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Talking about Arab Origins: The Transmission of the *ayyām al-ʿarab* in Kūfa, Baṣra and Baghdād

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If we define the historical consciousness (*Geschichtsbewusstsein*) as any narrative effort to construct a meaningful past, we can say that it is an anthropological universalism. By telling, retelling, reconstructing, and re-membering their experience of temporality, people shape, reshape, and reassure their personal and collective identity.[1]

In this wider sense, the illiterate North Arabian tribes of pre-Islamic times might not have developed a historio*graphy*, but they still had a historical consciousness. They talked proudly about the past of their tribe and

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about the deeds of their ancestors, and they continued doing so after the coming of Islam by reciting poetry and narrating accounts about famous events in the so-called *ayyām al-ʿarab* (battle-days of the Arabs).

However, in early ʿAbbāsid times, a new, specifically *Islamic* historical master-narrative emerged. In consequence, serious ideological objections arose which questioned this concern for a period which lay before of qurʾānic revelation and which could not be embedded into the prophetical pattern of Salvation History. Within this teleological monotheistic scheme, the pre-Islamic *Arab* past, the so-called *jāhilīya*, was interpreted as a dark, barbaric and violent period of ignorance, against which the period of Islam built a contrasting world of virtue, peace, salvation and knowledge.[2]

Notwithstanding this increasingly dominant Islamic discourse in early ʿAbbāsid times, many people did not only continue talking about their tribal past[3], but made a considerable effort to preserve this "barbaric" tradition. Scholars and transmitters collected Arab "Antiquities",[4] put them into a written form and transformed them gradually into a part of the Arab cultural heritage, by creating pre-Islamic poetry, proverbs, tribal genealogy, legends and historical accounts. As Rina Drory emphasizes in her fundamental article on the topic, the early ʿAbbāsid times can be duly regarded as the period in which the *jāhilīya* was constructed as a powerful and canonized cultural model which was to substantially affect the perception of the pre-Islamic past.[5]

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[2]   For the perception of the pre-Islamic past within this interpretative scheme, cf. Springberg-Hinsen, Monika: *Die Zeit vor dem Islam in arabischen Universalgeschichten des 9. und 12. Jahrhunderts. Religionswissenschaftliche Studien 13.* Ed. A. Khoury, Theodor *et al.* Würzburg 1989; for the concept of *jāhilīya,* cf. especially pp. 68–75.

[3]   *Naḥnu qāʾilūn bi-ʿawn Allāh wa-tawfīqihī fī ayyām al-ʿarab wa-waqāʾiʿihim, fa-ʾinnahā maʿāthir al-jāhilīya wa-makārim al-akhlāq al-sunnīya:* Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī: *Al-ʿiqd al-farīd.* Ed. ʿAbd al-Madjīd al-Tarḥīnī. Beirut 1997, vol. VI, p. 3.

[4]   In the sense of artefacts (objects and texts) and knowledge related to the Arab Antiquity, the *jāhilīya.*

[5]   Drory, Rina: The Abbasid Construction of the Jahiliyya: Cultural Authority in the Making. In: *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996), pp. 33–49.

With respect to this fascinating cultural process, the following article will give an insight into one rather neglected aspect: The collection and transmission of the *ayyām al-ʿarab* or "battle-days of the Arabs narratives," its classification within the different fields of knowledge, and its social and cultural function. However, due to the scarcity of earlier studies and the complexity of the topic, this article represents only a preliminary treatment of the question.

2.1 The *ayyām al-ʿarab*: Some General Remarks

The term *ayyām al-ʿarab*[6] is applied to those combats which the North Arabian tribes fought amongst themselves in the pre-Islamic past. The particular day was mostly called after the settlement, wellspring etc. where it took place. Although we speak of "battles", these "days" were not part of real wars between large armies, but rather skirmishes or quarrels between small tribal groups.

The narrative structure of a *yawm* follows mostly a similar pattern[7]: It starts by narrating the origin of the dispute in a very sober, realistic and vivid prose[8] (using a very "showing" style with dramatic dialogues[9])

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[6] Caskel, Werner: Aijam al-ʿArab. Studien zur altarabischen Epik. In: *Islamica* 3/5 (1930), pp. 1–99; on p. 2f. he explains the special meaning of *yawm* as "battle". The term *yawm* is only applied to the battles in pre-Islamic Arabia and to several tribal conflicts in early Islamic history. The battles of Muḥammad and the early *umma* are mostly called *ghazwa* or *waqʿa*: *ibid.*, 3–5; see also Meyer, Egbert: *Der historische Gehalt der aiyām al-ʿArab.* Wiesbaden 1970, p. 21. Like *maghāzī*, *ayyām* is applied to the events themselves but also to the narratives telling them.

[7] For the literary form, the narrative structure, the style and the language of the *ayyām* cf. Caskel, *Aijam*, 9–54. A recent study focussing on the narrative structure is al-Qāḍī, Muḥammad: La composante narrative des "journées des arabes" (ayyām al-ʿArab). In: *Arabica* 56 (1999), pp. 358–371.

[8] Werner Caskel describes style and language of the *ayyām* as "knapp, anschaulich, bildhaft, vermeidet leere und prunkende Worte", Caskel, *Aijam*, 43. In general, this style corresponds to all what we know about the *khabar*-style (brevity, realism, direct dialogues, and brisk tempus). For the *khabar*, cf. the basic study: Leder, Stefan: The Literary Use of the khabar: A Basic Form of Historical Writing. In: Cameron, Averil/Conrad, Lawrence I. (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, I: Problems in the Literary Source Material.* Princeton 1992, pp. 277–315, esp. 307–313.

[9] Caskel, *Aijam*, 41f.; On page 45 he says: "Rede und Dialog fügen sich in der Erzählung in Schmucklosigkeit und treffender Kürze des Ausdruckes". Direct speech is also a typical characteristic of the *khabar*-style: Leder, *Khabar*, 308: "Direct speech, a dramatic or mimetic technique of representation, is used to reduce the narrator's account and

and introducing the *dramatis personae*, their tribal context and the matter of dispute. This introduction is usually the main focus of the *yawm* and its most developed narrative part. It is followed by a concise account of the different fights that took place, mostly focusing on the individuals who fought, on their personal bravery and on some noteworthy anecdotes.[10] Finally, the narration ends with poems that where sung in the context of these events. It consists mostly of fragments of *fakhr* (panegyric poems) where the winners praise the dead heroes, lampoon the beaten enemy and boast of their past victories. Sometimes you find poems in reply recited by the defeated side, where they remind the winners of earlier defeats.

The *ayyām* are accounts about the past, and like *akhbār* they present themselves as *factual* reports.[11] They never surpass the boundaries of a realistic depiction of events (in stark contrast to the later popular epic, where fantastic episodes are common). Therefore, it is remarkable that Ibn al-Nadīm did not consider the men dealing with *ayyām* as *akhbārīyūn*, historians or story-tellers, but as *naḥwīyūn and lughawīyūn*, grammarians or philologists.[12] Probably, this is based on the fact that most of the first collectors of *ayyām* were motivated predominantly by linguistic concerns, as we will see.

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avoid any comment or interpretation." *Showing* (vs. *telling)* is an expression used in narratology which refers to texts that present the plot mainly through dialogues, like a drama, the narrator being quite absent.

[10] The *ayyām al-ʿarab* are certainly no military accounts and are obviously not thought to reconstruct any battle or strategy from a technical point of view.

