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Pre-Islamic Brigands in Mamluk Histrography. Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī's Account of
«The Brigands Among the Arabs»

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Pre-Islamic Brigands in Mamluk Historiography

Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī's Account of "The Brigands Among the Arabs" ¹

♦ ABSTRACT

Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī's (d. 845/1442) universal history, titled *al-Ḥabar 'an al-bašar*, contains a chapter "On the Brigands Among the Arabs" (*faṣl fī ḍikr luṣūṣ al-'Arab*), in which the author gives accounts of the lives and exploits of ten pre-Islamic and early-Islamic brigands. While the chapter relies on earlier sources, its subject matter has no parallel in other Arabic works of universal history, contemporaneous or earlier. My paper is a study of this chapter, based on a holograph of al-Maqrīzī's work. A close reading of the chapter's contents reveals that al-Maqrīzī compiled and edited afresh ancient narratives with the intention of exemplifying the ideological opposition between *ḡāhiliyya* and Islam. I draw special attention to al-Maqrīzī's unique report concerning the death and burial of Ta'abbāṭa Šarran, which portrays him as an antithesis to the figure of the *šahīd*. Finally, I suggest that al-Maqrīzī's chapter is a scholarly response both to the socio-political climate of al-Maqrīzī's Egypt, depicted in some of al-Maqrīzī's other works as fraught with Bedouin rebellions, as well as to the prevailing cultural climate, marked with the rise of the popular *Sīra*.

Keywords: brigands, *al-Ḥabar 'an al-bašar*, *ḡāhiliyya*, intertextuality, *luṣūṣ*, Mamluk historiography, al-Maqrīzī.

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♦ RÉSUMÉ

L'histoire universelle intitulée *al-Ḥabar 'an al-bašar* de Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (m. 845/1442) contient un chapitre « Sur les brigands arabes » (*faṣl fī ḍikr luṣūṣ al-'Arab*), dans lequel l'auteur raconte les faits et gestes de dix brigands de l'époque préislamique ou du début de l'islam. Bien que le chapitre reprenne du matériel préexistant, le sujet qu'il traite n'a de parallèle dans aucune histoire universelle, antérieure ou contemporaine. Notre article étudie ce chapitre en se fondant sur un manuscrit olographe de l'œuvre. Une lecture attentive montre qu'al-Maqrīzī a repris et réédité des histoires anciennes dans le but d'illustrer l'opposition idéologique entre la *ḡāhiliyya* et l'islam. Nous concentrons notre attention en particulier sur les passages concernant la mort et l'enterrement de Ta'abbāṭa Šarran, dans lesquels ce dernier apparaît comme l'antithèse du *šahīd*. Enfin, nous suggérons que ce chapitre représente la réponse d'al-Maqrīzī à la fois au climat socio-politique de l'Égypte de son temps, que dans d'autres ouvrages il décrit comme troublée par les multiples rébellions bédouines, et à l'ambiance culturelle de son époque, marquée par le développement du genre littéraire populaire des *sīra*-s.

Mots-clés: brigands, *al-Ḥabar 'an al-bašar*, *ḡāhiliyya*, intertextualité, *luṣūṣ*, historiographie mamelouke, al-Maqrīzī.

* * *

“There are few subjects that interest us more generally, than the adventures of robbers and banditti. In our infancy they awaken and rivet our attention as much as the best fairy tales, and when our happy credulity in all things is wofully abated [...] we still retain our taste for the adventurous deeds and wild lives of brigands.”

C. MacFarlane, Esq.,

*The Lives and Exploits of Banditti and Robbers
in All Parts of the World*, vol. I, 1833, pp. 3-4.

Introduction

Ḡāhili Brigands and *Ayyām al-'Arab* in Medieval Arabic Literature

From Middle English ballads about Robin Hood to Yaşar Kemal's *İnce Memed*, tales of bandits, robbers, and brigands are common in many literary traditions. Medieval Arabic literature is no exception: *ḡāhili* brigands (*ša'ālīk*, *luṣūṣ*) such as Ta'abbāṭa Šarran, al-Šanfarā, al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka and 'Urwa ibn al-Ward are among the most famous poets in the history of Arabic literature.² Their poetry (and that of others) was collected and transmitted by Arab scholars alongside reports about their lives and exploits, as part of a process of

2. See Arazi, 1997, and the literature quoted there.

collecting and preserving the cultural heritage of the *ġāhiliyya*. This process had its heyday during the 2nd/8th-4th/10th centuries, the so-called golden age of Arabic philology and *adab*. At its peak, the *ġāhiliyya* transformed in the hands of Abbasid scholars into an idealized past, a model for the formation of a new cultural identity.³

What sort of information did early Arab scholars seek to learn about *ġāhili* brigands? A report preserved in Abū al-Faraġ al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 356/967) *Kitāb al-aġānī* may serve as an answer:

‘Amr b. Abī ‘Amr al-Šaybānī said: I stayed with a clan of [the tribe of] Fahm, the siblings of the [tribe of] ‘Adwān from [the tribal confederacy of] Qays, and asked them for information (*ḥabar*) about Ta’abbaṭa Šarran [their tribesman]. One of them asked me: “Why do you ask about him? Do you want to be a brigand (*liṣṣ*)?” I said: “No, but I would like to acquaint myself with reports of these runners (*‘adda’ūn*) in order to transmit them [to others].” They said: “We shall tell you about him.”⁴

Ta’abbaṭa Šarran’s tribesmen then transmit to ‘Amr b. Abī ‘Amr al-Šaybānī the reports they have about him: according to what they have been told (*fī-mā ḥukiya lanā*), Ta’abbaṭa Šarran was an exceptional runner. He was nicknamed Ta’abbaṭa Šarran (literally: “carried evil under his armpit”) because he killed a ghou in the lands of the tribe of Huḍayl at nighttime, and in the morning he carried its corpse under his armpit on his way back to his companions. Upon seeing him, his companions said to him: “Indeed, you have carried evil under your armpit (*laqad ta’abbaṭta šarran*)!” The Fahmī informants also recite to the scholar a poem composed by Ta’abbaṭa Šarran to commemorate that event.

As can be gleaned from this report, brigand narratives include, among other things, etiological explanations of peculiar nicknames; stories about raids against enemy tribes (the Huḍayl mentioned in the text were Ta’abbaṭa Šarran’s chief opponents); reports on strange encounters in the wilderness of Arabia, and the like.

Many of the reports on brigands in classical sources are narratives of their raiding expeditions. In light of their subject matter and their prosimetric style, the literature on brigands can be seen as closely related to one of the most ancient genres of Arabic literature—the *Ayyām al-‘Arab* (“the battle-days of the Arabs”), a genre dedicated to accounts of the raids and battles of pre-Islamic Arab tribes and the poetry composed during or after them.⁵ It is hardly surprising then that in his *Kitāb al-fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadīm (d. circa 385/995) attributes a work by the title *Kitāb luṣūṣ al-‘Arab* (“Book of Arab Brigands”) to the Basran scholar

3. On the different meanings of the term, see Goldziher, 1967-1971a; Pines, 1990. On the *ġāhiliyya* as an idealized past, see Drory, 1996; and cf. Webb, 2014.

4. Abū al-Faraġ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aġānī*, XXI, p. 128. ‘Amr b. Abī ‘Amr al-Šaybānī (d. 232/847) was a scholar of the 3rd/9th century, son of the famous philologist, Abū ‘Amr al-Šaybānī (d. ca. 210/825). The *‘adda’ūn* or *ruḡaylā* (runners, footpads) were a class of brigands who carried raids against enemy tribes unmounted, relying solely on their fleet-footedness. See Lane, *Lexicon*, vol. 3, p. 1046b, s.v. *raġaliyy*.

5. See Caskel, 1930, esp. pp. 16-19 (on raid expeditions); Widengren, 1959; Rosenthal, 1968, pp. 19-21; Mittwoch, 1958; Jones, online 2007; Oller, 2005.

Abū ‘Ubayda Ma‘mar ibn al-Muṭannā (d. 209/824), known, among other things, for his uncontested authority in matters of *Ayyām al-‘Arab*.⁶

Another book on the subject, titled *Aḥbār luṣūṣ al-‘Arab wa-aš‘āruhum* (“Reports on the Arab Brigands and their Poetry”) or simply *Aš‘ār al-luṣūṣ* (“Poetry of the Brigands”) is attributed to Abū Sa‘īd al-Sukkārī (d. 275/888), an expert on ḡāhili poetry and transmitter of several pre-Islamic *dīwāns*.⁷ Abū ‘Ubayda’s work has been lost, and of al-Sukkārī’s book only a small portion has survived apparently, but at least some of the material collected by these two scholars was preserved in later sources, most notable among them *Kitāb al-aḡānī*.⁸ In this context, it is interesting to mention that a unique 7th/13th century ‘catalogue’ of the Ašrafiyya library in Damascus contains, *inter alia*, entries for volumes titled *Aḥbār al-‘addā’in wa-aš‘āruhum* (“Accounts of the Runners and their Poetry”), as well as *Aš‘ār al-luṣūṣ wa-aḥbāruhum* (“Poetry of the Brigands and their Accounts”).⁹

Brigand narratives collected by early philologists thus found their way—along with the closely related *Ayyām al-‘Arab* narratives—into various literary compilations. One such later compilation is the subject of this article: Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī’s “Chapter on the Brigands Among the Arabs” (*faṣl fī ḍikr luṣūṣ al-‘Arab*), included in his universal history, *al-Ḥabar ‘an al-bašar*.

The inclusion of brigand stories in a historiographical work raises, among others, the following questions: what are the functions of these stories in the framework of a Mamluk universal history? Why did al-Maqrīzī include these in his treatise? My purpose in this paper is twofold: firstly, I offer some answers to these questions through an investigation of al-Maqrīzī’s chapter. Secondly, by doing so I aim to revise some accepted notions regarding al-Maqrīzī’s originality as a historiographer. Following an exposition on the author and his work, I offer a close reading of some of the narratives recounted by al-Maqrīzī, while delineating the moralistic narrative embedded within the chapter as a whole.

6. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, p. 77; and cf. Yāqūt, *Iršād*, V, p. 2704; Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt al-a‘yān*, V, p. 235; Ḥāḡḡī Ḥalīfa, *Kaṣf al-zunūn*, II, p. 1550. For information on Abū ‘Ubayda see Oller, 2005, pp. 233-236; Madelung, 1992; Lecker, 1995; Weipert, online 2007.

7. See Leder, 1997.

8. The title of the work appears *inter alia* in Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXIV, p. 169; al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī, *Ta’rīḥ Baḡdād*, VII, p. 307. A manuscript of al-Sukkārī’s work, comprising the *dīwān* of the Umayyad brigand-poet Ṭahmān ibn ‘Amr al-Kilābī, was edited and published by William Wright in his *Opuscula Arabica*, pp. 75-95. See also Brockelmann, *GAL*, vol. 1, pp. 12-13; Sezgin, *GAS*, vol. 2, p. 63. One of Abū Sa‘īd al-Sukkārī’s teachers, Muḥammad Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 245/859-860), was himself among the pupils of Abū ‘Ubayda. It may well be that the book attributed to al-Sukkārī is a recension of the work carried by his teacher’s teacher, Abū ‘Ubayda, or that it at least relies on it; cf. Oller, 2005, pp. 233-236.

9. Süleymaniye Library, Ms Fatih 5433, fol. 247b; for a discussion, a facsimile, and an annotated translation of this document see now Hirschler, 2016, esp. p. 155, § 78 (*Aḥbār al-‘addā’in wa-aš‘āruhum*); p. 156, § 79 (*Aš‘ār al-luṣūṣ wa-aḥbāruhum*); p. 163, § 130 (*Aḥbār al-‘addā’in wa-su‘āt al-‘Arab*), § 131 (*Aḥbār al-luṣūṣ*); p. 422, § 1650b (*Aḥbār al-luṣūṣ*). I wish to thank Prof. Hirschler for his help and for his willingness to share with me his unpublished work. As mentioned above, Ta’abbaṭa Šarran (and not only he) was both a brigand and a “runner”; one may assume therefore that both works contained reports on him accompanying his verse.

Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī's *al-Ḥabar 'an al-bašar*

Al-Ḥabar 'an al-bašar is one of the last major works composed by Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. 'Abd al-Qādir al-Maqrīzī (766-845/1364-1442), the “most famous of medieval Egyptian historians”¹⁰ and “dean of Egyptian historians”.¹¹ Planned as an introduction to al-Maqrīzī's work on the Prophet Muḥammad's *Sīra*, *Imtā' al-asmā'*, and following the general scheme of other medieval Arabic universal histories, it opens with a lengthy discussion on the creation of the world and contains *inter alia* chapters on the genealogy of Arab tribes, pre-Islamic religions, Arabian idolatry, *Ayyām al-'Arab*, Visigothic Spain, pre-Islamic Iran, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine history, Biblical history and *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*.¹²

Despite al-Maqrīzī's fame, and although manuscripts of the work have been known to exist for quite some time, it has attracted little scholarly attention and until recently remained in manuscript.¹³ It was only published for the first time in 2013.¹⁴ This oversight is perhaps due to a critical opinion, shared by several scholars, that al-Maqrīzī is somehow lacking in originality. The scant references to the *Ḥabar* that can be found in modern scholarship highlight its merit in preserving reports lacking in other sources, but ignore al-Maqrīzī's skills as a historiographer.¹⁵ The attitude towards al-Maqrīzī and his works seems to range between admiration for his “great erudition” to accusations of “wholesale plagiarism” and “sloppiness”.¹⁶

However, as I intend to show here, a close reading of a single chapter of the *Ḥabar* reveals that al-Maqrīzī was not merely a copyist or plagiarist (whether gifted or sloppy) of earlier sources, but rather a historiographer endowed with a keen literary awareness and a clear

10. See Little, 1970, p. 76. For general information on al-Maqrīzī see e.g. Rosenthal, 1987; Rabbat, 2003.

11. Little, 1970, p. 77 (quoting—somewhat disapprovingly—Sadeque, S.F., *Baybars I of Egypt*, Oxford University Press, Pakistan, 1956, p. 23).

12. On the contents of the work, see Bauden, 2013; Tauer, 1924-1925; Brockelmann, *GALS*, vol. 2, pp. 37-38. On the genre of universal history in medieval Arabic historiography see Rosenthal, 1968, pp. 129-150; Radtke, 1992. See also Guo, 1997, pp. 33-36. The material adduced by al-Maqrīzī on pre-Islamic idolatry was discussed by Lecker, 1993.

13. See Ḥāḡḡī Ḥalīfa, *Kašf al-zunūn*, III, p. 130, § 4680; Nöldeke, 1886, pp. 306-307; Tauer, 1924-1925; Brockelmann, *GALS*, vol. 2, pp. 37-38.

14. Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-ḥabar*. Unfortunately, this recent edition is marred by lacunae and erroneous readings, rendering parts of it rather unintelligible. These faults are evident in the editors' treatment of the chapter on the brigands (V, pp. 281-309). Because of the poor state of this edition, I base my arguments on my own edition of the chapter, as per the author's holograph (Ms Fatih 4340, fols 1b-15b), and incorporate extensive citations from it in the course of the discussion.

15. Note, for example, Nöldeke, 1886, pp. 306-307 (repeated in Tauer, 1924-1925, pp. 363-364); cf. Lecker, 1993.

16. In addition to the references quoted above, see e.g. Guest, 1902, p. 106: “[T]he diligence and learning of the writer of *El Khīṭaṭ* cannot but command admiration. He has accumulated and reduced to a certain amount of order a large quantity of information that would but for him have passed into oblivion”; Nicholson, 1941, p. 453: “[H]e was both unconscious and uncritical, too often copying without acknowledgment or comment, and indulging in wholesale plagiarism when it suited his purpose”; and cf. Rosenthal, 1987; Little, 1998, p. 437; Rabbat, 2003, p. 5; Amitai, 2003; Bauden, 2010.

authorial voice. To use Konrad Hirschler's term, al-Maqrīzī appears as an actor, as evinced by what he chose to include or omit, and by his deliberate use of sources to his own ends, whether quoted or paraphrased, in composing the chapter under discussion.¹⁷

On the Brigands Among the Arabs

The first chapter of the fifth volume of the *Ḥabar* holograph, titled *Faṣl fī ḍikr luṣūṣ al-ʿArab*, is dedicated to accounts of the lives, deaths, exploits, sayings and poetry of ten brigand-poets of pre-Islamic and early Islamic times. The chapter is fifteen folios long and is divided into subchapters dedicated to each of these brigands. The lengths of these subchapters vary from a few lines to five folios. Between the folios of the manuscript, the author inserted notes in his own handwriting; in several places, he left blank spaces for later, but seems never to have filled these in. The brigands dealt with in the chapter are 'Amr Ḍū al-Kalb, Ta'abbaṭa Ṣarran, al-Ṣanfarā, al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka, al-Muntaṣir al-Bāhilī, Awfā ibn Maṭar, 'Amr ibn Barrāqa, al-Uḥaymir al-Sa'dī, Niẓām ibn Ġuṣam, and Yazīd ibn al-Ṣiqqīl (or: al-Saqīl) al-'Uqaylī.¹⁸

Most of the material utilized by al-Maqrīzī in composing the chapter is traceable to earlier sources (some of which are paraphrased, while others are cited with relative accuracy), all of them of a belletristic-*adab* character (alongside philological and lexicographical works), mostly from the 3rd/9th-4th/10th centuries.¹⁹ Although the distinction between *ta'rīḥ* and *adab* may appear tenuous at times, conspicuously none of these sources is historiographical *sensu stricto*, that is, none of them is a work of universal or annalistic history. Furthermore, in comparison with other medieval Arabic universal histories, the subject matter of this chapter seems unique to the *Ḥabar*. To the best of my knowledge, no earlier work of this historical genre (nor, for that matter, of the annalistic genre) contains a comparable chapter.

This ostensible novelty calls for some explanation: first, why were brigand narratives customarily restricted to non-historiographical belletristic sources? Second, why would al-Maqrīzī choose to include this material in a work on universal history, with apparently no precedent in earlier Arabic literature? As mentioned earlier, brigand narratives are closely related to the genre known as *Ayyām al-ʿArab*. A further indication of the strong link between the two is the fact that the chapter on *Ayyām al-ʿArab* in the *Ḥabar* follows immediately after the chapter

17. See Hirschler, 2006; 2013, p. 166ff.

18. 'Amr Ḍū al-Kalb: Ms Fatih 4340, fols 1a-2a; Ta'abbaṭa Ṣarran: fols 2b-7b; al-Ṣanfarā: fols 8a-8b; al-Sulayk: fols 9a-10a; al-Muntaṣir: fols 10b-11a; Awfā ibn Maṭar: fol. 11b; 'Amr ibn Barrāqa: fols 12a-12b; al-Uḥaymir: fol. 13a; Niẓām ibn Ġuṣam: fols 13b-14b; Yazīd: fol. 15a.

