiliyya and Early Islam* (Ashgate: Variorum, 1980).

⁵³ Hamdānī, *Ṣifa*, 179-80.

kets, fixed so precisely in time and place? To answer these questions, we must investigate the tradition more closely.

Time frame and political conditions

The situation described in the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* is that of Arabia after the establishment of Persian dominion in Yemen in the early 570s (which the tradition mentions), and well after the fall of the monarchy of Kinda, around 530 (which it ignores). The Sasanian invasion of the Byzantine Near East in the 610s provides a *terminus ad quem*, because it receives no mention at all. Looking more precisely, we can date these events and conditions to the turn of the seventh century. In particular, the tradition dates a certain story to “the year 35, reckoning from the Year of the Elephant, five years before the Summoning” [of Muḥammad].⁵⁴ The Year of the Elephant refers to Abraha’s failed siege of Mecca, which according to Islamic tradition took place in the year of Muḥammad’s birth, or 570 CE.⁵⁵ Accordingly, this story in the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* dates to 605 CE. Of course these chronological data may have been added long afterward, although we are told that the Arabs often reckoned by the Elephant during the decades before Islam.⁵⁶

The description of northern Arabia in the tradition reflects the weakening of the Ghassānids in the northwest (from the 580s) and the elimination of the Lakhmids in the northeast (in 602). Ukaydir, named as a ruler of Dūma, appears in Islamic sources, beginning with the expedition against Tabūk in 9/630; it is thus possible that his reign went back to the first decade of the 600s. In ‘Umān, Julandā was at first the title of Arab governors under Sasanian protectorate, in the reign of Khusraw I; later it became

⁵⁴ Marzūqī, 2:168, the story of ‘Amr b. Shurayd and Ma‘mar b. al-Hārith.

⁵⁵ Qur’an 105 (*al-Fīl*). Inscriptional evidence indicates an earlier date for Abraha’s campaign, 552 CE, and nothing directly involving Mecca, see Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 55-56; Beeston, “Abraha,” *EI*² 1:102-03; “al-Fīl,” *EI*² 2:895; J. Ryckmans, “Inscriptions sud-arabes,” *Le Muséon* (1953): 339-42.

⁵⁶ Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka* (see below, n. 92), 1:154, the Arabs “used to reckon by the Year of the Elephant in their contracts and acknowledgements of debt,” *bi-kutubihim wa-duyūnihim*. See also Ṭabarī, 1:1253-55; Mas‘ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh wal-ishrāf* (Leiden: Brill, 1894), 202-14; Simon, *Meccan Trade*, 23, 126, n. 26.

a personal name for the ruling dynasty. At the beginning of Islam, ‘Umān’s ruler was al-Julandā b. al-Mustakbir, named twice in the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*, who died at an advanced age between the years 8 and 10 of the Hijra (629-32 CE).⁵⁷ This Julandā may, like Ukaydir, have already been in place in the first decade of the seventh century. From all this we can conclude that the tradition describes conditions around 600-610, though it also alludes to some earlier events.

Not only does the tradition make no mention of the Byzantine-Persian wars, it never refers directly to the Byzantines at all. It also ignores the Arab-Persian battle at Dhū Qār, which took place some time between 604 and 611.⁵⁸ The Persians themselves, however, make several appearances, as traders and imperialists. In Mushaqqar, merchandise arrives from across the Gulf, while the Sasanians appoint or confirm the local rulers, as they do elsewhere.⁵⁹ In ‘Umān, Julandā governs Dabā and Ṣuḥār, again under Persian overlordship. In reality, three centuries of Persian presence in ‘Umān had resulted in a complex distribution of land and water resources, and while Julandā may have held sway in Dabā, he is not likely to have done so in Ṣuḥār, which the imperial authorities jealously kept for themselves.⁶⁰ For this reason it seems odd that Ṣuḥār appears in the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* as an emporium for local products, and Dabā as an entrepot for maritime trade. In Yemen, the cities are ruled by the *abnā’*, descendants of the Sasanians who occupied the country in the 570s.