[11] The line between fiction and history is difficult to draw in its original context, especially in classical Arabic literature. In fact, an ambiguity between fact and fiction is a general characteristic of classical Arabic prose: "Fictional narration, whenever it appears, is imbedded in a mainstream of factual, or allegedly factual, narration. When reading these texts, the assumption of factuality and the impression that there is narrative fiction involved, are almost constantly conflicting perceptions." Leder, Stefan: Conventions of Fictional Narration in Learned Literature. In: Idem (ed.), *Story-telling in the framework of non-fictional Arabic Literature.* Wiesbaden 1998, p. 34.

[12] Ibn al-Nadīm places the main specialist on *ayyām,* Abū ʿUbayda, in the *maqāla* of philology (Ibn al-Nadīm, Muḥammad b. Isḥāq: *Kitāb al-fihrist.* Ed. Gustav Flügel. Leipzig 1871–72, p. 53f.); the same does Ibn Qutayba (Ibn Qutayba, ʿAbdallāh b. Muslim: *Kitāb al-maʿārif.* Ed. Tharwat ʿUkāshā. Cairo 1992, pp. 540–546 on Abū ʿUbayda). Of course, these classifications are to be taken *cum grano salis*, since early scholars were all generalists.

The further transmission context offers a very complex and diversified picture. As will be seen in the following, the *ayyām* first were integrated into the classical Arab literary and cultural heritage, *adab.* Much later, however, in the Crusader times, the *ayyām* were included in several historical compendia[13] as part of institutionalized Arab history (*taʾrīkh).* Some *ayyām* continued circulating as popular epics and tales.[14] Moreover, new varieties of oral history appeared that partly continued the formal and functional traditions of the ancient *ayyām*[15]. These different social and cultural functions defined and shaped the transmission context of the *ayyām.*

2.2 Tribal Lore or: The *ayyām* in the pre-Islamic Past

In the context of the illiterate tribal society of the Bedouins, *ayyām* narratives must have been transmitted and taught orally in a rather informal way.[16] This means that we might classify the pre-Islamic *ayyām* in their original form as a sort of *oral tribal history* like, e.g., African tribal oral history.[17] This orality implies not only a medial aspect, but also one of form and content: oral texts are generally very plastic, because they are

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[13] In the *Al-kāmil fī l-taʾrīkh* by ʿIzz ad-Dīn ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1224); in the *Mukhtaṣar taʾrīkh al-bashar* by Abū l-Fidāʾ (d. 731/1331) and in the *Nihāyat al-ʿarab* by al-Nuwayrī (d. 732/1332) (book V on history) the chapter *ayyām al-ʿarab* stays for the pre-Islamic history of North Arabia. For more details see infra.

[14] E.g., cf. the epic cycle of Basūs. See Oliverius, Jan: Aufzeichnungen über den Basūs-Krieg in der Kunstliteratur und deren Weiterentwicklung im arabischen Volksbuch über Zīr Sālim. In: *Archiv Orientální* 33 (1965), pp. 44–64.

[15] Cf. the study on tribal history in Jordan by Shryock, Andrew: *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination. Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan.* Berkeley 1997. The author stresses the deep historical dimension of the tribal accounts in current Jordan: "The forms of oral and written history-making I encountered in the tribal Balga belong to an intellectual tradition of immense antiquity. It certainly predates Islam...," *ibid.*, 5. Cf. especially chapter 8, "Popular Genealogical Nationalism" (*ibid.*, 311–328), with an explicit reference to the *ayyām* on page 319.

[16] The tribal transmitters or *ruwāt* and the poets used teaching-methods like exemplification or non-public, informal teaching, like in almost all oral societies. "Most traditions are learned in the same way that other skills are, i.e., by imitation": Vansina, Jan: *Oral Tradition as History.* Oxford 1985, p. 47. This does not mean that there was not any "feedback" (mutual influence) between oral and scriptural culture, even in the pre-Islamic period. For the concept of "feedback" in this context cf. Vansina, *Oral tradition*, 156–157; Henige, David: *Oral Historiography.* London 1982, pp. 81–87.

[17] Cf. the basic studies by the Africanists Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition,* and David Henige, *Oral Historiography.*

flexibly conformed to the requirements of the social present and are shaped continuously in interaction with their addressees. Therefore we can be quite sure that only socially significant events and plausible information are remembered.[18]

The *ayyām* we have today, are, of course, written texts; but the earliest versions seem to reflect quite truly their original form from the oral tribal milieu.[19] In fact, they can be easily interpreted as expressions of a typical tribal war society with violent norms and values, martial rituals and socialization, ideals of aggressive masculinity and the commitment to revenge.[20] According to my opinion, this suggests that the *ayyām* can be considered, with some plausibility, as an authentic product of a Bedouin or semi-Bedouin milieu; at least much more so than the later romantic accounts of the *ʿudhrī* love-stories which reflected social settings existing in Umayyad times.[21]

Leaving this point aside, some remarkable key aspects of typical *ayyām* narratives should be mentioned:

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[18] Robinson, Chase F.: *Islamic Historiography*. Cambridge 2003, p. 10: He speaks of "re-inventing". On the dynamics of oral performance and the consequent plasticity of these tribal traditions cf. also Shryock, *Nationalism*, 33: "The tribal past, in the absence of standard texts, is continually reconstructed in speech." This does not mean that the whole of oral tradition is a product of the social present: cf. the detailed discussion by Vansina, where he considers the influence of the social presence, but insists on the role of tradition as "stuff to invent from" and declares: "the message is a social product": Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, 94–123.

[19] This is especially true for the *ayyām* of Tamīm and Bakr and the *ayyām* of the Hudhayl, which reflect conflicts of the late sixth and early seventh century and were therefore much closer to the moment of their written fixation: Cf. Meyer, *Der historische Gehalt,* 2–3. Of course, all the *ayyām* narratives underwent a process of fictionalization before and after their fixation in a written form.

[20] For a survey on the relationship between tribal war and cultural models on the one hand and on the nature of such a typical "Kriegskultur" or war culture, cf. Helbing, Jürg: *Tribale Kriege*. Frankfurt am Main 2006, pp. 295–335 "Krieg und Kultur". Helbing emphasizes that such a war culture is the result of a cultural adaptation to a violent, martial environment and not its cause. For a different, recent interpretation (more "peaceful") of the function of the *ayyām* cf. Said Agha, Saleh: Of Verse, Poetry, Great Poetry and History. In: Baalbaki, Ramzi/Said Agha, Saleh/Khalidi, Tarif (eds.), *Poetry and History. The Value of Poetry in Reconstructing Arab History.* Beirut 2011, pp. 1–38.

[21] Cf. Jacobi, Renate: The ʿUdhra: Love and Death in the Umayyad Period. In: Pannewick, Friederike (ed.), *Martyrdom in Literature.* Wiesbaden 2004, pp. 137–148; and Leder, Stefan: The ʿUdhrī Narrative in Arabic Literature. In: *ibid.*, pp. 164–187.

Genealogical accuracy: Genealogy is fundamental for the social topography in any tribal society and defines status and prestige of tribes and individuals.[22] This explains the plethora of names transmitted in the *ayyām*. In a society of "shared honor" or "collective honor" like the Bedouin society, the glorious deeds of the ancestors and tribal relatives increased individual honor and value. Therefore, the heroes were to be identified exactly within the web of tribal kinship to state the genealogical distance or closeness and the degree of commitment to revenge. Within the norms of revenge and honor, genealogy served as an explanation for the motivation of the protagonists.