19. Among the sources and scholars al-Maqrīzī cites in the chapter are Abū 'Alī al-Qālī's (d. 356/967) *Kitāb al-amālī*; Abū al-Faraġ al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 356/967) *Kitāb al-aġānī*; Ibn al-Kalbī's (d. 204/819 or 206/821) now lost *Kitāb al-ġāmi'*; Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām al-Harawī's (d. 224/838) *Kitāb al-amṭāl*; Ibn Qutayba's (d. 276/889) *Kitāb al-ṣi'r wa-l-ṣu'arā'*; al-Ġāhiz's (d. 255/869) *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*; Kuṣāḡim's (d. 350/961) *Kitāb al-maṣāyid wa-l-maṭārid*; al-Mubarrad's (d. 286/900) *Kitāb al-kāmil*; al-Mu'āfa b. Zakariyyā's (d. 390/1000) *al-Ġalīs al-ṣāliḥ*; and al-Marzubānī (d. 384/994, apparently quoting from the lost part of his *Mu'ḡam al-ṣu'arā'*).

on the brigands.²⁰ While some of the more famous *Ayyām al-ʿArab* narratives did find their way into pre-Mamluk universal or annalistic histories, pre-Mamluk historians apparently deemed neither *Ayyām al-ʿArab* nor brigand narratives important enough as to dedicate whole chapters to either of these genres in their works.²¹ Franz Rosenthal's remarks on this are noteworthy:

Those [= the *Ayyām al-ʿArab*] narratives were not originally intended to be historical material. The earlier Muslim historians usually restricted themselves to brief references to the battle-days. According to W. Caskel, the elaborate battle-day narratives were fully accepted in historical literature no earlier than the thirteenth century. The historians thus showed themselves hesitant to adopt material which they recognized as belonging to the domain of philologists and littérateurs. And in fact, in their origin, the battle-day narratives belonged rather to literature in the narrow sense than to history. They primarily served for the entertainment of the listeners and for their emotional enjoyment.²²

Rosenthal's explanation seems sufficient in answering the first question posed above, to wit, why brigand narratives (like *Ayyām al-ʿArab* narratives) were restricted to belletristic sources. However, neither Rosenthal nor Caskel explain why the *Ayyām al-ʿArab* narratives were accepted in historiographical literature from the 7th/13th century on. Significantly, Ulrich Haarmann notes that during the same period historical writing shifted from traditional standards towards a more literarized mode. This literarization (*Literarisierung*) entailed *inter alia* an increasing assimilation of belletristic-*adab* elements such as poetry, rhymed prose, and witty sayings and anecdotes, as well as the introduction of so-called popular elements borrowed from folk epics, *ʿağāʾib* literature etc., into the writing of history.²³ Similarly, Bernd Radtke notes that from the 7th/13th century onward “a mixture of salvationist, cultural, and world history as entertainment became the norm”.²⁴

20. Ms Fatih 4340, fols 16a-75a.

21. The chapters on *Ayyām al-ʿArab* in al-Yaʿqūbī's (d. 284/897) *Taʾrīḥ* seem to be an earlier exception; al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) gives a detailed account of the *Yawm Dī Qār*, see *Taʾrīḥ al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, I, 2, pp. 1015-1037 (= trans. Bosworth, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 5, pp. 338-370). However, unlike other *Ayyām*, the battle at Dī Qār was rather more than a tribal feud, as there were Persian troops involved in the clash; see Vaglieri, 1961.

22. See Rosenthal, 1968, pp. 20-21; cf. Caskel, 1930, p. 8.

23. See Haarmann, 1971. Interestingly, Haarmann mentions al-Maqrīzī among several other Mamluk historiographers operating in a period later than the 7th/13th century, in whose writing there is “an unmistakable conservative, anti-literary historiographical ethos” (“ein konservatives, literaturfeindlich Geschichtsethos”). Haarmann sees the literary material found in the works of these historians as evidence of the strength of literarization during the period, labeling it “*Literarisierung wider Willen*”—literarization against one's will (p. 54).

24. See Radtke, 1992, pp. 543-544. Radtke, however, perceives this new norm not as a deviation from classical standards but rather as a continuation and development thereof. Indeed, some classical universal histories, notably al-Masʿūdī's *Murūğ al-ḍahab* and al-Maqrīzī's *al-Badʿ wa-l-taʾrīḥ* (both from the 4th/10th century), already show a blend of *taʾrīḥ* and *adab*, and cf. Khalidi, 1994, especially the third and fourth chapters. In his review of Radtke's work, published in *JAOS* 115, 1995, pp. 133-135, Haarmann criticizes Radtke's perception of continuity in the modes of historical writing as derived from a “static world view” (p. 134).

The folk epics mentioned by Haarmann gained significant popularity during the Mamluk period, and some of them (especially *Sīrat ʿAntar* and *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*) draw on *Ayyām al-ʿArab* traditions and share many common motifs with them (as well as with brigand narratives).²⁵ As noted by Konrad Hirschler, these *siyar* were often treated as harmful by Mamluk scholars, since they often dealt with historical topics by presenting an unauthorized version of the past. Since scholars saw historical topics as their exclusive domain, they perceived the *siyar* as a threat to their authority of knowledge.²⁶ It might be suggested that the absorption of *Ayyām al-ʿArab* narratives into historiography in the 7th/13th century (and later of brigand narratives) was partly due to a scholarly attempt at reclaiming their authority by saving this material that was lost on folk-epics.

I suggest that al-Maqrīzī's chapter on the brigands in the *Ḥabar*, with its literary source material and its correspondence with *Ayyām al-ʿArab* and folk-epic themes, reflects the historiographical conventions of its time. However, in order to understand how and to what ends al-Maqrīzī used these materials, a closer look at the contents of the chapter is required.

Death of a Brigand

What, then, is the function of a chapter on ancient brigands in the framework of al-Maqrīzī's universal history? Can the reports included in it be portrayed merely as anecdotes picked at random and meant only as entertaining literary embellishments? While one cannot ignore the entertaining aspects of this chapter, I would like to suggest that more inheres in it.

Overall, the subsections devoted to each of the brigands in the chapter appear in chronological order, starting with the oldest pre-Islamic brigands and ending with the latest early Islamic ones. There are several recurrent topics in the material that al-Maqrīzī included in the chapter, among which mention should be made of: 1) stories on raid expeditions; 2) etiological narratives explaining the origins of brigand nicknames; 3) narratives depicting strange or supernatural encounters in the wilderness; 4) accounts of brigands' deaths. A close inspection of this last category, i.e. accounts of brigands' deaths—not least among them some rare details concerning the death and burial of Ta'abbāṭa Šarran—offers a key to understanding the inclusion of this chapter as a whole in the *Ḥabar*. How, then, does a brigand die?²⁷

Cf. also Guo, 1997, pp. 33-36; and K. Hirschler, 2013, p. 168. Hirschler, who seems to side with Radtke, criticizes Haarmann's terminology as it implies "a dichotomy between literary fictional texts on the one hand, and historical factual texts on the other". However, he admits that "U. Haarmann's observations on the Mamluk period gain new significance because he had rightly observed that changes did take place in the way authors crafted their narratives".

25. See for example Lyons, 1995; Cherkaoui, 2003; Kruk, 2006; Reynolds, 2006, and 2009; Heath, 1996, esp. pp. 22-30. Al-Maqrīzī himself describes the Ḥuṭṭ Bayna al-Qaṣrayn in Cairo as a place where many gathered to listen to popular *siyar*, see his *al-Mawāʿiẓ wa-l-iʿtibār*, III, p. 53.

26. See Hirschler, 2012, pp. 165-196.

27. The following discussion includes a close reading of the accounts given on seven of the brigands dealt with in the chapter (ʿAmr Ḍū al-Kalb, Ta'abbāṭa Šarran, al-Šanfarā, al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka, al-Muntašir, al-Uḥaymir and Yazīd). The chapter does not include reports about the deaths of the remaining three

The Many Deaths of ‘Amr Dū al-Kalb

After a brief lexicographical introduction to the chapter dealing with the nomenclature of different types of brigands (*luṣūṣ*) and brigandage (*talaṣṣuṣ*),²⁸ al-Maqrīzī turns his attention to ‘Amr Dū al-Kalb of the Huḍayl tribe. Following some explanations regarding the origin of his peculiar nickname (“the dog master”), al-Maqrīzī quotes three different accounts regarding his death. One account is a summary of an elaborate story found in Kuṣāḡim’s *Kitāb al-maṣāyid wa-l-maṭārid*, according to which ‘Amr died from a snakebite while slaying a lion.²⁹ The two other versions are based—by al-Maqrīzī’s own admission—on reports from *Kitāb al-aḡānī*.³⁰ According to the first, while on a plundering expedition against the rival tribe of Fahm, two leopards attacked him and devoured him. The tribesmen of Fahm found his body and later claimed that they were the ones who had killed him.³¹ The second, longer, version, also involves the tribe of Fahm:³² it is said that ‘Amr Dū al-Kalb had a love affair with a Fahmī woman called Umm Ġulayḥa. When her tribesmen found this out he fled from them. During his flight, he encountered a man in the wilderness sitting next to a bonfire. ‘Amr Dū al-Kalb asked him the name of the place, and the man told him that he had reached *al-Sudd*. ‘Amr then realized that he was lost, because *al-Sudd* (the barrier) is impassable.³³ He then found refuge in a cave in the *Sudd*. The Fahmīs tracked him down and besieged him in the cave. He had managed to kill one of them with his arrows before they pierced a hole in the cave’s wall through which they shot their arrows and killed him. They took his booty and presented it to Umm Ġulayḥa, who at first refused to believe they had managed to kill him, becoming convinced only when presented with his shirt that still retained his scent.³⁴

(Awfā ibn Maṭar, ‘Amr ibn Barrāqa, and Nizām ibn Ġuṣam), nor about the death of al-Uḥaymir, whose appearance in the chapter is nonetheless significant, as I intend to show.

28. The term *ṣu’lūk* (pl. *ṣa’ālīk*) is conspicuously absent from the introduction. I shall return to this point later on, while discussing the absence of ‘Urwa ibn al-Ward from the chapter.

29. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 1a: *wa-fi Kitāb al-maṣāyid annahu summiya Dā al-Kalb li-anna al-asad qatala aḥan lahu wa-walaḡa fi damihi wa-kāna ‘Amr yaqtulu al-usud wa-yalaḡu fi dimā’ihā wa-ra’āhu ‘Amr ibn Ma’dī-Karib yalaḡu fi dam asad ṭumma nahaṣathu ḥayya fa-māta wa-kāna ‘Amr yaqūlu innamā al-asad kalb fa-li-dālīka summiya Dā al-Kalb*. Cf. Kuṣāḡim, *Kitāb al-maṣāyid wa-l-maṭārid*, pp. 172-173. The same report appears in al-Mu‘āfā ibn Zakariyyā, *al-Ġalīs al-ṣālīḥ*, I, pp. 545-547, the first few lines of which al-Maqrīzī quotes towards the end of the section devoted to ‘Amr Dū al-Kalb (Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 2a: *wa-qāla al-qādī Abū al-Faraḡ al-Mu‘āfā ibn Zakariyyā* etc.). The end of the story does not appear in the holograph, but it seems to have been completed in one of the other manuscripts of the *Ḥabar*, as evinced by its inclusion in ‘Abd al-Ġanī and al-Suwaydī’s edition, V, pp. 284-285. According to this version, transmitted on the authority of Wahb ibn Munabbih (alluded to in the *isnād* only by his *nisba*—al-Ḍimārī; d. 110/728 or 114/732), the *muḥaḍram* poet ‘Amr ibn Ma’dī-Karib told the story of ‘Amr Dū al-Kalb’s death to the second caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Ḥattāb, upon the latter’s request that he tells him the most astonishing thing he saw (*aḥbirnī yā Abā Tawrin bi-a’ḡabi ma ra’ayta*).