All the places just mentioned (except Dūma) are under Sasanian overlordship and described as *arḍ mumlaka*, territory under settled rule. Here the Arab rulers take customs dues (*maks*) or a tithe (*‘ushr*) from the markets, and have the right to sell their own wares before anyone else. There is no mention of tribute or tax paid to the imperial authorities, though some such thing must have happened. Elsewhere, travelers must pay *khifāra*, “protection.” In addition to these two conditions—indirect domination by the Sasanians, and tribal “protection”—there is the situation

⁵⁷ J.C. Wilkinson, “The Julandā of Oman,” *Journal of Oman Studies* 1 (1975): 97-107, esp. 99.

⁵⁸ Ṭabarī, 1:1015-37.

⁵⁹ Marzūqī, 2:162.

⁶⁰ J.C. Wilkinson, “Arab-Persian Land Relationships in Late Sasanid Oman,” *Proceedings of the Sixth (1972) Seminar for Arabian Studies* (London, 1973); idem, “The Julandā of Oman,” 98-99.

of ‘Ukāz and its neighbors, Dhū l-Majāz and Majanna. Even though the fair there took place during the sacred month of Dhū l-Qa‘da, it was not immune to violence and the blood feud, as we see in the revenge story about Muḥārib and the brother of Ḥurr,⁶¹ and in the statement that the Arab nobles used to veil themselves at ‘Ukāz, for fear of being recognized.⁶² Nonetheless, ‘Ukāz provided the occasion for a general peace.

Transmission of the narrative

Within the great mass of early Arabic narrative and historical traditions (*akhbār*), the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* stands out in several ways. For one thing, the two principal versions of it are longer than most *akhbār* relating to pre-Islamic Arabia. Another peculiarity is the tradition’s thematic unity and range: it covers an unusually comprehensive topic and a broad extent of both space and time.

Do this unusual content and form argue for the tradition’s authenticity? Could it be a chunk of narrative that originated in (or soon after) the early seventh century and then, for some reason, did not undergo the recombining and recasting that were the lot of so many Arabic narratives?⁶³ It is tempting to think so. However, while the tradition constitutes a single unit of narrative—and was considered as such within medieval Islamic scholarship—it actually contains diverse interests, tendencies and biases. In other words, the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* resulted, like other Arabic narrative traditions, from a long process of collecting, editing and recombining of information. Our next task is to outline that process as best we can.

We have seen that the tradition exists in several versions, of which the earliest are in books by Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb, al-Ya‘qūbī and al-Marzūqī.⁶⁴ Ya‘qūbī’s version is by far the short-

⁶¹ Marzūqī, 2:168.

⁶² Marzūqī, 2:166; Bonner, “The Arabian Silent Trade,” 43.

⁶³ Recent work in this area is voluminous. A good starting-point is Albrecht Noth’s *Quellenkritische Studien* (Bonn, 1973), translated by M. Bonner and reedited with L. Conrad, as *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Analysis* (Princeton: Darwin, 1994).

⁶⁴ Above, n. 4. See also Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *Kitāb al-imtā‘ wal-mu‘ānasa* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1965), 1:75-94; ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Baghdādī, *Khizānat al-adab* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya,

est, Marzūqī's the longest. At first glance it seems logical to consider Ibn Ḥabīb's version as the most reliable, since it is the earliest and relatively free of the garblings that afflict Marzūqī's version as we have it. Considerations such as these led the modern Syrian scholar Sa'īd al-Afghānī to say repeatedly that Marzūqī took his information from Ibn Ḥabīb.⁶⁵ However, this turns out to be not quite accurate, and while our text of Marzūqī contains lacunae and apparent errors, there is no obvious reason why we should reject out of hand the many passages in Marzūqī that are lacking in Ibn Ḥabīb, or why we should prefer Ibn Ḥabīb's wording of a passage when it differs from Marzūqī's.

Where did Ibn Ḥabīb, Ya'qūbī and Marzūqī get this information in the first place? Ibn Ḥabīb cites no *isnād* (supporting chain of authorities) here, in accordance with his usual practice in the *Muḥabbar* and elsewhere.⁶⁶ However, we know that his main authority was Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. ca. 204/819), who lived in al-Kūfa. In fact, Ibn Ḥabīb was Ibn al-Kalbī's student and the *rāwī*, or primary transmitter, of his monumental work on genealogy, the *Jamharat al-ansāb*.