Geographical accuracy: Geographical accuracy was also important, since many conflicts were territorial in nature, notably disputes over watering holes and grazing grounds. Therefore, we have a lot of exact topographical data transmitted in the *ayyām*. Geographical accuracy is also a very typical characteristic of Arab Bedouin poetry.[23]

Genealogic and geographical accuracy together reinforce the narratives' sense of reality and factuality.[24]

Chronological inaccuracy: Chronology, on the contrary, was not the focus of the *ayyām* accounts. The relative chronology of the events (or sequence) was not very important, since it did not affect the value of the individual heroic fighter which was established by his concrete deeds. Absolute chronology, on the other hand, was never applied because there was no established referential frame.[25] It was sufficient to know that the events took

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[22] For the function of genealogy as structuring principle in oral traditions, cf. Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, 24; 182–185; Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 97–102.

[23] Thilo, Ulrich: *Die Ortsnamen in der altarabischen Poesie*. Wiesbaden 1958, pp. 9–12.

[24] This does not mean that this information is always correct; but it is the focus of the *ayyām* to suggest accuracy here. The pervasive presence of lists and names is common to *akhbār* literature and is a frequent device to reinforce the impression of factuality; cf. Leder, *Khabar*, 309–313. Meyer, *Der historische Gehalt,* 7 (and *passim)* used all these names as a method to establish the historicity of *ayyām* with unequal success. On in the *ayyām* cf. Meyer*, Der historische Gehalt*, 6 ; Caskel, *Aijam*, 39: "realistisch bis zur Derbheit". This realism is also typical for *khabar*-style: Leder, *Khabar*, 308: "it is evident that the apparent objectivity of *akhbār* contributes to the illusion of reality".

[25] Of course, it is possible to establish an approximate relative and absolute chronology of the *ayyām* by a careful comparative analysis (Meyer, *Der historische Gehalt*, 8–9, and *passim*), but chronology is definitely not the focus of the *ayyām*.

place in the unstructured *past*. For us, who are used to start the study of history by ordering events in their "real chronological and causal order", this lack of chronological accuracy and causal coherence in the *ayyām* has always been an exasperating feature in this genre and the most important reason to deny them the status of history.[26]

Authentication by poetry: The nature of the relationship between prose narrative and poetry in the *ayyām* varies from case to case and is not always easy to establish.[27] But, in general, in their written form they both appear together and depend on each other. The poems function as authentication of the account, and the prose passages, on the other hand, contextualize the poetry.[28]

Private performance: The "Sitz im Leben" of the *ayyām* in the pre-Islamic past was probably the *majlis*, i.e., the private evening gatherings in the tent of the tribal chief, as Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih reports: "What did you normally speak about when you were in privacy in your sessions? We used to recite poetry and tell each other accounts about our jāhilīya".[29] According to Andrew Shryock, tribal history in Jordan is told nowadays only in private settings.[30] This aspect needs further study, but it means that the *ayyām* were not publicly performed like pre-Islamic poetry, for example in the markets like that of ʿUkāẓ near to Mecca.

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[26] This lack of chronology is a common complaint of Western scholars. E.g., Caskel, *Aijam*, 7f., where he remarks that the *ayyām* are "arm an historischer Substanz".

[27] Cf. For the poetry in the *ayyām* and its function cf. Caskel, *Aijam*, 59–75. "Eine Gesamtentscheidung über das Abhängigkeitsverhältnis von Vers zu Prosa in den *aijām* ist unmöglich; man muss von Fall zu Fall entscheiden": Caskel, *Aijam*, 75.

[28] Contemporaneous tribal poetry is also connected with prose accounts. Cf. Shryock, *Nationalism*, 112, concerning the function of poetry in current tribal history of Jordan: "these (the *gasayid* < classical Ar. *qaṣāʾid*) are metrical, rhyming poems that commemorate significant tribal elements. *Gasayid* are usually appended to *gisas* (classical Ar. *qiṣaṣ*), apart from which they make little sense. The story and verse serve as memnonics for each other; the *gissa* is the poems foundation (*asas*), and the *gasida*, in turn, becomes the stories proof (*dalīl*)".

[29] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *ʿIqd*, VI, 3.

[30] Shryock, *Nationalism*, 151. Cf. also Caskel, *Aijam*, 84, referring to a report of 1910 by Gerald E. Leachman (1880–1920, a British soldier and intelligence officer who travelled extensively in Arabia): "at night the conversation in the diwans is of a most enlightened character, chiefly consisting of battle stories or family history [...]".

Oral transmission by specialists: As today in Bedouin society, tribal lore, which included both poetry and *ayyām*, was preserved by specialists, i.e. the poets and tribal *ruwāt* (transmitters).[31] This knowledge was transmitted orally, but not by direct systematic teaching ("education") but by *mimesis*, i.e., by imitation of an elder master.

2.3 *Ayyām* and Philology[32]

2.3.1 Origins

The *ayyām,* like Bedouin poetry, continued to be transmitted and narrated in Umayyad times.

This is due to the fact that Arab tribes and the concomitant tribal interpretation of social reality did not disappear in early Islam. The social, economic and political function of the pre-Islamic Arab tribes changed following the Islamic conquests, though this seems to have increased the significance of tribal allegiance in Umayyad times, and a new tribalism dominated most of the political conflicts in Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid times.[33] The revaluation and transformation of tribalism fostered the interest in preserving *tribal* lore as an object of tribal pride and as argumentative basis in the ongoing struggles for political power. In this new context the *ruwāt* continued preserving and narrating the tribal *ayyām*, but changed the setting and the audience. Many moved to the new political and cultural centers, where they told their accounts in the *majālis* of the mosques and the courts of emirs.[34]

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[31] Like in the case of poetry, tribal *ruwāt* preserved the *ayyām* (and the poetry) of their own tribe only.

[32] On the emergence of Arab philology and grammar cf. the recent excellent survey in Behzadi, Lale: *Sprache und Verstehen. Al-Ǧāḥiẓ über die Vollkommenheit des Ausdrucks.* Wiesbaden 2009, pp. 27–47 "Die arabische Sprache als Gegenstand der Wissenschaft" and "Die Sonderstellung der arabischen Sprache", 113–125; cf. also Ramírez del Rio, José: *La Orientalización de al-Andalus.* Sevilla 2002, pp. 36–43 "Los primeros filólogos".

[33] Cf. Orthmann, Eva: *Stamm und Macht. Die arabischen Stämme im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert der Higra.* Wiesbaden 2002, *passim.*

[34] This began probably even earlier. Abū Yazīd ʿĀqil b. Abī Ṭālib (Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 258f.) e.g., one of the genealogists of the *dīwān* of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, is said to have recited *ayyām* in the *masjid* in Medina. For the *majālis* in various cities cf. Caskel, *Aijam*, 84–85. The informants of Abū Ubayda were mostly tribal *ruwāt* that spoke only about their own family and tribe. Cf. Caskel, *Aijam*, 82f.

