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Pre-Islamic Brigands in Mamluk Histography. 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-Habar 'an al-baṣar*, contains a chapter "On the Brigands Among the Arabs" (*faṣl fī dikr 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'abbaṭa Šarran, which portrays him as an antithesis to the figure of the *ṣahīd*. 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-Habar 'an al-baṣar*, ḡāhiliyya, intertextuality, *luṣūṣ*, Mamluk historiography, al-Maqrīzī.

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1. This article is largely based on my MA thesis, which was supervised by Prof. Simon Hopkins and Prof. Michael Lecker, both of the Arabic Language and Literature Department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I am grateful to both of them for their kindness and encouragement. I also wish to thank my doctoral advisor, Prof. Sara Sviri, also of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, for generously reading the manuscript and offering many valuable comments. Last but not least, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the editors, Adam Talib and Monica Balda-Tillier, for their kindness, patience, and encouragement, as well as for their meticulous comments and corrections that enabled me to improve this article considerably.

◆ RÉSUMÉ

L'histoire universelle intitulée *al-Habar 'an al-bašar* de Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (m. 845/1442) contient un chapitre « Sur les brigands arabes » (*faṣl fi dīkr 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 *gāhiliyya* et l'islam. Nous concentrons notre attention en particulier sur les passages concernant la mort et l'enterrement de Ta'abbaṭa Šarran, dans lesquels ce dernier apparaît comme l'antithèse du *shāhid*. 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-Habar 'an al-bašar*, *gāhiliyya*, intertexualité, *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

Ǧāhili Brigands and Ayyām al-‘Arab in Medieval Arabic Literature

From Middle English ballads about Robin Hood to Yaṣar Kemal's *İnce Memed*, tales of bandits, robbers, and brigands are common in many literary traditions. Medieval Arabic literature is no exception: *gāhili* brigands (*ṣa‘ālīk*, *luṣūṣ*) such as Ta'abbaṭa 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 *ḡāhiliyya*. 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 *ḡāhiliyya* 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 *ḡāhili* brigands? A report preserved in Abū al-Faraḡ al-Īṣfahānī's (d. 356/967) *Kitāb al-āgānī* 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] Ādwān from [the tribal confederacy of] Qays, and asked them for information (*babar*) 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 (*‘addā’īn*) 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 (*fi-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 ghoul in the lands of the tribe of Hudayl 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’abbaṭa 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 Hudayl 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 *ḡāhiliyya* as an idealized past, see Drory, 1996; and cf. Webb, 2014.

4. Abū al-Faraḡ al-Īṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-āgānī*, 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 ‘*addā’ūn* or *ruḡylā* (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. *raḡaliyy*.

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‘āruhūm* ("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-Sukkarī (d. 275/888), an expert on ḡāhīlī poetry and transmitter of several pre-Islamic *dīwāns*.⁷ Abū 'Ubayda's work has been lost, and of al-Sukkarī'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-ağānī*.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’īn wa-aš‘āruhūm* ("Accounts of the Runners and their Poetry"), as well as *Aš‘ār al-luṣūṣ wa-aḥbāruhūm* ("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 fi ḏikr luṣūṣ al-‘Arab*), included in his universal history, *al-Ḥabar ‘an al-baṣar*.

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-fibrīst*, p. 77; and cf. Yāqūt, *Irṣād*, V, p. 2704; Ibn Ḥallikān, *Wafayāt al-a‘yān*, V, p. 235; Ḥāggī 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-Īṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, XXIV, p. 169; al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī, *Ta’rīh Baḡdād*, VII, p. 307. A manuscript of al-Sukkarī'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-Sukkarī'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-Sukkarī 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’īn wa-aš‘āruhūm*); p. 156, § 79 (*Aš‘ār al-luṣūṣ wa-aḥbāruhūm*); p. 163, § 130 (*Aḥbār al-‘addā’īn wa-su‘āt al-‘Arab*), § 131 (*Aḥbār al-luṣūṣ*); p. 422, § 165ob (*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 Ṣarran (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-Habar 'an al-baṣar*