30. See Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXII, pp. 351-353.

31. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 1a: *wa-kāna ḡazā Fahman fa-waṭaba ‘alayhi namirān fa-akalāhu fa-dda’at Fahm qatlahu*.

32. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 1a-2a.

33. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 1b: *fa-‘arafa annahu qad halaka wa-aḥṭa’ a wa-l-sudd ṣay’ lā yuḡāwazu*.

34. According to another version of the last story (which al-Maqrīzī does not mention), ‘Amr had managed to kill three hundred Fahmīs with his arrows before they besieged him, and thirty-nine more from within

Whether he died of a snakebite while slaying a lion, was devoured by two leopards, or was killed at the hands of his Fahmī rivals, it is quite clear that ‘Amr Dū al-Kalb did not die of old age. Leading what appeared to be a violent life, raiding tribes and taking booty, led him to a violent, perhaps demeaning, death.³⁵

Ta’abbaṭa Šarran – an Anti-šahīd

The next brigand to whom al-Maqrīzī turns his attention is from the above-mentioned tribe of Fahm and is both the most notorious *ḡāhili* brigand and the most celebrated poet among the *ṣa’ālīk*. His birthname is sometimes given as Tābit ibn Ḡābir, but he was mainly known by his nickname—Ta’abbaṭa Šarran.³⁶ Al-Maqrīzī quotes ibn al-A’rābi’s (d. 231/845) statement that he was of the *Aḡribat al-‘Arab* (“the ravens of the Arabs”) that is of black African ancestry.³⁷

Al-Maqrīzī recounts several stories regarding the source of his ominous nickname, following closely the reports found in *Kitāb al-aḡānī*. As mentioned earlier, according to some he hunted down a ram-shaped ghou and carried it under his armpit; others say that after his mother had asked him to pick some truffles for her, he went out to the desert, gathered the largest vipers

the cave. The Fahmīs then burned him alive in the cave; see Abū Sa’īd al-Sukkārī, *Šarḥ aš’ār al-Huḍaliyyīn*, II, pp. 854–856.

35. Adam Talib turned my attention to an interesting interplay of motifs between the story of ‘Amr’s death and the Qur’ānic and Biblical story of Yūsuf/Joseph (Qur’ān, XII; cf. Gen., XXXVII): aside from a phonetic similarity between the names of Zulaḡḡa and (Umm) Ḡulaḡḡa, the garment thrown to Umm Ḡulaḡḡa as proof of ‘Amr’s death is reminiscent of the bloody shirt presented to Ya’qūb as falsified evidence of Yūsuf’s death. Furthermore, both Y’aqūb and Umm Ḡulaḡḡa react skeptically to the news of the death of their loved ones. It can be noted that as opposed to the righteous Yūsuf, who was treacherously abandoned by his brothers but kept alive, ‘Amr was indeed killed. The motifs present in *Sūrat Yūsuf* are thus turned upside-down in the story of ‘Amr’s death, presenting the *ḡāhili* brigand ‘Amr Dū al-Kalb as a mirror image of the Qur’ānic prophet Yūsuf.

36. For general information about him and his poetry, see Arazi, 1998. On the meaning of this nickname see above.

37. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 2b. The same is said about al-Šanfarā (fol. 8a) and al-Muntašir al-Bāhili (fol. 10b); al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka is said to have been born to a black captive woman (fol. 9a). Neither Ta’abbaṭa Šarran nor al-Šanfarā are counted among the *aḡriba* in other classical sources. See for example Abū ‘Ubayda, *Kitāb al-dībāḡ*, pp. 40–41; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ši’r wa-l-šu’ara’*, p. 131 (on ‘Antara); Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, VIII, p. 240. Ibn al-A’rābi’s statement is quoted also in Ibn Manẓūr’s *Lisān al-‘Arab*, s.v. *ḡrb*, and mentions Ta’abbaṭa Šarran and al-Šanfarā among the *aḡriba* who lived during Islam (!) in contradiction to other sources about them. Furthermore, the evidence regarding Ta’abbaṭa Šarran’s pedigree seems to point to the contrary, that he was rather of a purely Arab lineage. See e.g. Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXI, p. 127; cf. also p. 170; and al-Sukkārī, *Šarḥ aš’ār al-Huḍaliyyīn*, II, p. 846. Al-Ḡāḥiẓ mentions Ta’abbaṭa Šarran’s mother in *Kitāb al-ḡayawān*, I, pp. 286–287, as one of the wisest among Arab women (*min ‘uqalā’ nisā’ al-‘Arab*), and states that she had a noble stature among them (*muqaddamatan fihim*). The evidence regarding al-Šanfarā and al-Muntašir is somewhat less conclusive (cf. *infra*). Bernard Lewis seems to be right in making the point that “[b]y a confusion between the two groups—the ‘crows of the Arabs’ and the brigand poets—several of the latter are described by some early sources as having been black, though this is not supported by the main tradition”. See Lewis, 1985, p. 92.

he could find and brought them to her in a leather bag tucked under his armpit.³⁸ The famous lexicographer al-Ḥalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. 170/786) is quoted saying that he carried a knife under his arm, while the Basran philologist Abū Ḥātim al-Siğistānī is of the opinion that he used to carry his quiver under his arm.³⁹

Most of the reports given by al-Maqrīzī on Ta'abbāṭa Šarran speak of his raids on enemy tribes and his narrow escapes from them.⁴⁰ According to al-Maqrīzī's account he found his death following such a raid against Huḍayl ('Amr Dū al-Kalb's tribe):

tumma ḥaraḡa Ta'abbāṭa li-yaṭ'ara bi-aṣḥābihi fa-ra'ā baytan li-Huḍalī fa-qāla li-aṣḥābihi aḡnamūhu tumma ra'ā ḍabu'an 'an yasārihi fa-qāla abširi ušbi'uki min al-qawm ḡadan tumma aḡāra 'alā al-bayt wa-qatala šayḥan wa-'aḡūzan wa-ttaba'a ḡulāman fa-ramāhu al-ḡulām fa-ntaḡama qalḡahu wa-lāḡa al-ḡulām bi-qatāda fa-qatā'ahā Ta'abbāṭa bi-ḥuṣāṣatihi wa-qatala al-ḡulām tumma māta wa-qāla inna allaḡi ramāhu lāḡa minhu bi-ranfa.⁴¹

Ta'abbāṭa Šarran went to avenge the death of his companions. He saw a house belonging to a man of Huḍayl and said to his companions: "Plunder it!" Then, to his left, he saw a she-hyena. He said to [it]: "Rejoice! I shall satisfy your hunger with [corpses] of the tribe tomorrow." Then he raided the house and killed an old man and an old woman. He went after a boy. The boy shot him and pierced his heart. The boy sought shelter under an astragalus bush. Ta'abbāṭa Šarran cut it in his dying breath and killed the boy. Then he died. Others say that the one who shot him found shelter under a willow.

Thus far, the account given by al-Maqrīzī regarding Ta'abbāṭa Šarran's death is a summary of similar reports found in several 3rd/9th-4th/10th century sources.⁴² The rest of the account, which relates the brigand's burial, though also based on these earlier sources, calls for special attention as it contains some details that appear uniquely in the *Ḥabar* and are not paralleled in any other source known to me. These details seem to hold the key to al-Maqrīzī's decision to include brigand narratives in his universal history. Here is his version (the new material added in al-Maqrīzī's report is underlined in transliteration and bold in the translation):

fa-lam ya'kul min Ta'abbāṭa sabu' wa-lā ṭā'ir illā māta wa-qāla inna rā'ihatahu kānat idā mālat 'alā ḥayy mariḡa fa-ḥaraḡa fityān min Huḍayl li-yadfinūhu fa-lam yaḡid aḡad riḡahu illā māta fa-talattama qawm wa-saddū manāḡirahum wa-ramawhu fi ḡār Raḡmān fa-raḡa'ū wa-kulluhum urimmū tumma 'amū 'an āḡirihim wa-kānat ḡumḡumatuhu min qit'a wāḡida wa-kānat 'izāmuhu ṣumman lā muḡḡ fihā.⁴³

38. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 2b; and cf. Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXI, pp. 127-128.

39. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 2b. The explanations quoted on the authority of al-Ḥalīl ibn Aḥmad and Abū Ḥātim al-Siğistānī appear, *inter alia*, in Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, s.v. 'bṭ.

40. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 3a (a raid against the Baḡila with 'Amr ibn Barrāq[a]); fol. 4a (on a raid against the Huḍayl); fol. 4b (a raid against Ḥaṭ'am); fol. 5a (a raid against Azd); fol. 5b (a raid against Nufāṭa). Most of these stories are based on reports found in Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXI, pp. 127-173.

41. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 5b.

42. Cf. Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXI, pp. 166-168 and 169-170 (a slightly different version); Ibn Ḥabīb, *Asmā' al-muḡtālīn*, pp. 221-223; Abū Sa'īd al-Sukkarī, *Šarḥ aṣ'ār al-Huḍaliyyīn*, II, pp. 843-848.

43. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 5b.

Every beast or bird of prey that scavenged on him [=his corpse] died. It is said that whenever the malodor [of his corpse] reached a living thing, it fell ill. Some young men of Huḍayl went out to bury him, but each of them fell dead upon sensing his malodor. Then some people wore veils around their faces and plugged up their nostrils. They threw him in the cave of Raḥmān, and then went back [to their tribe]. [The bones of] all of them decayed and soon after every last one of them became blind. His skull was made of a single piece [of bone], and his bones were hard and solid, without any marrow.