2.3.2   The "New" *ruwāt*

Toward the end final of the Umayyad era a new type of *rāwī* emerged in the
multiethnic garrison cities of Iraq.[35] Unlike the earlier *ruwāt,* these were
not of Arab origin anymore, but were in their majority Iranian *mawālī.*
The best representative of this type in Kufa was Ḥammād al-Rāwiya (ca.
75–155/694–773)[36], collector of the first version of the *Muʿallaqāt* and the
teacher of al-Aṣmaʿī. In Basra, the most prominent transmitter and col-
lector of this new type was Khalaf b. Hayyān al-Aḥmar (ca. 115–180/
733–796)[37] who was held in high esteem by al-Aṣmaʿī and was the teacher
of Abū Nuwās. These "new" *ruwāt* who were not longer attached to a
certain Arab tribe started to collect poetry and the context of this poetry,
i.e., *ayyām*, in a more comprehensive way – i.e., they began to collect
any tradition (*khabar al-shiʿr*) disregarding tribal boundaries. Although
unsystematic, this was the first important step toward the formation of a
compact corpus of *ayyām.*

2.3.3   The Scholars

The next important step which lead to the written record of a corpus of
"Arab" knowledge is represented by the activities of the Kufan al-Mufaḍḍal
al-Ḍabbī (30–90/691–784)[38], the collector of the *Mufaḍḍaliyāt*[39] and tutor
of the caliph al-Mahdī. He is the first person who can be called a true
philological scholar, since he represents the emergence of a more systematic
approach to "Arab lore[40]." This scholarly, i.e. more formal and systematic
approach of al-Ḍabbī was surely influenced by his parallel activities in other
fields of knowledge which had already undergone systematization, i.e. lex-

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[35]   On these new *ruwāt* in the context of philology, cf. Drory, *Construction*, 39–42.
[36]   Fück, Johann: Art. "Ḥammād ar-Rāwiya". In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam. Second edition
       (EI²),* Online-version; Sezgin, *GAS*, II, 46–53. He was held in high esteem by the
       Umayyads because of his knowledge of poetry, genealogy and *ayyām,* but was rather
       an unsystematic dilettante and bon-vivant, not caring for matters of authenticity etc.
[37]   Pellat, Charles: Art. "Khalaf b. Aḥmar". In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam. Second edition
       (EI²),* Online-version. He was famous for his fabulous memory, but "his deep knowledge
       of archaic poetry, linked with a tendency which was quite frequent in his time, led him
       to compose poetry of Bedouin type which he attributed then to ancient poets".
[38]   Lichtenstädter, Ilse: Art. "Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī". In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam. Second
       edition (EI²),* Online-version.
[39]   Sezgin, *GAS*, II, 53–54. This collection is far more extensive than the *Muʿallaqāt.*
[40]   On this "scholarly" approach to philology, cf. Drory, *Construction*, 42–48.

icography and grammar.[41] As far as we know, he did not collect a corpus of *ayyām* in the strict sense, but his *ayyām* material is scattered in later collections and was included as commentary for the poems.

Al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī was contemporaneous with his rival Ḥammād al-Rāwiya, whom he considered an unserious forger (there are several anecdotes that illustrate this rivalry).[42] As has been demonstrated by Rina Drory, the underlying conflict between both was a dispute on cultural authority, in particular on the "changing function of jāhiliyya", "a new image of knowledge" and a "new way of managing knowledge."[43]

The central Basran personality who represents this emerging scientific and systematic approach to "Arab lore" in the late Umayyad and early ʿAbbāsid period was Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlāʾ, (d. 154/770) who was a celebrated "reader" of the Qurʾān and the teacher of many famous scholars like al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Aṣmaʿī, Khalīl ibn Aḥmad and Abū ʿUbayda.[44] His scientific background established the study of the Qurʾān and Arabic grammar (he is considered the founder of the grammar school of Basra). He was also a transmitter of poetry. Unfortunately, nothing of his work is left.

2.3.4 The Collection of the *ayyām* Corpus

The real "creator" of the *ayyām* as a distinct text group was the great Basran grammarian and lexicographer Abū ʿUbayda Maʿmar b. al-Muthannā (110–209/728–824)[45]), who was a disciple of Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlāʾ. Applying to the scattered oral and written materials circulating in the garrison

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[41] "In the field of grammar, Arab scholars seem to have written and published books (in the strict sense, syngrammata) relatively early (before 184/800)": Schoeler, Gregor: *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam.* Tr. U. Vagepohl. Ed. J. Montgomery. London 2006, p. 49.

[42] This is a famous dispute preserved in the *Kitāb al-aghānī*, quoted and studied in detail by Rina Drory, *Construction*, 46–47; cf. also Hoyland, Robert G.: History, Fiction and Authorship in the First Centuris of Islam. In: Bray, Julia (ed.), *Writing and Representation in Medieval Islam.* London 2006, p. 16. The anecdote illustrates the transition from a living and plastic historical tradition to one which must be preserved intact and transmitted according to rigorous rules.

[43] Drory, *Construction*, 35.

[44] Blachère, Regis: Art. "Abū ʿAmr al-ʿAlāʾ". In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam. Second edition (EI²)*, Online-version.

[45] Weipert, Reinhard: Art. "Abū ʿUbayda, Maʿmar b. al-Muthanna". In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam. Three*, Online-version and Lecker, Michael: Biographical Notes on Abū ʿUbayda Maʿmar b. al-Muthanna. In: *Studia Islamica* 81 (1995), pp. 71–100; Sezgin, *GAS*, II, 61 (for his works on *ayyām*); Sezgin, *GAS*, VIII, 67–71 (for his works on

cities the systematic methods employed in the philological schools, he collected and grouped together items of similar or the same kind. This way he established the first corpus of *ayyām* and supplied most of the data for all future studies. Probably he was the first who transformed the *ayyām* into a coherent text group by separating it from poetry.[46] Abū ʿUbayda is ascribed two monographs on the *ayyām*, a shorter one (encompassing 75 or 150 days), and a larger one called *Maqātil al-fursān* (1200 or 1600 days),[47] neither of which are preserved, but they form the basis of nearly all subsequent *ayyām* traditions transmitted in other sources. In sum, Abū ʿUbayda was very significant for the transmission of the *ayyām*. He created a systematic canon, which became a corpus that could be transmitted and taught as compact *knowledge*. Furthermore, he became the most important "bottleneck" for the later *ayyām*-material.

2.3.5   Baghdād and Beyond: *ayyām* and *adab*

As in many other fields of knowledge, the center for the study of the *ayyām* shifted in the early 3rd/9th century from the Iraqi garrison cities to Baghdād and spread later to other cultural centers of the Islamic world.

In fact, the *ayyām* material is widely scattered in different works of *adab*, and a comprehensive evaluation would require an exhaustive study that surpasses the limits of this article. For now, one can just state that the transformation of the *ayyām* into one canonized part of *adab* was a complicated process of selection, exclusion and canonization. It is remarkable, for example, that some famous early authors of *adab* who treated topics of

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lexicography); Sezgin, *GAS*, IX, 65–66 (grammar). Concerning his eminent role in the transmission of the *ayyām,* cf. Meyer, *Der Historische Gehalt*, 3–4; Caskel, *Aijam*, 85–87, Ramírez, *Orientalización*, 42–43. For Abū ʿUbayda as lexicographer see the study by Nora Schmidt included in this volume (p. 155ff.

[46]   Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī is also said to have composed a monograph on the *ayyām* (Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 97), but it seems not to have been as influential as Abū ʿUbayda's.