Marzūqī, for his part, provides no systematic listing of his authorities, but he does leave clues scattered here and there. For instance, he begins several sections with the phrase "Abū l-Mundhir said." Abū l-Mundhir is the *kunya*, or teknonym, of Hishām b. al-Kalbī who thus emerges, unsurprisingly, as a common source for Ibn Ḥabīb and Marzūqī, and probably also for Ya'qūbī who, like Ibn Ḥabīb, gives no indication of his sources.⁶⁷

Marzūqī provides another clue when he says: "This is what Abū l-Mundhir said, on the authority of his father and Khirāsh: this is what the Banū Tamīm say."⁶⁸ Here it emerges that the

1967), 4:431-32; Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'shā* (Cairo: al-Mu'assasa al-Miṣriyya, 1964), 1:410-11.

⁶⁵ Afghānī, *Aswāq al-Arab*, passim.

⁶⁶ I. Lichtenstädter, "Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb and his *Kitāb al-Muḥabbar*," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1939): 1-27, esp. 19-24, listing the *isnāds* that do occur in the *Muḥabbar*; eadem, art. "Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb," *EI*², 7: 401-02.

⁶⁷ Further proof that Ibn Ḥabīb's and Marzūqī's versions both derive from Ibn al-Kalbī can be found in the fact that whenever Marzūqī says "Abū l-Mundhir said," this material appears in Ibn Ḥabīb as well.

⁶⁸ Marzūqī, 2:166.

ḥadīth al-aswāq began as what we might call a “tribal tradition” among the Tamīm, a confederation who, at the beginning of Islam, lived mainly in northeastern Arabia. This is significant because the Tamīm are, in effect, a collective protagonist within the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*, as we shall see shortly.

It thus appears that information on the markets circulated among the Tamīm, who related it to a certain Khirāsh b. Ismāʿīl al-Shaybānī al-ʿIjlī, an obscure figure active in the mid-second/eighth century.⁶⁹ Khirāsh passed this information on to Muḥammad b. al-Sāʾib al-Kalbī,⁷⁰ who then relayed it to his son, the already-mentioned Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. ca. 204/819). Or alternatively, Hishām received it directly from both his father and Khirāsh; we find a similar ambiguity elsewhere.⁷¹ Either way, Hishām b. al-Kalbī was likely the first to put the tradition into writing. Ibn Ḥabīb received it from Ibn al-Kalbī and recorded it in his *Muḥabbar*, which we now have. At some time Ibn Ḥabīb left his native Kūfa and went to live in Baghdad, but otherwise we know little about his life.

Meanwhile, the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* also circulated in the city of Basra. We know this from statements by Marzūqī at the beginning of the tradition⁷² and toward its end⁷³:

Abū Bakr al-Duraydī [= Ibn Durayd] said: the tradition of the markets (*ḥadīth al-aswāq*) was not in the book of Abū ʿUbayda. Rather, it was Abū Ḥātim who included it; accordingly, we have relayed it from his book (*fa-naqalnāhu min kitābihi*).

Here we see that the Basran Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī (d. ca. 255/869) took over the tradition on the markets, most likely di-

⁶⁹ On Khirāsh, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, ed. G. Flügel (Leipzig: F.C.W. Vogel, 1871-72), 1:95.

⁷⁰ This line of transmission is confirmed at Ibn al-Nadīm, *loc. cit.* In al-Anbārī’s commentary on the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, 427-41, Khirāsh is the main “Bakrī” source, emphasizing the “royal” character of the Kindī house: Olinder, *Kings of Kinda*, 22-23.

⁷¹ Ibn al-Nadīm, *loc. cit.*, regarding the Rabīʿa.

⁷² Marzūqī, 2:161, “Abu Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Durayd al-Azdī said, in an *isnād* which he recited (*fi isnād dhakarahu*): the markets of the Arabs,” etc.