Ta'abbaṭa Šarran's death as it is recounted here is a violent one; he is killed while killing others. Furthermore, he is depicted as a monstrosity: his physique grotesquely deformed with its jointless skull and its solid, marrowless bones.⁴⁴ Most importantly, we are told that he continues killing even after his death: birds and beasts that prey on his venomous body die, and the stench of his corpse kills the people who approach it, or afflict them with a disease.

The details of this report might be understood against the background and antithesis of Islamic traditions regarding the corpses of martyrs (*šuhadā'*, sg. *šahīd*). These traditions, in particular those regarding the body of the Prophet Muḥammad, claim that a martyr's body does not decay in the tomb, but stays intact and lifelike, while giving off a sweet fragrance.⁴⁵ Michael Lecker notes, moreover, that according to some traditions, leaving a Muslim warrior's body in the battlefield so that it will "resurrect from the bellies of the beasts of prey and birds" was considered a privilege.⁴⁶ Thus, a certain Hadith recounts that the Prophet, upon seeing the mutilated corpse of his uncle, Ḥamza ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, who was killed at Uhud (3/625), cried: "Had it not been for the women's grief and the fear that this would become a *sunna* after my time, I would have left him until God resurrected him from the bellies of the beasts of prey and the birds (*min buṭūni al-sibā'i wa-l-ṭayri*)".⁴⁷

44. A similar wording is used by al-Mas'ūdī (d. ca. 345/956) in his description of the rhinoceros (*karkaddan* or *biṣān*), see *Murūğ al-ḍahab*, I, p. 204, § 430: *wa-laysa fī anwā' al-ḥayawān wa-Llāhu a'lam ašadd minhu ḍālik anna akṭar 'izāmihī ḍumm* (read: *šumm*) *lā mafṣil fī qawā'imihī*.

(The form *ḍumm* is unattested in the dictionaries I consulted. The reading *šumm* seems to be justified both here and in the passage quoted from the *Ḥabar*; cf. Lane, *Lexicon*, vol. I, p. 1734c, s.v. *ašamm*: "[as that which is without a cavity is generally non-sonorous] one says *ḥağarun ašammu* meaning *Hard and solid stone*" etc.). Furthermore, al-Ġāḥiẓ mentions in his depiction of the ostrich (*na'āma*) that its bones are hollow and have no marrow (*lā muḥḥa fihā*): see *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, IV, p. 326. It can also be mentioned that according to a report preserved in al-Anbārī's (d. ca. 304/916) *šarḥ* on the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, two of Ta'abbaṭa Šarran's toes were conjoined (*wa-kānat iṣba'āni multaṣiqatāni min aṣābi'i riğlihi*), see al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, I, p. 195.

45. See for example al-Ḍahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, IX, p. 161. On the Late Antique (especially Christian) precursors of these traditions see Harvey, 2006, pp. 11-21, 206-210 and *passim*. On traditions surrounding martyrs and martyrdom in Islam, see Kohlberg, 1997; and Lecker, 2000. On traditions concerning the Prophet's death, see Szilágyi, 2009. The same theme famously appears in the third part of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, regarding the hideous stench of Starets Zosima's corpse.

46. See Lecker, 2000, pp. 48-49.

47. The translation follows Lecker's translation; see 2000, p. 48, quoting al-Qurṭubī, *al-Ġāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, X, p. 201. Cf. another report mentioned by Lecker, 2000, pp. 48-49, found in al-Mu'āfā ibn Zakariyyā,

A comparison between the traditions about martyrs on the one hand, and the information regarding Ta'abbaṭa Šarran's death and burial on the other, reveals that like martyrs, Ta'abbaṭa Šarran died a violent death, but unlike them, his death was clearly not for the sake of God. While the bodies of martyrs are blessed, spreading the sweet fragrance of holiness, his body, according to al-Maqrīzī's version, spreads the unbearable malodor of sin and vileness; and while martyrs may be resurrected from the entrails of birds and beasts, his body poisons every bird or beast that tries to feed on it.⁴⁸ Seen in this light, the story of Ta'abbaṭa Šarran's death and burial as told by al-Maqrīzī portrays him as an antithesis of the figure of the *šahīd* in Islamic tradition and as an epitome of corruption and moral decay.

Al-Šanfarā's Deadly Skull

Al-Maqrīzī's next infamous brigand-poet appears in some reports as Ta'abbaṭa Šarran's close companion. He was named (or nicknamed) al-Šanfarā, and like Ta'abbaṭa Šarran, al-Maqrīzī states that he was one of the *Ağribat al-'Arab* (the ravens of the Arabs).⁴⁹ According to al-Maqrīzī's sources, he was born to a clan of the tribe of Azd, but taken captive soon after by Ta'abbaṭa Šarran's tribe of Fahm. Later, he was ransomed by the Banū Salāmān, another clan of his native tribe.⁵⁰ Al-Maqrīzī has two versions regarding the rest of the story:

a.

wa-kāna al-Šanfarā fi Banī Sulāmān (sic) yaḥsubu naḥsahu aḥadahuṃ tumma waqa'a bayna ibn allaḍī kāna 'indahū wa-bayna al-Šanfarā šarr fa-naḥathu 'anhum fa-atā allaḍī ištārāhu min Fahm fa-qāla iṣḍuqnī mimman anā fa-a'lamahu fa-qāla lan ada'akum ḥattā aqtula minkum mi'a bi-mā i'tabadtumūnī fa-qatala minhum tis'a wa-tis'īn wa-lazima dār Fahm yuḡīru 'alā al-Azd fa-raṣadahu Usayd ibn Ġābir al-Sulāmānī (sic) wa-ṭalāta (?) ilayhi fa-ra'ā al-Šanfarā al-sawād fa-ramāhu fa-aṣāba Usayd tumma waṭabū 'alayhi fa-aḥadūhu wa-qālū inšudnā fa-qāla innamā al-našīd 'alā al-masarra fa-dāhabat maṭalan wa-qālū lahu ayna naqburuka fa-qāla:

*lā taqburūnī inna qabrī muḥarramun / 'alaykum wa-lākin ḥāmirī Umma 'Āmirī*⁵¹

al-Ġalīs al-šāliḥ, II, pp. 455-456, on a warrior whose wish it was to be "resurrected from the bellies of the beasts of prey and the craws of the birds (*min buṭūn al-sibā' wa-ḥawāṣil al-ṭayr*)".

48. It should be noted that the passage on the birds and beasts of prey that died after scavenging on Ta'abbaṭa Šarran's corpse already appears in the older versions of the report, e.g. in Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXI, p. 166-168. The new material found in the *Ḥabar* report is quite likely al-Maqrīzī's own interpolation, playing on motifs already found in the older version. On a similar interpolation (albeit in a smaller scale) see *infra*, in the discussion on al-Šanfarā.

49. For general information about al-Šanfarā and his poetry, see Arazi, 1996. Al-Šanfarā's genealogy is indeed unclear, but in a couple of verses attributed to him he boasts of his noble pedigree (*anā ibnu ḥiyārī al-ḥiḡrī baytan wa-manṣiban wa-ummī bintu al-aḥrārī*); see: Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXI, p. 179; and cf. p. 193; Tibrīzī, *Šarḥ Dīwān al-ḥamāsa*, II, p. 25). The evidence that he might have been of the *ağriba* is circumstantial.

50. The main source is again Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXI, pp. 181-182; and cf. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Asmā' al-muḡtālīn*, pp. 242-243.

51. Var.: *abširī Umma 'Āmirī*.

*idā iḥṭamalū ra'sī wa-fi al-ra'si akṭarī / wa-ḡūdira 'inda al-multaqā tamma sā'irī.*⁵²

Al-Šanfarā stayed among the Banū Sulāmān (*sic*), thinking that he was one of them. Then he fell into enmity with the son of the one with whom he stayed. [The Salāmān] banished him from among them. He came to the one who had ransomed him from Fahm and said: "Tell me the truth, to whom do I belong?" [The man] informed him [of his true origin], and he said: "I shall not let you [=the Salāmān] be until I kill a hundred of you, in retaliation for having enslaved me." He killed ninety-nine of them. He stayed in the tribal quarters of Fahm, carrying raids against Azd. Usayd ibn Ḡābir al-Salāmānī ambushed him with three[?] [of his companions]. Al-Šanfarā saw the black [of Usayd's eye] and he shot it and hit Usayd. Then they jumped on him and seized him. They said to him: "Recite to us!" He said: "Recitation is only done with joy" and it became a proverb. They asked him: "Where should we bury you?" upon which he recited:

Do not bury me, burying me is forbidden to you,
But hide yourself (*var.*: rejoice), Umm 'Āmir,⁵³
When they carry away my head, which carries the most of me,
And the rest of me is left behind in the battlefield."

b.

*wa-qīla sabat Salāmān al-Šanfarā fa-qāla lahu āsiruhu law-lā annī aḥāfu an yaqtulanī Banū Salāmān la-zawwaḡtuka ibnatī fa-qāla in qatalūka qataltu minhum mī'a fa-zawwaḡahu fa-qatalathu Banū Sulāmān fa-šana'a al-Šanfarā al-nabl wa-ḡa'ala afwāqahā min al-qurūn li-tu'rafa fa-qatala minhum tis'a wa-tis'in tumma raṣadūhu 'alā mā' wa-qatalūhu wa-šalabūhu wa-baqiya 'āman maṣlūban wa-'alayhi min naḍrihi raḡul fa-marra bihi raḡul wa-qad saqaṭa fa-rakaḡa ra'sahū bi-riḡlibi fa-daḡala fihā 'aẓm fa-baḡat 'alayhi fa-māta.*⁵⁴

It is said that the Salāmān captured al-Šanfarā. His captor said to him: "Had I not been afraid that the Banū Salāmān would kill me, I would have wedded you to my daughter." He replied: "If they kill you, I will kill a hundred of them." So he wedded him [to his daughter] and the Banū Salāmān killed him. Al-Šanfarā made arrows, and made their notches out of horns, so that they would be recognizable. He killed ninety-nine of them. Then they ambushed him next to a water source. They killed him and crucified him. He [=his body] remained on the cross for a year, still having one more man [to kill] according to his oath. A man passed by him [=by his body] after he had fallen [off the cross] and struck [al-Šanfarā's] head with his foot. A bone entered it, it became infected, and he died.

52. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 8a. For other versions of the poem see e.g. Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXI, p. 182; al-Marzūqī, *Šarḥ Diwān al-ḥamāsa*, I, pp. 487-491; al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, I, p. 197. The poem is in the *ṭawīl*; the conspicuous omission of the initial short syllable (*ḥarf*) of the first metrical foot (*fa'ūlun*) of the first line of the poem conforms to the phenomenon known as *ḥarm* in the science of 'arūd: see Frolov, 2000, pp. 196-197; cf. Stoetzer, 1999; van Gelder, 2012, p. 347 (I thank Adam Talib for this reference).

53. A nickname for a female hyena.

54. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 8a. Cf. Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXI, pp. 179-182; al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, I, pp. 194-199; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Asmā' al-muḡtālīn*, pp. 242-243.

Al-Šanfarā's crucifixion corresponds to the Islamic punishment on brigandage as prescribed in the Qur'ān against *muḥāraba*, a term that closely parallels in Islamic law the term *qaṭ' al-ṭarīq* (brigandary).⁵⁵ Furthermore, as with Ta'abbāṭa Šarran, al-Šanfarā's bloodlust carries on beyond the grave. His skull, which he boasts as "carrying the most of him", is also the poisonous vessel by which his oath to kill a hundred of the Banū Salāmān is fulfilled.⁵⁶

In this respect, in describing the affair, al-Maqrīzī's phraseology calls for special attention. The parallel report in *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, al-Maqrīzī's apparent source for this report, uses the passive form of the verb *'aqara* to describe what happened to the person who accidentally hit al-Šanfarā's skull with his leg: *fa-ʿuqirat riḡluhu*—"his leg was wounded".⁵⁷ Al-Maqrīzī however substitutes this verb with a rarer, more salient form: *fa-baḡat 'alayhi*—"it became swollen and infected". This substitution does not seem accidental: the phrase *baḡā 'alā* usually denotes "to act wrongfully or tyrannically towards s.o."⁵⁸ When used to convey the meaning "to swell" or "to become infected", the verb *baḡā* is not usually complemented by a prepositional phrase.⁵⁹ The infinitive, *baḡy*, is used in Islamic law to denote acts of transgression or rebellion against religious authority, following the usage of verb in the Qur'ān, and as such, it is closely associated with the term *muḥāraba* mentioned above.⁶⁰ Furthermore, as noted by Caskel and Oller, *baḡy* is a recurrent trope in *Ayyām al-ʿArab* narratives, where unlawful and wrongful doings are the chief characteristic of some of the heroes.⁶¹

55. See Qur'ān, V, 33. For references to and discussion of exegetical literature on this famous verse, see Kraemer, 1980, esp. pp. 61-70; and cf. Heffening, 1995.

56. An interesting forerunner of the symbol of a brigand's skull appears in a famous passage of the *Mishnah*. Tractate *Avot* II, 6 reads: "He [=R. Hillel] also saw a skull floating on the water. He said to it: Because you caused [others] to float (i.e. because you drowned others), they made you float, and those that made you float will end up floating [themselves]." (*'ap hū' rā'ā gulḡoleṭ 'aḡaṭ šāpā 'al pānē ha-māyim wə-āmar lāh: 'al da-ʾāṭīēpt 'āṭīpūk wə-sōp mətīpayik yaṭūpūn*). According to the exegete Rashi (Salomon Isaacides, d. 1105, France), the skull was that of a brigand (*məlasṭēm ha-bəriyyōt*), see e.g. Kinstlikher, Spitzer (eds.), *Masekhet Avot*, p. 48. Maimonides's (d. 1204) commentary on this passage is especially interesting, since it fits well also with the story of al-Šanfarā's death: "Because you caused [others] to float you were made to float, and the one who made you float will be made to float [himself]"—it means that you were killed because you killed others, and the one who killed you will be killed [himself]. The intention of this maxim is that wrongful deeds turn back against their doers. [...] It is discernible and evident in every time and every place that he who does wrongful deeds and contrives types of tyranny and vileness is himself [eventually] afflicted with the harm caused by the very same mischiefs he contrived, because he teaches a craft that will [eventually] be applied unto him and unto others." See Maimonides, *Masekhet Avot 'im perush rabenu Mosheh ben Maimon*, pp. 131-132 (in Judaeo-Arabic).

57. See Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XXI, p. 186. The same appears in Ibn Ḥabīb, *Asmā' al-muḡtālīn*, p. 243.

58. See Lane, *Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 231b-c s.v. *baḡā*.

59. See Lane, *Lexicon*, vol. 1, pp. 231c-232a. s.v. *baḡā*: "*baḡā al-ḡurḡu* [...] the wound swelled [...] and became in a corrupt state."

60. See Qur'ān, XLIX, 9. See discussion of the term in Kraemer, 1980, p. 48ff. The verb is also used in *'ahd al-umma*, on which see Lecker, 2004, pp. 110-112.

61. See Oller, 2005.

It appears that al-Maqrīzī intentionally uses the semiotic wealth of the verb *bağā*, denoting both “to swell, to become infected” and “to act tyrannically, to transgress”. While accentuating themes already present in older versions of the report, he seems to interpolate it, so as to create an intertextual reverberation of multifaceted connotations. In this way, the reader is led to judge al-Šanfarā as a *bāğī* or a *muḥārib*, namely, according to the moral norms of Islam, a transgressor and a rebel against God.

Al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka's Unavenged Death

Regarding al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka of the Banū Sa’d (Tamīm), al-Maqrīzī mentions that his mother was a black captive and a servant of the Banū al-Ḥārīt ibn Ka’b, and that he was nicknamed Sulayk al-Maqānib (“Sulayk of the rapacious wolves”). Like Ta’abbata Šarran, he was also one of the *ruğaylā’* (the fleet-footed brigands), and according to one story, he remained fleet-footed even as an old man.⁶² Here are al-Maqrīzī’s versions of the story of his death:

wa-kāna al-Sulayk yu’ṭi ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Muwaylik al-Ḥaṭ’amī itāwa min ḡanā’ imihi fa-yuḡāwizu bilād Ḥaṭ’am wa-yuḡīru fa-marra qāfilan bi-bayt min Ḥaṭ’am fihi imra’a šābba fa-tasannamahā fa-aḥbarat bi-dālika fa-ttaba’ahū Anas ibn Mudrik fa-qatalahu fa-qāla Ibn Muwaylik la-aqtulanna qātilahu aw la-yadiyannahu fa-qāla Anas wa-Llāhi lā adihi wa-qāla: innī wa-qatli Sulaykan tumma a’qiluhu [...] wa-fi šī’rihi annahu kāna sabā imra’a min Ḥaṭ’am wa-waladat lahu waladan wa-azārahā qawmahā fa-lammā raḡa’a ittaba’ahu Anas fa-qatalahu wa-qāla Ibn Qutayba waṭi’a Sulayk imra’a min Ḥaṭ’am ahluhā ḥulūf fa-qatalahu Anas wa-ṭūliba bi-qatlihi fa-qāla qataltuhu bi-stiḥqāq fa-kayfa a’qiluhu.⁶³

Al-Sulayk used to pay ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Muwaylik al-Ḥaṭ’amī tribute from his booty in order to cross the lands of Ḥaṭ’am and carry out raids. On his way back [from a raid], he passed by a house of Ḥaṭ’am. Inside was a young woman [of the tribe]. He raped her.⁶⁴ She informed [the tribesmen] of that. Anas ibn Mudrik [= a chieftain of Ḥaṭ’am] chased him and killed him. Ibn Muwaylik said: “I shall kill his killer unless he pays the bloodwit.” Anas then said: “By God, I shall not pay the bloodwit for [killing] him”, and composed [the following]: “It was my right to kill Sulayk—why should I pay the bloodwit for this?” [...] According to his poetry, he captured a woman of Ḥaṭ’am and she bore him a son. He took her to visit her people. When he returned Anas followed him and killed him. Ibn Qutayba said: Sulayk raped a woman of Ḥaṭ’am while her tribesmen were absent. Anas killed him and was demanded [to pay the bloodwit] for killing him. He said: “I had every right killing him, why should I pay for it?”

62. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 10a.

63. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 10a. Cf. Abū al-Farağ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XX, pp. 386-387; Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-ši’r wa-l-šu’arā*, p. 215; Abū ‘Ubayda, *Kitāb al-dībāğ*, pp. 44-45.

64. Literally: “He mounted her” or “took her by surprise”.

Al-Maqrīzī's version leaves it unclear whether or not Anas finally paid the bloodwit (according to another version he did).⁶⁵ However, his refusal to pay is justified by the fact that *diyya* or 'aql was paid only in cases of unjustified killing. Since al-Sulayk appears to have betrayed the code of *ḡiwār* sacred to the pre-Islamic tribal society by raping (or taking captive) a girl from the tribe that gave him protection, killing him for that was not perceived as wrongful.⁶⁶ Once more, we encounter a brigand who led a violent life that ended in a violent death.

Al-Muntašir al-Bāhilī – A Limb for a Limb

Al-Muntašir ibn Wahb al-Bāhilī is also said to have been one of the *ruḡaylā* and the *āgrība*. It is said that he used to raid the Yemenite tribe of Banū al-Ḥārīt ibn Ka'b, and that he killed 'Amr ibn 'Āhān. The latter's mourner then composed an elegy in which she lampooned al-Muntašir:

wa-aḡāra al-Muntašir fa-qatala nā'ihā 'Amr wa-asara Ṣalā'a ibn 'Amr al-Ḥārītī wa-kāna sayyidan fa-qāla lahu iftakka (!) naṣsak fa-abā fa-qāla la-uqattī 'annaka anmalatan anmalatan wa-'uḍwan 'uḍwan mā lam taftakka (!) naṣsak ḥattā qatalahu tumma raṣadat Banū al-Ḥārīt al-Muntašir ḥattā ḥaḡḡa Dā al-Ḥalaṣa fa-dallat 'alayhi Banū Nufayl al-Ḥārītīyyīn fa-aḥaḍūhu fa-qata'ūhu 'uḍwan 'uḍwan [...] wa-kānat Banū al-Ḥārītī tusammī al-Muntašir muḡaddī'an.