[47]   The exact number of *ayyām* in both versions is unknown: Cf. the detailed discussion in Werkmeister, Walter: *Quellenanalyse des Kitab al-ʿiqd al-farīd des Andalusiers Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih* (246/860–328/940). Berlin 1982, pp. 147–151. The material of the extended version is scattered in the *Kitāb al-aghānī*, in the *Ḥamāsa* by Abū Tammām and in the *Amthāl* by Maydanī: see Fleischhammer, Manfred. *Die Quellen des Kitāb al-Aghānī*. Wiesbaden 2004, pp. 92–93.

jāhilīya extensively like Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb[48] and al-Jāḥiẓ[49] did not refer to the *ayyām*, whereas others did.

In the following, I will present three of the most influential authors of *adab* and their treatment of *ayyām* material.

1. Abū Muḥammad ibn Qutayba, (213–276/828–889), a famous poly-math and a compiler of encyclopedias, is regarded as one of the "gi-ants" of *adab*[50] . His most important teachers were disciples of Abū ʿUbayda,[51] whom he quotes very frequently; thus, it is probable that he was also well acquainted with Abū ʿUbaydas *ayyām*-material.[52] In his general encyclopedia *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* he does not include a chap-ter on the *ayyām*, although he uses some of this material. However, he mentions explicitly the *ayyām* in his *Kitāb al-maʿārif*, where he composed a short chapter on *ayyām*, the first such list in an *adab* encyclopedia.[53]

2. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfāhānī (284–356/897–967): This prolific and famous author was generally very well acquainted with material from the *jāhilīya*, including *ayyām*. Therefore it is not surprising that amongst

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[48]   Muḥammad b. al-Ḥabīb (d. 245/860) was a disciple of Hishām b. al-Kalbī and of Abū ʿUbayda. He was a transmitter of the *Naqāʾid Khalīl wa-Farazdaq*. His *Kitāb al-muḥabbar* (ed. Ilse Lichtenstädter. Hayderabad 1942) is an encyclopedia on Arab "Antiquities" but it does not include any *ayyām*-material.

[49]   His full name is Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr al-Jāḥiẓ (160–255/776–868). For his treatment of *jāhilīya* themes cf. Ramírez, *Orientalización*, 46–49.

[50]   Lécomte, Gerard: *Ibn Qutayba. L'homme, son oeuvre, ses idées.* Damas 1965; Lé-comte, Gerard: Art. "Ibn Ḳutayba". In: *Encyclopedia of Islam. Second edition (EI²)*, Online-version.

[51]   Among them were Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī and al-Riyāshī: Lécomte, *Ibn Qutayba*, 50f. Regarding Abū ʿUbayda as such, cf. Lécomte, *Ibn Qutayba*, 80: "on renounce à établir une statistique des citations d'al-Asmaʿī et d'Abū ʿUbayda, qui viennent de très loin en tête pour le volume de la documentation que leur doit Ibn Qutayba ... on pense pouvoir advancer un chiffre de plusiers centaines de citations pour chacun d'eux". Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī, on the contrary, is only quoted ten times by Ibn Qutayba (*ibid.*, 81).

[52]   Concerning Ibn Qutayba's treatment of pre-Islamic history and *jāhilīya* cf. Springberg-Hinsen, *Die Zeit vor dem Islam*, 23–27 and especially Ramírez, *Orientalización*, 49–55: the latter emphasizes Ibn Qutayba's tendency to construct a very idealized image of the *jāhilīya*.

[53]   Cf. Ramírez, *Orientalización*, 54. Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-maʿārif*, 603–607 under the heading *Dhikr al-ayyām al-mashhūra fī l-jāhilīya*. It is a very short chapter and omits poetry.

his monumental output the biographical literature lists at least one monograph on *ayyām* written by him. Unfortunately, it is not preserved.[54]

In his main work, the *Kitāb al-aghānī,* he quotes extensively from *ayyām*-material, using as sources the historian Ibn al-Kalbī[55], al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī and the extended *ayyām*-book by Abū ʿUbayda. The *Kitāb al-aghānī* mentions 390 days. However, the *ayyām* material is scattered in the *Kitāb* since the arranging principle is to supply information on singers and poets.[56] Therefore, there is no thematic chapter on *ayyām.*

3. The most important *adab* author for the transmission of *ayyām* was not from Iraq, but from al-Andalus: Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih al-Qurṭubī (246–328/860–940), the author of the famous *adab* collection *Al-iqd al-farīd,* which was conceived as an all-encompassing, comprehensive encyclopedia of cultivated knowledge, comparable to the *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* by Ibn Qutayba. Probably inspired by the structure of Ibn Qutayba's *Kitāb al-maʿārif*, he included a larger, chapter on the *ayyām* in his *adab* encyclopedia.[57] The author seems to have used as basic source an Andalusian recension of the shorter *ayyām*-book by Abū ʿUbayda.[58] Later on, this chapter on *ayyām* by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih was regarded as quite convenient and was therefore often copied. Thus it functioned as a second "bottleneck" for the *ayyām*-material.

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[54]   Kilpatrick, Hilary: *Making the Great Book of Songs.* London 2007, p. 23 including a list of works attributed to Abū al-Faraj.

[55]   See *infra.*

[56]   Cf. Fleischhammer, *Kitāb al-aghānī,* 92 (no 46) mentioning Abū ʿUbayda as a very frequent source.

[57]   This chapter is book 17 out of 25: *Kitāb al-dhurra al-thāniya fī ayyām al-ʿarab wa-waqāʾiʿihim.* Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *ʿIqd*, VI, 3–118.

[58]   One half of the *ayyām*-reports in the *ʿIqd* are attributed to Abū ʿUbayda, cf. Werkmeister, *Quellenanalyse*, 147. The abridged version of Abū ʿUbayda's book came to al-Andalus via a scholar called al-Khushanī (*ibid.*, 254) , who had brought many philological books to al-Andalus (he was a disciple of al-Aṣmaʿī and of Abū Ghassān al-ʿAbdī, the latter being disciple of Abū ʿUbayda: *ibid.*, 52–54).

2.4 *Ayyām* and History

2.4.1 *Ayyām* and the *akhbārīyūn*

As we have seen, *ayyām* were treated mostly by philologists; it seems that these accounts were considered as *akhbār al-shiʿr* and were collected in order to contextualize poetry. However, there are some exceptions among the early historians, the most remarkable being the Kūfan *akhbārīs* Muḥammad b. Sāʾib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763) and his son Hishām b. al-Kalbī (d. 204/819). Ibn al-Nadīm mentions both in the *maqāla* of the "*akhbārīyūn, nassābīyūn and ahl al-ḥadīth*", i.e., he considered them "story-tellers" or early historians.[59] Both seemed to have had a more historical approach to "Arab lore." Muḥammad al-Kalbī, for example, seems to have been interested in history in general, including Jewish and Christian history.[60] His extremely productive son Hishām worked in nearly all fields of Arab "Antiquities";[61] with a special focus on genealogy, which in Arab culture was considered as an essential part of history.[62] Within the monumental book-list of Hishām transmitted by Ibn al-Nadīm (he attributes nearly 150 books to him)[63] there are 12 works classified under the heading *fī akhbār al-shiʿr wa-ayyām al-ʿarab*, including one monograph on *ayyām*.[64] Probably the majority of the later al-Kalbī quotations regarding Arab tribal history go back to his monumental genealogical compendium *Jamharat al-nasab,* which is his most popular work.