⁷³ Marzūqī, 2:168.

rectly from a book written by Ibn al-Kalbī,⁷⁴ and not from Ibn Ḥabīb. (The other Basran authority mentioned here, Abū ‘Ubayda Ma‘mar b. al-Muthannā, had little or nothing to do with Ibn al-Kalbī, which helps to explain his non-participation in the tradition on the markets.⁷⁵) Abū Ḥātim recorded the tradition in a book of his own, now lost. He also relayed the tradition to his Basran student Ibn Durayd (d. 321/933-34), who had a particular interest in this material because of a life-long affiliation with the Gulf and ‘Umān.⁷⁶ A century later, a book of Ibn Durayd’s containing the tradition on the markets came to the attention of al-Marzūqī (d. 421/1030), active at the Buyid court at Isfahan. Marzūqī included the tradition in his *Book of Times and Places*.

Marzūqī thus preserves what we may call a “Basran/Gulf” or “eastern” version of the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*. Similarly, we may describe Ibn Ḥabīb’s version as “Kufan/Baghdadi” or “western.” There are also a few extant fragments of an “eastern” version that go back to the Basran scholar al-Aṣma‘ī (d. 213/813), apparently independently of Ibn al-Kalbī.⁷⁷ Here it seems that Aṣma‘ī

⁷⁴ Abū Ḥātim had no direct affiliation with Ibn al-Kalbī: see, for instance, Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1404/1984), 4: 226. However, Ibn Durayd cites him here as a transmitter of the tradition on the markets, which goes back to Ibn al-Kalbī, as we have just seen. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:58-59; C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Leiden: Brill, 1937-43), I, 107, Suppl. I, 167; B. Lewin, *EI*², 1:125.

⁷⁵ Abū ‘Ubayda Ma‘mar b. al-Muthannā was born around 110/728 in Basra and died there at an advanced age. Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, 10: 221, does not list Ibn al-Kalbī among Abū ‘Ubayda’s tradents in either direction; see also Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, 4: 226; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 58; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta’rīkh Baghdād* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1931), 13:252-58; Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, I, 102-03, Suppl. I, 162 *EI*²1:125 (B. Lewin) and 1:158 (H.A.R. Gibb); and Olinder, *Kings of Kinda*, 25 (“Abu ‘Ubayda seems...independent of Ibn al-Kalbī’s traditions without...showing any great differences from them”).

⁷⁶ Ibn Durayd had ancestral roots in ‘Umān and the tribal confederation of Azd. When the war of the Zanj raged in southern Iraq in the 870s, destroying Basra, he departed for the Gulf region and stayed there around twelve years. Then he returned to Iraq and died in Baghdad at an advanced age in 321/933-34. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:61-62; Brockelmann, Suppl. 1: 172; J.W. Fück, “Ibn Durayd,” *EI*², 3: 757-58.

⁷⁷ Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-buldān*, 4:142; 5:55, 58-59; above, n. 34.

not only relayed information about individual markets, but also conveyed a sense of their being linked sequentially.

We owe much of our information on old Arabia to scholars such as Abū ‘Ubayda, Abu Ḥātim, al-Aṣma‘ī and (apparently) Khirāsh, who collected poetry from the desert-dwelling Arabs, as well as prose narratives on genealogy, battle-days of yore, and other matters. They then transmitted these materials in ways that resembled the procedures of the *muḥaddithūn*, the transmitters of Prophetic traditions and also, to a lesser extent, those of the historians. However, the literary specialists in Arabian antiquity were, in comparison with their traditionist colleagues, somewhat cavalier in their techniques of transmission; after all, pre-Islamic poetry and *akhbār* tended to be of secondary importance for serious religious and juridical scholarship.

For these and other reasons, modern scholars have devoted less effort to analysis of the literary sources for pre-Islamic Arabia than they have to those for early Islam. From our perspective now, however, it is not crystal-clear that the testimony of the early ‘Abbāsīd philologists is any less reliable than that of the traditionists and historians. After all, some of the philologists did interview their informants in person, at least some of the time. In this particular case, Khirāsh’s informants—unnamed members of Tamīm—may or may not have had accurate recollections of conditions in old Arabia, but they were clearly concerned with maintaining a collective sense of themselves, through these narratives of bygone days.