Al-Muntašir then raided [the Banū al-Ḥārīt]. He killed 'Amr's mourner and captured Ṣalā'a ibn 'Amr al-Ḥārītī, who was a chieftain (*sayyid*). He said to him: "Pay your ransom!" but [Ṣalā'a] refused. So he said: "I will tear you apart fingertip by fingertip and limb by limb until you pay your ransom!" He then tore apart his organs until he killed him. Banū al-Ḥārīt then watched for al-Muntašir till he went on a pilgrimage to [the shrine of] Dū al-Ḥalaṣa. The Banū Nufayl [ibn 'Amr ibn Kilāb] led the Banū al-Ḥārīt to him, and they captured him and tore him apart limb from limb. [...] The Banū al-Ḥārīt used to call al-Muntašir *muḡaddī'* (one who amputates).⁶⁷

This gruesome story demonstrates once more the dynamics of a violent life that ends in a violent death, in accordance with ancient tribal codes of mirror-punishment.⁶⁸ It is noteworthy that al-Muntašir is captured while performing the pagan pilgrimage to the shrine of Dū al-Ḥalaṣa (also known as al-Ka'ba al-Yamaniyya), that is, while participating in what Muslims would consider a heathen ritual.⁶⁹

65. See for example Ibn Ḥabīb, *Asmā' al-muḡtālīn*, p. 237; Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, XX, p. 387. In both these sources, it is explicitly said that al-Sulayk was a ḡār of the Ḥaṭ'am.

66. See Lecerf, 1963; Tyan, 1962.

67. Ms Fatih 4340, fols 10b-11a. Cf. Abū 'Ubayda, *Kitāb al-dībāḡ*, pp. 35-38; al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, II, pp. 750-751; Abū 'Ubayd al-Bakrī, *Simṭ al-la'ālī*, I, pp. 75-76.

68. The same is of course reflected in the Old Testament "an eye for an eye" (Ex., XXI, 24; Lev., XXIV, 20).

69. See Fahd, 1961.

Al-Uḥaymir and Yazīd – Repentance and Redemption

We now come to al-Uḥaymir al-Sa'dī and Yazīd ibn al-Saqīl/Siqqīl al-'Uqaylī, the eighth and tenth brigands (respectively) in al-Maqrīzī's chapter. Al-Maqrīzī's accounts of them are considerably shorter than the lengthy accounts he dedicated to others. This is hardly surprising, as his sources do not have much to say about them. Both of these brigands lived during early Islamic times, and both of them are said to have repented. Regarding the first of the two, al-Uḥaymir, al-Maqrīzī quotes Abū 'Alī al-Qālī who says that he was a brigand of the tribe of Sa'd. He then quotes one of his brigand poems, and remarks:

tumma tāba wa-qāla:

aškū ilā Allāhi ṣabrī 'an zawāmilihim / wa-mā ulāqī⁷⁰ idā marrū min al-ḥazanī
qul li-luṣūṣi Banī al-Laḥnā' i yaḥtasibū / bazza al-'Irāqī wa-yansaw ṭurfata al-Yamanī
wa-yatrukū al-ḥazza wa-l-dībāḡa yalbasuhū / biḍu al-mawālī ḍawī al-surrāti wa-l-'ukanī
fa-rubba ṭawbin karīmin kuntu āḥuḍuhū / min al-qīṭārī bi-lā naqdin wa-lā ṭamanī.⁷¹

Then he repented and composed the following:

I complain to God of my restraining from [seizing] their loaded camels

And the grief I encounter (*var.* endure) when they pass by.

Tell the brigands, those bastards, to content themselves with

The clothes of Iraq and to forget the rare [gowns] of Yemen,

And to leave the silken brocades to be worn by those

Whose clients are white and whose bellies are fat.

I took many a precious garment

From the caravan without money or payment!

No account of al-Uḥaymir's death is given. As a repentant, he may have died a peaceful death; in the verse that follows immediately after the verse of *Muḥāraba* mentioned earlier, the Qur'ān excludes those who repent before being captured from the punishments allotted to brigands.⁷²

The report on the last brigand in the chapter, Yazīd, is even shorter. Before quoting some of his verse, al-Maqrīzī says:

Yazīd ibn al-Ṣaqīl [...] al-Qaysī al-'Uqaylī kāna yasriqu al-ibil tumma tāba wa-qūtila fī sabīl Allāh.⁷³

Yazīd ibn al-Ṣaqīl... al-Qaysī al-'Uqaylī... he used to steal camels, but then he repented and was killed in the cause of God.

Thus the chapter ends, with a reformed brigand who died a *shahīd*.

70. *Var.*: *uqāsī*.

71. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 13a; Cf. Abū 'Alī al-Qālī, *Kitāb al-amālī*, I, p. 49.

72. See Qur'ān, V, 34.

73. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 15a; cf. al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, I, pp. 59-60; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, s.v. *b'r*.

‘Urwa ibn al-Ward and the *ğāhili* Brigand-Paradigm

It is noteworthy and surprising that one of the most famous figures of the pre-Islamic *ṣa‘ālik*, ‘Urwa ibn al-Ward, is entirely absent from al-Maqrīzī’s text. I would like to offer an explanation for this conspicuous absence. ‘Urwa, a near contemporary of other pre-Islamic brigands mentioned in the chapter, is one of the best-known *ṣa‘ālik* poets; indeed, he is sometimes nicknamed ‘Urwa of the *ṣa‘ālik* (*‘Urwat al-ṣa‘ālik*). The origin of this nickname is explained in *Kitāb al-ağānī*:

He was nicknamed ‘Urwa of the *ṣa‘ālik* because he used to gather them and take care of them when they were unsuccessful in their raids and had neither livelihood nor a place to plunder.⁷⁴

The *Ağānī* further reports that during years of drought, ‘Urwa would gather the poorest of his tribe and provide for them, while taking those who were strong enough on raids and giving them their share of the booty; he was therefore nicknamed ‘Urwa of the *ṣa‘ālik*.⁷⁵ The term *ṣu‘lūk*, it should be noted, originally denoted “poor, destitute” and was not necessarily associated with unlawful behavior. This is in accordance with its usage here.⁷⁶ ‘Urwa is nicknamed “‘Urwa of the poor” (or “‘Urwa of the brigands”) not because he was a petty brigand, but because he was a noble tribal leader who took care of the poor and needy, leading his men on raids for the benefit of the poor among them, not for his own personal gain.⁷⁷

Two Umayyad caliphs are quoted in the *Ağānī* expressing their high esteem for ‘Urwa. Mu‘āwiya II (64/684) is quoted as saying: “If ‘Urwa ibn al-Ward had progeny, I would have liked to ally myself with them in marriage”;⁷⁸ and ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (65-86/685-705) says: “Among the Arabs from whom I am not descended, the only one whom I would be happy to have as an ancestor is ‘Urwa ibn al-Ward”; and also: “He who claims that Ḥātim (al-Ṭā‘ī) was the most generous of men does injustice to ‘Urwa ibn al-Ward”.⁷⁹

Thus, the image of ‘Urwa seems to stand in stark opposition to images of other pre-Islamic brigands dealt with in al-Maqrīzī’s chapter: his behavior is neither sinful nor vile, but rather noble and honorable, one that deserves the praise of rulers. Indeed, he seems to embody the *ğāhili* ideal of virility and generosity known as *murū’a*.⁸⁰

74. Abū al-Farağ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, III, p. 73.

75. See Abū al-Farağ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, III, pp. 78-79.

76. The term is mentioned in al-Maqrīzī’s text only three times: once with regard to ‘Āmir ibn al-Aḥnas, *sayyid al-ṣa‘ālik*; and twice in a poem attributed to ‘Amr ibn Barrāqa (Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 12a). Arazī, 1997, notes that during the Umayyad period the term *ṣu‘lūk* was gradually replaced with the term *liṣṣ*.

77. In this his figure resembles those of the noble bandits dealt with by Eric Hobsbawm, 1972 (see especially pp. 41-57). It should be noted, however, that Hobsbawm limits his discussion of social bandits to their role in rural agrarian societies, considering that “[t]ribal or kinship societies are familiar with raiding, but lack the internal stratification which creates the bandit as a figure of social protest and rebellion” (p. 18).

78. Abū al-Farağ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, III, p. 73.

79. Abū al-Farağ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, III, pp. 73-74.

80. On which see Goldziher, 1967-1971b.

By excluding ‘Urwa from the chapter—whether intentionally or not—al-Maqrīzī retains the structural integrity of the *ḡāhili* brigand-paradigm, according to which the main qualities of such brigands are cruelty and sinfulness; ‘Urwa has no place here.

Conclusion

Drawing on a wealth of anecdotes scattered in disparate older sources, many of the stories that al-Maqrīzī gathered in this chapter from the *Ḥabar* seem to be emblematic of the “literarization” of Mamluk historiography, or its “mixture of salvationist, cultural, and world history as entertainment”, as noted before. However, the novelty of the synthesis in which al-Maqrīzī handles these materials makes it more than an anecdotal compilation of brigand stories meant for amusement, as it clearly shows editorial discretion on al-Maqrīzī’s part. The moralistic line of thought behind his arrangement of materials is evident: while the chapter begins with *ḡāhili* brigands portrayed as semi-diabolical figures, who hold values antithetical to Islamic virtues and die a variety of violent deaths, it ends with reformed brigands, the last of whom dies as a Muslim martyr, no less. The chapter thus embodies a central theme in Islamic Salvationist history, namely, the moral and spiritual contrast between *ḡāhiliyya* and Islam.

Neither the materials embedded in the chapter nor the contrast between *ḡāhiliyya* and Islam that arises from it are original. The reports cited in the chapter are not al-Maqrīzī’s own literary creation, and he certainly was not the first to introduce into Islamic historiography the contrast between the *ḡāhiliyya* and Islam (he was not a *mubdiʿ*).⁸¹ The novelty of his rendering rather lies in his choice of materials and in his subtle and astute editorial adjustments of the older materials he had at hand. As I have shown, al-Maqrīzī accentuated known and available themes in order to achieve the effect of demonstrating the contrast between the *ḡāhiliyya* and Islam.