Al-Habar 'an al-baṣar 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 *Habar* 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 *Habar* 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 Ḥāggī Ḥalīfa, *Kaṣf al-ẓunūn*, 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 Khiṭāṭ* 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 *Habar* holograph, titled *Faṣl fī ḏikr luṣūṣ al-‘Arab*, 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 Ḏū al-Kalb, Ta’abbaṭa Ṣarran, al-Šanfarā, al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka, al-Muntašir al-Bāhili, Awfā ibn Maṭar, ‘Amr ibn Barrāqa, al-Uḥaymir al-Sa’dī, Niẓām ibn Ĝušam, and Yazīd ibn al-Šiqqīl (or: al-Saqīl) al-‘Uqayli.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’rīh* 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 *Habar*. 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-‘Arab*. A further indication of the strong link between the two is the fact that the chapter on *Ayyām al-‘Arab* in the *Habar* follows immediately after the chapter

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

18. ‘Amr Ḏū al-Kalb: Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 1a-2a; Ta’abbaṭa Ṣarran: fol. 2b-7b; al-Šanfarā: fol. 8a-8b; al-Sulayk: fol. 9a-10a; al-Muntašir: fol. 10b-11a; Awfā ibn Maṭar: fol. 11b; ‘Amr ibn Barrāqa: fol. 12a-12b; al-Uḥaymir: fol. 13a; Niẓām ibn Ĝušam: fol. 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-Faraḡ al-Isfahānī’s (d. 356/967) *Kitāb al-ağānī*; Ibn al-Kalbī’s (d. 204/819 or 206/821) now lost *Kitāb al-ğāmī*; 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-Ğāhiżī’s (d. 255/869) *Kitāb al-hayawān*; Kušāġim’s (d. 350/961) *Kitāb al-maṣāyid wa-l-maṭārid*; al-Mubarrad’s (d. 286/900) *Kitāb al-kāmil*; al-Mu’āfā b. Zakariyyā’s (d. 390/1000) *al-Ğalīs al-ṣāliḥ*; and al-Marzubānī (d. 384/994, apparently quoting from the lost part of his *Mu’ğam al-ṣu’arā*).

on the brigands.²⁰ While some of the more famous *Ayyām al-‘Arab* narratives did find their way into pre-Mamluk universal or annalistic histories, pre-Mamluk historians apparently deemed neither *Ayyām al-‘Arab* 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-‘Arab*] 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-‘Arab* narratives) were restricted to belletristic sources. However, neither Rosenthal nor Caskel explain why the *Ayyām al-‘Arab* 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, ‘āgā’ib 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-‘Arab* in al-Ya‘qūbī’s (d. 284/897) *Ta’rīh* seem to be an earlier exception; al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) gives a detailed account of the *Yawm Dī Qār*, see *Ta’rīkh 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 Dū Qār was rather more than a tribal feud, as there were Persian troops involved in the clash; see Vagliieri, 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-Mas‘ūdī’s *Murūq al-dahab* and al-Maqdisī’s *al-Bad’ wa-l-ta’rib* (both from the 4th/10th century), already show a blend of *ta’rīh* 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 'Antar* and *Sīrat Banī Hilāl*) draw on *Ayyām al-'Arab* 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-'Arab* 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 *Habar*, with its literary source material and its correspondence with *Ayyām al-'Arab* 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'abba'a Šarran—offers a key to understanding the inclusion of this chapter as a whole in the *Habar*. 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-Qaṣrāy in Cairo as a place where many gathered to listen to popular *siyar*, see his *al-Mawā'iz wa-l-i'tibār*, 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 ('Amr Dū al-Kalb, Ta'abba'a 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 (*luşuş*) and brigandage (*talaşşuş*),²⁸ al-Maqrīzī turns his attention to 'Amr Dū al-Kalb of the Hudayl 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 Kuşāğim's *Kitāb al-maşāyid 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-ağānī*.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 Ġulayha. 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 Ġulayha, 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 Niẓām ibn Ġušam), nor about the death of al-Uhaymir, whose appearance in the chapter is nonetheless significant, as I intend to show.

28. The term *su'lük* (pl. *sa'ālik*) 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-fī Kitāb al-maşāyid annahu summiya Dā al-Kalb li-anna al-asad qatala aban lahu wa-walağā fī damihi wa-kāna 'Amr yaqtulu al-usud wa-yalağū fī dimā'ibā wa-ra'āhu 'Amr ibn Ma'dī-Karib yalağū fī dam asad ȝumma naħħathu ḥayya fa-māta wa-kāna 'Amr yaqūlu innamā al-asad kalb fa-li-dālika summiya Dā al-Kalb*. Cf. Kuşāğim, *Kitāb al-maşāyid wa-l-maṭārid*, pp. 172-173. The same report appears in al-Mu'āfā ibn Zakariyyā, *al-Ğalīs al-ṣāliḥ*, 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-Farağ 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 *Habar*, as evinced by its inclusion in 'Abd al-Ğanī 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-Dimārī; d. 110/728 or 114/732), the *muḥādram* poet 'Amr ibn Ma'dī-Karib told the story of 'Amr Dū al-Kalb's death to the second caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Hattāb, upon the latter's request that he tells him the most astonishing thing he saw (*akbirnī yā Abā Tawrin bi-a'ğabi ma ra'ayta*).