Tamīm and Quraysh

The transmission history of the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* brought us back to a collective informant, “the Banū Tamīm,” which led us to describe it as a “tribal tradition.” It is difficult to say what this really means,⁷⁸ but we do know that early Muslim scholars col-

⁷⁸ “Tribal traditions” do not come up often in modern studies of early Islamic historical writing. For older scholarship, see Olinder, *The Kings of Kinda*, cited throughout this essay, and W. Caskel, *Ajām al-‘Arab. Studien zur altarabischen Epik*, *Islamica* 3 (Leipzig: Asia Major, 1932), esp. 80f. For more recent work, see M. Lecker, *The Banū Sulaym: A Contribution to the Study of Early Islam* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1998), and Sarah Zubair Mirza, “Oral Tradition and Scribal Conventions in the Documents Attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad” (Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2010), especially Chapter 3.

lected information under tribal rubrics. So for instance, monographs were composed on Quraysh and Thaḳīf.⁷⁹ Hishām b. al-Kalbī authored books on ‘Āmir, Asad, Kalb, Kilāb, Muzayna, and the “royal” Kinda.⁸⁰ al-Madā’inī wrote about Khuzā’a, and al-Haytham b. ‘Adī about Tayyī.⁸¹ These books have long since disappeared, but they contained information on the protagonists’ genealogy and battle-days (*ayyām*), as well as verses vaunting (or denigrating) their achievements in generosity and war.

The Tamīm also appear in the titles of books of this kind, although their contents have not survived.⁸² In the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*, meanwhile, we can see that Khirāsh’s informants had a vivid sense of their ancestors’ presence in Arabia. The region of Mushaqqar was inhabited by ‘Abd al-Qays and Tamīm, and its “kings” were of Tamīm. Later, the tradition tells of the existence in Arabia of two groups, *muḥrimūn*, “sanctifiers,” and *muḥillūn*, “profaners,”⁸³ and then adds a third category, a group led by a Tamīmī named Ṣalṣala b. Aws, who fought the *muḥillūn*, even though this induced them to violate the truce of the sacred months. For now we may simply note that Marzūqī’s version of the tradition shows a positive attitude toward this group.⁸⁴ Finally, the Tamīm had a prominent role at ‘Ukāz:

Abū l-Mundhir said, the Muḍar claimed that control over the fair and the judgeship of ‘Ukāz (*amr al-mawsim wa-qaḍā’ ‘Ukāz*) belonged to the B. Tamīm. It [went to] their various fractions (*afkhādhihim*), with one of them exerting control over the fair, while [another] exerted control over [the judgeship]. After-

⁷⁹ Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī*, 6:94; R. Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1952-66), 1:98.

⁸⁰ Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 98f., 103; Blachère, *Histoire*, 1:129; Olinder, *Kings of Kinda*, 22-23. Our very same Khirāsh figures among the transmitters of the Kinda traditions.

⁸¹ Ibn al-Nadīm, 1:99-100, 103.

⁸² According to Ibn al-Nadīm, 1:96, Abū l-Yaqzān al-Nassāba wrote a *Kitāb akhbār Tamīm*, and Ibn al-Kalbī wrote a *Kitāb ḥilf Kalb wa-Tamīm*, part of a “battle-days” (*ayyām*) cycle.

⁸³ Marzūqī, 2: 166. Other sources say much the same, such as Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, 1:180-82.

⁸⁴ Marzūqī, 2:166, refers to this third group as *ahl hawan*, but this is not pejorative: all three groups are described as *ahwā’*, “tendencies.” Cf. Kister, “Mecca and Tamim,” 143.

ward, the ones among them who combined both functions were ‘Amir b. al-Zarb al-‘Adwānī, and Sa’d b. Zayd Manāt b. Tamīm.⁸⁵

The tradition then cites a verse recalling this Sa’d’s splendid position at ‘Ukāz. After him, six generations of Tamīmīs performed these functions, the last being the very same Ṣaṣal b. Aws whom we have just met. In a different version, we are told that “permission to enter the fair” was granted by one of the B. ‘Awāfa b. Sa’d b. Zayd Manāt b. Tamīm. The last of these to hold the office was a certain Karib b. Ṣafwān; during his lifetime, Islam arrived and the office was apparently abolished.⁸⁶ These two versions contradict one another, but either way, the Tamīm are said to have held high honors at ‘Ukāz.