The reason behind al-Maqrīzī’s choice of brigand stories remains unclear, however. Why was he fascinated with brigands to the extent that he would dedicate a whole chapter to them, with no precedent in Arabic historiography? I would like to offer two lines of explanation in accordance with al-Maqrīzī’s socio-cultural setting.

Firstly, among the major threats to the integrity of the Mamluk regime during al-Maqrīzī’s times were rebellions of Bedouin tribes, which were often accompanied by acts of plunder and brigandage.⁸² Al-Maqrīzī recorded some of these rebellions and raids in his other works, and commented on the destruction wrought by Bedouin tribes upon the land. Thus, in his *al-Bayān wa-l-iʿrāb ʿammā bi-arḍ Miṣr min al-Aʿrāb*, on the genealogy and history of the Bedouin tribes in Egypt, he mentions the great corruption (*fasād*) of the Ġudām, the loathsomeness of the ʿUḍar (*qawmun lā ḥalāqa lahum wa-lā ḍimāmun*), and the destruction wrought by

81. As noted earlier, during the early Abbasid period the *ḡāhiliyya* was rather perceived a model of an idealized past. Webb, 2014, locates during the 4th/10th century a “shift towards an interpretation of *al-Jāhiliyya* as the ‘bad old days’ of a pagan and anarchical pre-Islamic Arabia”, p. 84.

82. See e.g. Marsot, 2007, p. 40; Rapoport, 2004; Martel-Thoumian, 2012, *passim*.

other tribes.⁸³ In his *Kitāb al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mulūk* there are numerous records of Bedouin rebellions, plunders, and acts of brigandry. Al-Maqrīzī's description of the reign of al-Malik al-Zāhir Barqūq (784-791/1382-1389 and 792-801/1390-1399) is especially negative, and among other charges made against Barqūq, al-Maqrīzī accuses him of overturning the social order by advancing men of lower classes to power, debasing the old elites (and the scholars among them), and antagonizing internal and outside sources such as the Bedouin tribes in Egypt and Syria, which caused them to rebel and bring whole parts of the land to ruin.⁸⁴ As noted by S. Massoud, al-Maqrīzī "felt that he was witnessing the end of an era and the dawn of another fraught with a breakdown in the traditional order, social turmoil, danger at the borders, an increasingly predatory regime, etc."⁸⁵

Al-Maqrīzī's records for the years following the reign of Barqūq also abound with mentions of Bedouin rebellions, attacks, and brigandage. A short example would suffice; according to al-Maqrīzī, during Ġumādā I 818/July 1415:

The damage of the brigands (*quṭṭāʿ al-ṭariq*) in all of Egypt, north and south, became severe, because the Bedouins rebelled (*li-ḥurūġ al-ʿurbān ʿan al-ṭāʿa*) and attacked travellers on land and on sea. Many people were killed.⁸⁶

As A. Broadbridge notes, al-Maqrīzī, who was a student and an admirer of Ibn Ḥaldūn (d. 808/1406), appears to have been influenced, at least in part, by his famous teacher's cyclical theory of history and "its assumptions about... the connections among strong royal authority, justice, and an ordered society, with the consequent assumption that weak royal authority led to the spread of injustice and societal disorder".⁸⁷ She further remarks that al-Maqrīzī and his student Ibn Taġrībīrdī (d. 874/1470) "appear to have felt that they were living in a period of societal decline", and that "al-Maqrīzī... argued powerfully that his own day and time suffered from societal, administrative, and financial dysfunction and disarray".⁸⁸

83. See al-Maqrīzī, *al-Bayān wa-l-iʿrāb*, pp. 20-21, 60, 70.

84. See Massoud, 2003.

85. Massoud, 2003, p. 120; cf. Broadbridge, 2003, pp. 233-234.

86. See al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, IV, p. 319. For other reports on Bedouin rebellions, brigandry, etc., see e.g. IV, pp. 44 (a Bedouin siege on Damanhūr in Dū al-Qaʿda 809/April 1407), 316 (a rebellion of the Aḥāmida in the Ṣaʿīd in Rabīʿ II 816/July 1413), 320 (Ġumādā II 818/August 1415: *wa-l-nās min kaṭrat fasād al-ʿurbān bi-nawāḥi Miṣr fi ġaḥd*), 330 (year 818/1415-1416: *wa-šamilat maḍarrat al-ʿurbān ʿāmmat al-nās*), 386 (Ṣafar 820/March-April 1417: *wa-fi ḥādā al-šahr kaṭura fasād al-ʿurbān bi-bilād al-Ġiza wa-kūrat al-Bahnasā*), 387 (Rabīʿ II 820/May-June 1417: *sāra al-amīr... li-yatbaʿa al-ʿurbān fi al-barriyya fa-innahu kaṭura ʿabaṭuhum wa-fasāduhum*), 394 (year 820/1417: *fa-fi ard Miṣr min ʿabaṭ al-ʿurbān wa-nahbihim wa-taḥribihim wa-qaṭʿihim al-ṭuruqāt ʿalā al-musāfirīn min al-tuġġār wa-ġayrihim šayʿ ʿaẓīm qubḥuhu šanīʿ wašfuhu*), 601 (year 825/1422: *wa-bilād al-Ṣaʿīd qad ʿāṭa biḥā al-ʿurbān wa-kaṭura fasāduhum*), 678 (year 828/1424-1425: *wa-l-ṭuruqāt bi-Miṣr wa-l-Šaʿm maḥūfa min kaṭrat ʿabaṭ al-ʿurbān*), 908 (Year 837/1433-1434—a rebellion of the Buḥayra Bedouins).

87. See Broadbridge, 2003, p. 232.

88. Broadbridge, 2003, pp. 233-234.

Against this background, it is plausible that al-Maqrīzī saw his time, with its breakdown of power, moral decay, and lack of personal security, as a return to what he perceived as the anarchic and heathen *ḡāhiliyya*. His *ḡāhili* brigands thus stand not only as a dim reminder of the pre-Islamic past, but as a shadow still lurking, still threatening the peace of the land and the souls of its people. As such, al-Maqrīzī's "Chapter on the Brigands Among the Arabs" can be read as an admonitory reminder of the dire situation at hand.

Secondly, as was earlier suggested, the absorption of *Ayyām al-ʿArab* (and subsequently also brigand) narratives in Arabic historiography from the 7th/13th century onward may have resulted, among other factors, from the increased popularity of folk epics. Konrad Hirschler argues that this tendency was perceived by contemporary scholars as a threat to their authority. He further notes that the *Sīrat Ḥamza* was perceived by scholars as "particularly problematic" because "it undermined, among others, the *jāhiliya* paradigm that saw pre-Muḥammadan Mecca as the pagan and disdained 'Other' in contrast to the alternative monotheistic order brought by the Prophet".⁸⁹ As I have shown, the same "*ḡāhiliyya* paradigm" underlies the arrangement of al-Maqrīzī's chapter on the brigands.

However, as noted by Hirschler, medieval scholars directed their attacks mainly against two other epics—the *Sīrat ʿAntar* and the *Sīrat Dalhama*.⁹⁰ It is noteworthy that the pre-Islamic poet ʿAntara Ibn Šaddād, on whom the figure of the folk-epic ʿAntar is based, was one of the *Aḡribat al-ʿArab*, like some of the brigands mentioned in al-Maqrīzī's chapter, and that ʿAmr Dū al-Kalb and al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka, who feature in al-Maqrīzī's chapter, also make an appearance in *Sīrat ʿAntar*.⁹¹ Their portrayal in the popular epic, it should be noted, is quite different than that given in the old *aḥbār* material utilized by al-Maqrīzī in composing his text; aside from their names, there is little that connects their figures in the *Sīrat ʿAntar* to the reports about them in early Arabic literature.⁹²

By going back to these early *aḥbār*, which are the supposed source of the popular *Sīra*, and collecting them from the various belletristic sources in which they are scattered, al-Maqrīzī both re-appropriates materials that have fallen into the hands of folk-epic narrators, and rectifies the false and harmful portrayal of the *ḡāhiliyya* in these folk-epics, thus defending his authoritative scholarly status. Al-Maqrīzī employs here a 'hidden polemic', to use a term coined by Bakhtin,

89. Hirschler, 2012, p. 181. Incidentally, the eponymous hero of the *Sīrat Ḥamza* is none other than Ḥamza ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib mentioned earlier, the Prophet's uncle.

90. Hirschler, 2012, p. 181.

91. See Lyons, 1995, vol. 2, pp. 18-44; vol. 3, pp. 17-76; Heath, 1996, pp. 168-231.

92. Al-Sulayk appears in the epic as a black brigand, "known as 'the ghoul of the desert', a wanderer without a homeland, and a womanizer who is too proud to consort with slave-girls but who rapes Arab ladies". See Lyons, 1995, vol. 3, p. 42 (§ 42); cf. Heath, 1996, p. 194; ʿAmr Dū al-Kalb appears as a warrior who had forced the Arabs to pay tribute to his dog. He becomes ʿAntar's close companion, and ʿAntar marries his sister, Hayfā, who bears him a daughter named ʿUnaytira. See Lyons, 1995, vol. 3, pp. 72-76; Heath, 1996, pp. 225-228, 253, 272. Both al-Sulayk and ʿAntar/ʿAntara were, of course, among the most famous of the *Aḡribat al-ʿArab*, and it is worthwhile mentioning in this context that their names appear in conjunction several times in *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, among other sources. See Abū al-Faraḡ al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-aḡānī*, VIII, pp. 240, 246; XV, pp. 214-215; and cf. the sources quoted regarding the *Aḡriba* in the section on Taʿabbata Šarran.

directed against the popular epic. According to Bakhtin, in a hidden polemic “[t]he other’s discourse is not itself reproduced, it is merely implied, but the entire structure of speech would be completely different if there were not this reaction to another person’s implied words”.⁹³

Through these two converging explanations for the composition of the “Chapter on the Brigands Among the Arabs”, the text emerges as a scholarly response both to socio-political events of al-Maqrīzī’s time, as well as to popular cultural practices that prevailed during the period. Al-Maqrīzī’s own voice, though barely audible from behind the thick curtain of quotations that make up his text, is constantly engaged in a double dialogue: with Arabic belletristic and historiographical tradition on the one hand and with popular literature on the other.

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