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[59] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 89: *Akhbārīyūn wa-nassābīyūn wa-aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth wa-l-ayāt*; cf. also Ibn Qutayba, *Maʿārif*, 536. The expression *muʾarrikh* emerged only in the 7th/13th cent.: Michaeu, Françoise: Le Kitāb al-kāmil fī tāʾrīkh d' Ibn al-Athīr: Entre chronique et histoire. In: *Studia Islamica* 104–105 (2007–2008), p. 90.

[60] It is interesting that he also worked in the field of *tafsīr* and is credited to have composed the first work of this sort. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 95.

[61] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 95: *huwa ʿālim bi-nasab wa-akhbār al-ʿarab wa-ayyāmihā w-mathālibihā wa-waqāʾiʿihā*. For an evaluation of Ibn al-Kalbī as author of *ayyām,* cf. Caskel, *Aijam*, 87–89. For both al-Kalbīs cf. Khalidi, Tarif: *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period.* Cambridge 1994, pp. 50–4; Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 268–271; Atallah, W.: Art. "Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī". In: *Encyclopedia of Islam. Second edition (EI²)*, Online-version.

[62] Shryock, *Nationalism*, 22: "Abbadis and Adwanis argued convincingly that their genealogical knowledge was not simply a model of social topography; it was a way of articulating past and present, a way of transmitting and talking about history".

[63] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 96–98.

[64] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 97. None of these works is preserved.

Although Hishām b. al-Kalbī was later discredited as an untrustworthy "story-teller,"[65] he became one of the main sources for al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Qutayba[66] and Abū l-Faraj al-Isfāhānī[67] for Arab pre-Islamic history and the *jāhilīya*.

2.4.2 *Ayyām* and Universal History

Most of the early historians who wrote universal history including pre-Islamic history in ʿAbbāsid times were Iranians with a synthetic and inclusive Islamic perspective, centered on the idea of continuity.[68] They established a master narrative[69] based, first on the idea of interpreting the Iranian dynastic traditions and the Biblical patriarchs as precursors of the Islamic *umma* and second, on the providential role God played in history. Therefore, these Iranian and Biblical traditions occupy most of the space dedicated to pre-Islamic history. Moreover, the relatively short chapters on pre-Islamic *Arabian* history do not mention the *ayyām*. They are focused instead on two narrative bundles: first on the South Arabian traditions (the so-called South Arabian Saga narratives and the dynastic accounts about the Lakhmids, the Kinda and the Ghassān) and second on the Meccan Ibrāhīm/Ismāʿīl legends concerning the Kaʿba. The reason might be that within a teleological and religious discourse of "preparation of Islam,"the

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[65] As many early *akhbārīyūn*, he was later blamed as "*kādhib*" (lyar), because of his informal treatment of the sources, which did not follow later requirements of authentication. These followed the methods of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* including correct *isnāds* etc. For this accusation against *akhbārīs* and *quṣṣāṣ* cf. Hoyland, *History, Fiction and Authorship*, 19–25f. Moreover, the two al-Kalbīs were Shīʿīs or at least pro-ʿAlids. This point is developed further in the paper of Jens Scheiner included in this volume (see p. 71ff.).

[66] Hishām is quoted 28 times, his father ten times (see Lécomte, *Ibn Qutayba*, 78).

[67] See Fleischhammer, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 87–88, 121.

[68] Al-Dūrī, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz: *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs. Tr. by Lawrence I. Conrad, with an introduction by Fred M. Donner.* Princeton 1983, p. 147; 149.

[69] Donner, Fred M.: *Narratives of Islamic origins: the Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing.* Princeton 1998, pp. 129–131 (for the master narrative by al-Ṭabarī); 132–138 (for others). For the concept of historical "master narrative" cf. White, Hayden: *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation.* Baltimore 1987, pp. 1–25, 58–82.

ayyām accounts seemed not to be of usage; however, the comparatively pervasive presence of South Arabian material has still not been explained satisfactorily.[70]

In his important monograph on the emergence of Arabic historical writing, Fred Donner only dedicates two pages to pre-Islamic Arabian History[71], a topic which he classifies among the "themes of leadership."[72] He interprets it as a "theme of preparation" "growing out of the competition among various tribal groups of Arabian origin for status and leadership within the new community."[73] Regarding especially the North Arabian traditions, i.e., the *ayyām*, he states that "for north Arabian tribesmen, it was done by the recounting (or inventing) their heroism in battle and their noble generosity of bygone days."[74]

Indeed, there is evidence in the sources that shows that the *ayyām* continued to circulate in ʿAbbāsid times and that they were considered at least partly as accounts that had to be told in order to emphasize North Arabian prestige. Several early authors of universal histories felt compelled to mention the *ayyām* when they touched one essential topic both very relevant for North Arabian status and for the *umma*: The North Arabian tribal genealogy of the prophet and his descent from Ismāʿīl b. Ibrāhīm via ʿAdnān. It seems that the concern for tribal genealogy of the prophet opened the door for the mention the most famous *ayyām*. Let me provide some examples:

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[70] For the eminent role of Yemen in the history of pre-Islamic Arabia: cf. Donner, *Narratives*, 223–224 (explained as consequence of significant historiographical activity) and Nagel, Tilman: *Alexander der Große in der frühislamischen Volksliteratur*. Walldorf-Hessen 1978, *passim*. Nagel's thesis is that Yemenis who settled in Egypt initiated the process in the later $1^{st}/7^{th}$ and $2^{nd}/8^{th}$ centuries of creating a tradition of popular storytelling that praised Yemenis. This tradition was, to varying degrees, incorporated into the Islamic tradition over the centuries. The predominance of Yemeni traditions in pre-Islamic Arabian history (compared to North Arabia) is a question that needs further research. Peter Webb's Ph.D. project (London) is investigating this important topic as part of a wider study of Muslim-era Arab origin stories, and he has been so kind to update my knowledge in this field.

[71] Donner, *Narratives*, 196–198.

[72] Donner, *Narratives*, 184–202.

[73] Donner, *Narratives*, 196.

[74] *Ibid.*

1. Abū l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 283/905) wrote the earliest surviving example of an universal history, the *Taʾrīkh al-Yaʿqūbī*,[75] and included several chapters on pre-Islamic Arab history. The first details South Arabian kings *(mulūk al-Yaman)*, the second, the Lakhmids (*mulūk al-Ḥīra min al-Yaman*), the third on the war of Kinda (*ḥarb Kinda)* and a fourth on the Ghassānids (*mulūk al-Shām*). His fifth chapter details the "descendants of Ismāʿīl" (*walad Ismāʿīl b. Ibrāhīm)*[76] where he treats North Arabian genealogy and tribal history by mixing lists of tribal genealogies with events related to the tribes. This chapter ends with the Kināna and the Quraysh, the last person mentioned is ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, the father of the Prophet. Al-Yaʿqūbī's structuring principle is genealogy, not chronology. When al-Yaʿqūbī discusses the Rabīʿa b. Nizār he remarks: *kānat li-Rabīʿa ayyām mashhūra wa-ḥurūb maʿrūfa* (The Rabīʿa had some famous *ayyām* and known wars). Then he continues to mention several *ayyām* well known from other sources.[77]

2. The historian Abū Ḥanīfa al-Dīnāwārī (d. 282/904)[78] did not include the *ayyām* in his *Akhbār al-ṭiwal*; however, the historic conception of this interesting early work deserves definitely deeper investigation. Like in other universal histories, many personalities and events of South Arabian history are mentioned. Under the heading *Masīr Ṣahbān ilā ḥarb al-ʿAdnānīyīn bi-l-Tihāma* (How Ṣabhān participated in

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[75] Al-Yaʿqūbī, Aḥmad b. Abī Yaʿqūb: *Taʾrīkh al-Yaʿqūbī*. Ed. Dār Ṣādir. Beirut 1980. On this original author, whose works did not become a standard because he bucked the historiographical trends and conventions of the day (by skipping *isnāds* etc.), cf. Springberg-Hinsen, *Die Zeit vor dem Islam*, 29–31; Donner, *Narratives*, 134; Robinson, *Historiography*, 136f.; al-Dūrī, *Rise*, 64ff.