30. See Abū al-Farağ al-İsfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, XXII, pp. 351-353.

31. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 1a: *wa-kāna ȝazā 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-aħṭa'a wa-l-sudd šay' lā yuġāwazu*.

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 *ḡāhīlī* brigand and the most celebrated poet among the *ṣā'ālīk*. His birthname is sometimes given as Tābit ibn Ġābir, but he was mainly known by his nickname—Ta'abbaṭa Šarran.³⁶ Al-Maqrīzī quotes ibn al-Ārābī's (d. 231/845) statement that he was of the *Āgrībat al-Ārab* ("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-āgānī*. As mentioned earlier, according to some he hunted down a ram-shaped ghoul 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-Hudāliyyīn*, 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 Zulayḥa and (Umm) Ġulayḥa, the garment thrown to Umm Ġulayḥa 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 Ġulayḥa 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 *ḡāhīlī* 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 *āgrība* in other classical sources. See for example Abū 'Ubayda, *Kitāb al-dībāq*, pp. 40-41; Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ši'r wa-l-šu'arā'*, p. 131 (on 'Antara); Abū al-Faraḡ al-Īsfahānī, *Kitāb al-āgānī*, VIII, p. 240. Ibn al-Ārābī's statement is quoted also in Ibn Manzūr's *Lisān al-Ārab*, s.v. *ḡrb*, and mentions Ta'abbaṭa Šarran and al-Šanfarā among the *āgrība* 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-Īsfahānī, *Kitāb al-āgānī*, XXI, p. 127; cf. also p. 170; and al-Sukkārī, *Šarḥ aš-ār al-Hudāliyyīn*, II, p. 846. Al-Ğāhīz mentions Ta'abbaṭa Šarran's mother in *Kitāb al-hayawān*, I, pp. 286-287, as one of the wisest among Arab women (*min 'uqalā' nisā' al-Ārab*), and states that she had a noble stature among them (*muqaddamatān 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-Ḥalil ibn Aḥmad (d. 170/786) is quoted saying that he carried a knife under his arm, while the Basran philologist Abū Ḥātim al-Sīgīstānī 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’abbaṭa 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 Hudayl (‘Amr Dū al-Kalb’s tribe):

tumma haraġa Ta’abbaṭa li-yaḍ’ara bi-ashabibi fa-ra’ā baytan li-Hudalī fa-qāla li-ashabibi aġnamūhu tumma ra’ā dabu’an ‘an yasārībi fa-qāla abṣirī uṣbi’ uki min al-qawm ġadan tumma aġāra ‘alā al-bayt wa-qatala šayḥan wa-‘aġūzan wa-ttaba’ a ġulāman fa-ramāhu al-ġulām fa-ntażama qalbahu wa-lāda al-ġulām bi-qatāda fa-qatā’ahā Ta’abbaṭa bi-ħušaġatih wa-qatala al-ġulām tumma māta wa-qila inna alladī ramāhu lāda minhu bi-ranfa.⁴¹

Ta’abbaṭa Šarran went to avenge the death of his companions. He saw a house belonging to a man of Hudayl 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’abbaṭa 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’abbaṭa 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 *Habar* 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’abbaṭa sabu’ wa-lā tā’ir illā māta wa-qila inna rā’iħatahu kānat idā mālat ‘alā bayy marida fa-haraġa fityān min Hudayl li-yadfinūhu fa-lam yaġid ahad rihahu illā māta fa-talattama qawm wa-saddū manāħbirahum wa-ramawhu fi ġār Rahmān fa-raġa’ū wa-kulluhum urimmū tumma ‘amū ‘an āħiřihim wa-kānat ġumġumatuħu min qit’ a wāħida wa-kānat ‘izāmuħu șumman lā muħħib fihā.⁴³

38. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 2b; and cf. Abū al-Faraġ al-İsfahānī, *Kitāb al-aġānī*, XXI, pp. 127-128.