While the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* has good things to say about other tribal confederations, such as Azd, Kinda and Quraysh, it presents the Tamīm in an especially favorable light and connects them to ‘Ukāz. Why should the Tamīm have wanted or needed this? A possible answer emerges from a courtly episode, placed toward the end of the seventh century CE, in which the poet al-Farazdaq, a proud Tamīmī, finds himself taunted by the (counter-) caliph Ibn al-Zubayr:

One hundred and fifty years before Islam, the B. Tamīm attacked the House [the Meccan sanctuary] and plundered it. Because of this desecration, which no one had ever committed before, the Arabs gathered against them and banished them from the land of Tihāma.⁸⁷

Elsewhere this event is called “the pilgrimage of betrayal.”⁸⁸ Interestingly, however, Farazdaq does not refute Ibn al-Zubayr’s

⁸⁵ Marzūqī, 2:167-68.

⁸⁶ Marzūqī, 2:168.

⁸⁷ Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī*, 9:328-29; 21:291-92. The account is relayed by ‘Umar b. Shabba.

⁸⁸ In Mas‘ūdī, *Tanbīh*, 203, the event (also situated 150 years before Islam) begins with a raid by two brothers, Awsā and Ḥaṣba, descendants of Zayd Manāt b. Tamīm [b. Murr], against people sent by the “kings” of South Arabia, carrying a cover for the Ka’ba and money for the guardians of the sanctuary. The raiders kill and despoil these en-

charge, but responds by vaunting his own father's achievements: "I am the son of the man who slaughtered the she-camels with plenteous milk, the choice of the spoils...."⁸⁹ Here Farazdaq refers to an incident in which his father, Ghālib b. Ṣa'ṣa'a, once slaughtered a camel and distributed its meat among the tents of his clan, and then got into a competition (*mu'āqara*) with another man. The contestants slaughtered camel after camel to see which of the two was more generous and ready to waste his own substance. The result was a triumph for Ghālib, and an enormous mound of carrion left to rot in the desert.⁹⁰

This conversation between poet and caliph points to conflict and migration in an obscure past. It emerges that the Tamīm's eponymous ancestor, Tamīm b. Murr, lies buried in Wāḍī al-Zahrān, the site of Dhū l-Majāz⁹¹; which indicates in turn that the Tamīm had, or claimed to have, roots in the region of 'Ukāz. The *ḥadīth al-aswāq* does not mention their expulsion and emigration from there, just as it does not mention the massacre of Tamīmīs that the Sasanians perpetrated at al-Mushaqqar. It does, however, present members of Tamīm as holding high honors at 'Ukāz, their ancestral homeland, over many generations. Farazdaq's response also points to the old Arabian values of competitive and self-destructive generosity, values that were not unique to the Tamīm, but which they continued to treasure for generations after the coming of Islam.

This self-vindicating view of peninsular networks and tribal history is part and parcel of the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*, where the sequence of markets works its way slowly through Arabia until its climax at 'Ukāz, the peninsular capital of boasting and generosity. Elsewhere I have contrasted this view with other early Arabic sources for pilgrimage and trade in Arabia before Islam, especially the history of Mecca written by the third/ninth-century Meccan scholar al-Azraqī. Here the goal of the yearly journey is not 'Ukāz but 'Arafa, Minā and Mecca; the central activity is the pilgrimage; trade is permitted but accorded no sacral value; and

voys and then proceed to the pilgrimage, where fighting breaks out once word gets out of their crime.

⁸⁹ Abū l-Faraj, *Aghānī*, 9: 329.

⁹⁰ Yāqūt, 3:430-31; Ibn Habib, *Muḥabbar*, 142; further references at Wellhausen, *Reste*, 90; Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, trans. Barber and Stern (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), 1:62; M.J. Kister, *El*², 2: 998.

⁹¹ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 87.

competitive, boastful generosity is ignored or condemned.⁹² And here, moreover, the collective protagonist is, without any doubt, the Prophet Muḥammad's tribe, the Quraysh. This foregrounding of Quraysh informs Azraqī's description of trading networks throughout the peninsula, just as the foregrounding of Tamīm informs the networks described in the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*.