[76] Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, 221–253.

[77] For the Rabīʿa he mentions the names of the following *ayyām*: Sullām, Khazāz, Kulāb, Basūs, Dhū Qār, giving in each case a short summary of the basic events (but without poetry). For the Qays he mentions the following *ayyām*: al-Baydāʾ, Shiʿb Jabala; al-Habāʾ; al-Raqm; Fayf al-rīḥ; Milbaṭ; Raḥraḥān; al-ʿUrrā; Dāḥis wa al-Gharbāʿ. For the Tamīm he mentions: Kulāb, al-Marawat, Jadūd, al-Nassār. The chapter is followed by a survey of Arab cultural history: 1. *adyān al-ʿarab* (al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, 254–257); *ḥukkām al-ʿarab* (*ibid.*, 258); *azlām al-ʿarab* (*ibid.*, 259–261); *shuʿarāʾ al-ʿarab* (*ibid.*, 262–269); *aswāq al-ʿarab* (*ibid.*, 270–271).

[78] Al-Dīnāwārī, Abū Ḥanīfa Aḥmad: *Akhbār al-ṭiwal*. Ed. Muḥammad al-Rāfiʿ. Cairo 1912. Cf. Springfeld-Hinsen, *Die Zeit vor dem Islam*, 27–29; Donner, *Narratives*, 134–135; al-Dūrī, *Rise*, 68–69.

the war of the Northern Arabs in the Tihāma) al-Dīnāwarī mentions, at least, the tribal chief of the Taghlib, Kulayb b. Rabīa, and the *yawm* of Khazāz, where the North Arabian Maʿadd defeated the South Arabian Qaḥṭān[79] .

3. Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956) is the author of the famous *Murūj al-dhahab*, a broad collection of historic and geographic information which is arranged chronologically[80]. In this work, al-Masʿūdī dedicated the first *juzʾ* and the first half of the second to the history of non-Islamic people (with a special focus on the pre-Islamic period) and to the pre-Islamic Arabs. The selection of people from pre-Islamic Arabia resembles the information we find in al-Yaʿqūbī's, al-Ṭabarī's and al-Dīnāwārī's chronicles (i.e., the South Arabian traditions). In addition, al-Masʿūdī includes a special section dedicated to the "Bedouins of the Arabs" (*al-badāwī min al-ʿarab)*[81], where he treats explicitly the North Arabian tribes. The whole chapter is a very interesting and original mixture including genealogical notices, old migration legends and anthropological observations of the Bedouins. He ends the chapter with a very short section on "some *ayyām*, battles and wars of the Arabs" (*baʿḍ ayyām al-ʿarab wa-waqāʾiʿihā wa-ḥurūbihā)*[82] where he enumerates some famous *ayyām* remarking that they have been already mentioned before in their correct context. Then he introduces the chapters, which are dedicated to the cultural history of the pre-Islamic Arabs, in the same order as al-Yaʿqūbī does.

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[79] Al-Dīnawārī, *Akhbār*, 52–54. According to al-Dīnāwārī, Ṣahbān b. Dhī Kharb was a South Arabian (Ḥimyarī) king who had usurped the throne. The chapter treats: First, the rise and fall of the Kinda in Central Arabia, especially of king al-Ḥārith b. ʿAmr al-Kindī and of his son Ḥujr b. ʿAmr, the father of the famous poet Imrūʾ al-Qays (i.e., its chronological context is the beginnings of the sixth century), second, the Kinda's dominance over the North Arabian Muḍar and Rabīʿa and third, the final victory of Kulayb b. Rabīʿa, who is portrayed as the chief of all Maʿadd, who defeated the South Arabians in Khazāz(ā), which was a place between Mekka and Medina.

[80] Al-Masʿūdī, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī: *Murūj al-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar*. Ed. Yūsuf Asʿad Dāghir. Beirut 1983. For his conception of universal history, cf. Springberg-Hinsen, *Die Zeit vor dem Islam*, 35–40.

[81] Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj*, I, 87–102.

[82] *Ibid.*, 101.

Other historians preferred to omit the *ayyām.* This is true in particular for those influenced by the methods of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*[83] and who were therefore eager to authorize their material by *asānīd.* Among them there were:

1. Ibn Isḥāq (85–150/704–767), the main authority for the *Sīra nabawīya,* was also responsible for the first written version of the genealogy of the prophet, in which he traced back Muḥammad's descent from Adam in forty-eight generations. Through this, he did not only provide a genealogy to the Prophet but also added a universal dimension to Muḥammad's biography and kerygma. However, he seems not to have included therein any reference to the *ayyām* as far as we can tell. The pre-Islamic section, the *Kitāb al-mubtadāʾ,* is only partially preserved in al-Ṭabarī's chronicle. Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833), the author of the most widespread recension of Ibn Isḥāq's *Sīra,* left out large parts of this genealogy and started the prophetic genealogy with Ismāʿīl and did also not include any North Arabian narrative tradition, though he retains substantial pre-Islamic South Arabian stories.

2. The most important historian influenced by the *ahl al-ḥadīth* was, without any doubt, the emblematic Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (224–310/ 839–925), whose *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* rendered the classical model for all later universal histories.[84] Al-Ṭabarī does not mention the *ayyām* with one remarkable exception which is the *yawm* of Dhū Qār[85], although he treats pre-Islamic Arab history extensively. His selection of material about the pre-Islamic Arabs became authoritative. He includes some migration legends, the Arabian Zenobia legend

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[83] Al-Dūrī, *Rise,* 148–151 on this development; Donner, *Narratives,* 255–260 "the ḥadīth format".

[84] Al-Ṭabarī, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad: *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk.* Ed. Michel de Goeje *et al.* Leiden 1879–1901 [Reprint Leiden 1964].

[85] This *yawm* is quoted extensively, including poetry (al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh,* I, 1015–1037). The famous battle, which it took place probably ten years before of the *hijra* at a place close to Kufa) was considered as emblematic for the emerging Arab-Muslim identity because it was regarded as the first victory of the Arabs upon the Persians. Cf. the ḥadīth (quoted by al-Tabarī, *Taʾrīkh,* I, 1016: *hadhā awwalu yawm intaṣafa al-ʿarab min al-ʿajam wa-bihī nuṣirū).* In fact, during this battle a coalition of Bakr b. Wāʾil put other Arabs to flight (Taghlib, Iyād, etc.) among who, significantly, were regular Persian troops. See Veccia Vaglieri, L.: Art. "Ḏhū Ḳār". In: *Encyclopaedia of Islam. Second Edition (EI²),* Online-version.