This may seem complicated enough, but yet another difficulty emerges. Among the Arabic sources which describe the networks of Quraysh, we must include the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* itself, as when it mentions the travels of certain members of Quraysh and the "protection" that they sought from others.

How could a single narrative tradition contain both these "bi-ases"? The rough answer is that many early Arabic narrative traditions were assembled this way, as generations of transmitters and redactors combined bits of narrative that had originally come from different places.

The more precise answer begins with the transmission history of the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*, which shows that after Ibn al-Kalbī, it split into "western" and "eastern" versions. Both these versions contained "Qurashī" and "Tamīmī" elements. However, the western transmission—for our purposes, Ibn Ḥabīb—puts more emphasis on Quraysh. The eastern transmission—known to us from Marzūqī—tells us more about Tamīm. It may be that the Basrans subsequently added materials that were lacking in Ibn al-Kalbī's version, or that they continued to transmit materials that were present in Ibn al-Kalbī, which the "western" version subsequently dropped. Either way, we have an explanation for why Marzūqī's version is considerably longer than Ibn Ḥabīb's. Most importantly, we can explain some of the divergences between the two versions by concentrating our attention on this opposition of Quraysh and Tamīm.

Two modern views of the situation may help us to understand it better. The first is that of Julius Wellhausen's *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (Remains of Arabian Paganism), written over a century ago. Wellhausen did not know the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*, which at that time had not yet appeared in print. On the basis of other evidence, however, he argued that the fairs of 'Ukāz, Majanna and Dhū l-Majāz originally existed apart from Mecca. Then, he

⁹² Bonner, "Time Has Come Full Circle"; al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka* (Mecca: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1385/1965) 1:179-94.

maintained, as Quraysh extended their trading and political networks, they set their sights on ‘Ukāz and took it over. As a result, Quraysh integrated the pilgrimage and the Meccan sanctuary together with the fairs.⁹³

The second view is that of M.J. Kister, in an article on “Mecca and Tamīm.” Kister was well aware of the Tamīmī network described in the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*. In his view, however, this network became absorbed into the “tribal commonwealth” of Quraysh.⁹⁴ At an earlier time, Quraysh would only trade with merchants who frequented the markets of Dhū l-Majāz and ‘Ukāz during the sacred months.⁹⁵ Over time, however, Quraysh’s trade and influence grew, through the alliance of the *ḥums*,⁹⁶ and through an “inter-tribal militia set up to defend Mecca and the markets of Mecca,” in which members of Tamīm assumed some of the leading roles. Tamīm thus acted as agents of Quraysh, including when they held offices in Mecca and ‘Ukāz.⁹⁷ In all this, Kister sees Marzūqī as “supplementing” Ibn Ḥabīb, whom he takes as his main source, despite several contradictions in detail.⁹⁸ What emerges is a picture of cooperation between Tamīm and Quraysh, a picture which, according to Kister, overturns Wellhausen’s theory of a hostile takeover by Quraysh of the markets and fairs.⁹⁹

Recent contributions have tended to follow Kister’s approach, but Wellhausen’s still has much to recommend it. The networks of Quraysh and Tamīm, as we find them in these Arabic sources, are distinct but compatible, and it would certainly be wrong to portray these two tribes as enemies. What they represent instead, historiographically speaking, are rival views of commerce, time and space. The pro-Quraysh view, which we find in most of the relevant Arabic sources including, to some extent, the *ḥadīth al-aswāq* (especially its “western” transmission), conveys a sense of continuity in Arabia before and after the emergence of Islam,

⁹³ Wellhausen bases his argument on his assertion that Mecca was not the original center of the pilgrimage, *Reste*, 77.

⁹⁴ Kister, “Mecca and Tamīm,” 113.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁹⁶ Kister, “Mecca and Tamīm,” 132-40; Bonner, “Time Has Come Full Circle.”

⁹⁷ Kister, “Mecca and Tamīm,” 142-43.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 153-55.

especially through the annual pilgrimage. The pro-Tamīm view, especially in the “eastern” transmission of the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*, shows a different kind of continuity. Here a long sequence of markets brings together a motley collection of people, goods, and methods of commerce, culminating in the annual paroxysm of competitive generosity at ‘Ukāz. In this view, although the pilgrimage is connected to the sequence of “markets of the Arabs,” it is actually peripheral to it.