(Zabbāʾ), a lot of material taken from the South Arabian traditions, much on the Lakhmids and little information on the Ghassanids, but no *ayyām* narratives.

We can only speculate why al-Ṭabarī omitted the *ayyām,* since he does not explain his reasons. Probably al-Ṭabarī perceived them as pertaining to the realm of untrustworthy legends and *qiṣaṣ,* i.e. "stories" which are impossible to authenticate with any serious methodology. Moreover, they seem to make no sense in his larger historical narrative of Salvation and Prophecy.

2.4.3 *Ayyām* and Later Historians

This significant omission of the *ayyām* by al-Ṭabarī closed the door for many centuries: In the following, *ayyām* became part of *adab*, not of historical writing.

It is not until the annalistic work *Al-kāmil fī l-taʾrīkh* by Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) that we find the *ayyām* in the framework of a historiographical work again, where a large and extensive chapter under the heading *Dhikr ayyām al-ʿArab* is included.[86] It is noteworthy that Ibn al-Athīr, a very innovative historian in many respects,[87] states explicitly that he considered the absence of the *ayyām* as a shortcoming of al-Ṭabarī which he wanted to supplement.[88] It is also very significant to remark that Ibn al-Athīr

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[86] See Ibn al-Athīr, ʿIzz al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan: *Al-kāmil fī l-taʾrīkh.* Ed. Carl Johann Tornberg. 13 vols. Leiden 1853–1871. [Reprint Beirut 1965], vol. I, pp. 502–684. The chapter follows the one about the Sasanian kings and precedes the chapter treating the revelation and *sīra* of the prophet.

[87] For a synthetic evaluation of the innovative method of Ibn al-Athīr, which is definitely a rupture with the methods of traditional Islamic historiography (i.e. the *isnād* and the basic principle of juxtaposition and preservation of the disagreement of the sources, see Robinson, *Historiography*, 79) cf. Michaeu, *Le Kitāb al-kāmil*, 90–93: "l'histoire qu'offre le Kāmil est une histoire chronologique et linéaire. Ibn al-Athir ne recopie pas textuellement les sources, mais les choisit, les résume, voire les recompose, expeptionellement les critique" (*ibid*, 91). He acts as an historian in the Western sense: he interprets the sequence of events and tries to make historical sense.

[88] Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-kāmil*, I, 502: *Lam yadhkur Abū Jaʿfar min ayyāmihā ghayra yawma Dhī Qār wa-Jadhīma al-abrash wa-l-Zabbāʾ wa-Tasm wa-Jadīs, w- mā dhakara dhālika illā ḥaythu annahum muluk, fa-aghfala mā siwā dhālika*: Abū Jaʿfar does not mention *ayyām* with the exception of the battle of Dhū Qār and Jadhīma al-Abrash and Zenobia and Tasm and Jadīs. And he only mentions them because they were kings, and he omitted those who were (only) similar (to kings).

was the first author to package the *ayyām* into a true historical narrative. He arranged the *ayyām* in a chronological order and increased the internal semantic congruence and coherence by harmonizing different versions, with disregard for the sources.[89]

Another remarkable example from the same historical context, i.e. the Crusader period, is the chronographer Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlī, Abū l-Fidāʾ (d. 731/ 1331). In his *Al-mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar* he dedicates the fourth book to the pre-Islamic Arabian kings bearing the heading *al-faṣl al-rābiʿ fī mulūk al-ʿarab qabl al-islām.*[90] Within this chapter, he includes a section the heading: *kāna bayna mulūk al-ʿarab waqāʾiʿ fī ayyām mashhūra*[91] (there were famous battles in the wars between the Arab kings) where he enumerates the most famous *ayyām*.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that in the contemporaneous large encyclopedia *Nihāyat al-ʿarab* by al-Nuwayrī (d. 732/1332) book V, dedicated to history, contains a chapter on *ayyām al-ʿarab* and the pre-Islamic history of North Arabia. It is a exact copy of the chapter in the *Al-ʿiqd al-farīd*.

2.5 Summary, Preliminary Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research

The *ayyām*, which originally had a very concrete social function in Bedouin society as *tribal lore* and normative reference, began to be converted in the urban milieu of Basra and Kufa into a manageable and systematized field of Arab knowledge to be taught in the areas of philology and history. After a long time of mimetic informal transmission in the oral milieu of tribal *ruwāt*, the *ayyām al-ʿarab* ceased to be *tribal lore* and became a part of the institutionalized cultural written heritage, i.e., *adab*. The shape and selection of the material we have today reflect the concerns of these early collectors who, first of all, needed the *ayyām* for the contextualization of poetry, i.e., as *akhbār al-shiʿr*. At the end of the eighth century, the *ayyām* were unified into a sort of systematic corpus by Abū ʿUbayda, whose collection came to form the basis of nearly all later references to the *ayyām*.

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[89] Cf. Caskel, *Aijam*, 89–90.
[90] Abū l-Fidāʾ, Ismāʿīl b. ʿAlī: *Al-tawārīkh al-qadīma min al-mukhtaṣar taʾrīkh al-bashar*. Ed./tr. Heinrich Fleischer as: *Abulfedae Annales anteislamici*. Leipzig 1881, pp. 114–147.
[91] *Ibid.*, 145–147.

The wider cultural background of this effort was probably the ʿAbbāsid construction of the *jāhilīya* as a specifically *Arab* cultural and normative icon, a powerful identity discourse that was constituted in order to compete with other contemporaneous rival discourses. Other possible factors involved in this development were political and social issues like tribalism and factionalism.

According to my opinion, this process might be interpreted cum *grano salis* within the interpretative scheme of Jan Assmann's "cultural memory". Therefore the construction of *jāhilīya* and the collection of Arab "Antiquities" can be described as the transformation of the unsystematic oral knowledge about the pre-Islamic Arab past ("communicative memory") into a fixed and systematized part of the Arab cultural heritage ("cultural memory").[92] Applied to the *ayyām,* this means that the *ayyām* in its tribal context would be equivalent to the communicative memory, characterized by a high degree of non-specialization, thematic instability and disorganization. Whereas the *ayyām* in *adab* and history could be interpreted as part of the much more organized and fixed cultural memory.

Although the *ayyām* are accounts about the past, historians (*akhbārīs*) were much less involved in this process than philologists. The reasons for this reluctance amongst the historians are manifold and need to be analyzed in a further study. Probably they were related to the emerging master narrative of pre-Islamic and universal history, according to which the North Arabian tribal pre-Islamic history could not be embedded with success. Other factors are to be seen in concepts of authority and legitimacy inspired by the parameters of the *muḥaddithūn*. It is very significant that the most emblematic Islamic historian, al-Ṭabarī, omitted the *ayyām* almost completely. Against this background, it is noteworthy that much later, in context of the Crusades, the *ayyām* attained the status of history in the Muslim chronicles for the first time.

However, many basic questions remain open: Why did some authors of *adab* include the *ayyām* in their collections, while others did not? Why were South Arabian traditions so present in the framework of universal chronicles, that is, much more than North Arabian history and *ayyām*? Why did some historians of the Crusades start to confer to the *ayyām* the status of history?

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[92] Assmann, Jan/Czaplicka, John: *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity.* In: *New German Critique* 65 (1995), pp. 125–133.

In sum, I hope to have shown that the investigation of the *ayyām* and their transmission context deserves more scholarly attention since it opens the path to many interesting issues of Arabian cultural history and identity discourses.

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