Conclusion

The narrative tradition on the “markets of the Arabs” depicts Arabia at a moment of transition, simultaneously looking outward, especially toward Sasanian Iran and Iraq, and inward toward ‘Ukāz. One could maintain that its unusual character and content speak in favor of its historicity and authenticity, as compared with most *akhbār* that deal with similar subject-matter. However, there is no way to prove this definitively, and after all, many students of early Islam now admit that they cannot say with confidence how things actually happened, *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. What we can say is that Arabian trade has a distinctive and unusual guise in the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*, again, when compared with the other relevant literary sources. Accordingly, I have identified two contrasting views of the matter with two networks or trajectories (“Tamīmī” and “Qurashī”). Perhaps I have done this too reductively and schematically. But if I am at all correct in this, then I can outline two different scenarios, or two ways of looking at the situation.

The first scenario runs as follows. Here we begin by supposing that in the decades before Islam, and perhaps much earlier than that, there actually was a cycle, or rather, spiral¹⁰⁰ of markets in Arabia, following a prescribed sequence and taking up most of the year. Of course people frequented other markets and few, if any individuals ever traversed the entire sequence. Nonetheless, it really took place, outlining the contours of Arab habitation and strengthening the Arabs’ emerging sense of themselves as a “nation” (*umma*). Its culminating point was not the annual pilgrimage, but rather the fair of ‘Ukāz. Meanwhile, the market sequence combined a rich variety of habits, rules and techniques for the exchange of goods and services. However, the

¹⁰⁰ Bonner, “Time Has Come Full Circle.”

early narrators (originators?) of the *ḥadīth al-aswāq*—identified with the Tamīm—nostalgically preferred the archaic mode of exchange that prevailed at ‘Ukāz: giving gifts, hosting feasts, competing for glory and honor, and hearing and judging musical, poetical and rhetorical performances. Moreover, the economic and social system in force here favored petty “kings” who taxed the markets and manipulated prices, and “nobles” who competed for the favors and gifts that those “kings” bestowed.¹⁰¹ Then, with the coming of Islam, these ways of doing things were quickly abandoned and suppressed.

In the second scenario we begin by conceding that we cannot be sure of the historicity of the market sequence; or in other words, that we cannot prove that it did or did not actually happen. However, we can still point to a lasting tension in historical writing in this area, as well as in other genres of Arabic literature. An example comes in the passages quoted earlier from two important scholars of the third/ninth century, al-Wāqidī and his disciple, Ibn Sa‘d, regarding the annual fair (*mawṣim*) of Badr.¹⁰² We may set aside the questions of whether this fair actually happened and whether it belonged, strictly speaking, to the “markets of the Arabs.” Instead we may note that in Wāqidī, the event consists of slaughtering camels, feasting, drinking wine, listening to singing-girls, and boasting of one’s achievements. We may also note that Wāqidī disapproves of this behavior: after all, the chief partygoer, Abū Jahl, is the archenemy of Muḥammad and Islam, and the very model of *jāhiliyya* in both his conduct and his name. Ibn Sa‘d, on the other hand, describes the market of Badr as simply a market, a place that resembles the description that we find in al-Azraqī of the markets of ‘Ukāz, Dhū l-Majāz and al-Majanna: that is, occasions for acquiring useful things, turning a profit, and socializing with other marketgoers. All this trading and socializing, meanwhile, amount to little more than diversions before the main event, which is the pilgrimage.

Well before Ibn Sa‘d, this tension had already been resolved, at least in Islamic law, in favor of what we now call a “free” commerce in which the market became, in and of itself, both the site and the mechanism for setting prices, and where the structures and rules were prescribed by jurists, rather than by nobles,

¹⁰¹ Bonner, “The Arabian Silent Trade.”

¹⁰² Above, nn. 50, 51.

kings, caliphs or governors. In some environments, however, including the court, the values of generosity and competition and the quest for honor and glory still lived on. In this way, the habits of ‘Ukāz and the “markets of the Arabs” continued to flourish, long after the triumph of Islam and the expansion of its commerce.