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

40. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 3a (a raid against the Baġila with ‘Amr ibn Barrāq[a]); fol. 4a (on a raid against the Hudayl); 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-Faraġ al-İsfahānī, *Kitāb al-aġānī*, XXI, pp. 127-173.

41. Ms Fatih 4340, fol. 5b.

42. Cf. Abū al-Faraġ al-İsfahānī, *Kitāb al-aġānī*, XXI, pp. 166-168 and 169-170 (a slightly different version); Ibn Ḥabib, *Asmā’ al-muġtālin*, pp. 221-223; Abū Sa’id al-Sukkārī, *Šarḥ aš-ṣār al-Hudaliyyīn*, 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 Hudayl 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 Rahmān, 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'abbata 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 *bišān*), see *Murūğ al-dahab*, I, p. 204, § 430: *wa-laysa fi anwā'* *al-hayawān wa-Llāhu a'lām ašadd minhu dālik anna akṭar 'izāmīhi ḍumm* (read: *ṣumm*) *lā maṣīl fi qawā'imihi*.

(The form *ḍumm* is unattested in the dictionaries I consulted. The reading *ṣumm* seems to be justified both here and in the passage quoted from the *Ḥabar*; cf. Lane, *Lexicon*, vol. I, p. 1734c, s.v. *aṣamm*: "[as that which is without a cavity is generally non-sonorous] one says *hağarun aṣammu* meaning *Hard and solid stone*" etc.). Furthermore, al-Ǧāhīz mentions in his depiction of the ostrich (*na'āma*) that its bones are hollow and have no marrow (*lā muḥha fihā*): see *Kitāb al-hayawān*, IV, p. 326. It can also be mentioned that according to a report preserved in al-Anbārī's (d. ca.304/916) *ṣarḥ* on the *Mufaddaliyyāt*, two of Ta'abbata Šarran's toes were conjoined (*wa-kānat iṣbā'āni multaṣiqatāni min aṣābi'i riğlihi*), see al-Mufaddal al-Ḍabbī, *al-Mufaddaliyyāt*, 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-Ǧāmi'* *li-ahkām al-Qur'ān*, X, p. 201. Cf. another report mentioned by Lecker, 2000, pp. 48-49, found in al-Mu'āfa 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 *shahīd* 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 *Āgrībat al-Ārab* (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 fī Banī Sulāmān (sic) yahsubu nafsahu aḥadahum tumma waqa'a bayna ibn allādī kāna 'indabu wa-bayna al-Šanfarā ṣarr fa-nafathu 'anbum fa-atā allādī iṣtarāḥu min Fahm fa-qāla iṣduqnī mimman anā fa-a'lamahu fa-qāla lan ada' akum hattā aqtula minkum mī'a bi-mā i'tabadtumūnī fa-qatala minhūm tis'a wa-tis'īn wa-lazima dār Fahm yugīru 'alā al-Azd fa-raṣadahu Usayd ibn Ġābir al-Sulāmānī (sic) wa-talāṭa (?) ilayhi fa-ra'ā al-Šanfarā al-sawād fa-ramāḥu fa-aṣāba Usayd tumma waṭabū 'alayhi fa-aḥadūḥu wa-qālū inṣudnā fa-qāla innamā al-naṣīd 'alā al-masarrā fa-dahabat maṭalan wa-qālū lahu ayna naqburuka fa-qāla:

*lā taqburūnī inna qabri muḥarramun / 'alaykum wa-lākin hāmīri Umma 'Āmīri*⁵¹

al-Ğalīs al-ṣāliḥ, II, pp. 455-456, on a warrior whose wish it was to be "resurrected from the bellies of the beasts of prey and the crows 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-Īṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-āgānī*, XXI, p. 166-168. The new material found in the *Ḩabar* 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 ḥiyāri al-ḥiğri baytan wa-manṣīban wa-ummī bintu al-ahrāri*); see: Abū al-Faraḡ al-Īṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-āgānī*, XXI, p. 179; and cf. p. 193; Tibrīzī, *Šarḥ Dīwān al-ḥamāṣa*, II, p. 25). The evidence that he might have been of the *āgrība* is circumstantial.

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

51. Var.: *abšīrī Umma 'Āmir*.

*idā iḥtamalū ra'sī wa-fī al-ra'si akṭarī / wa-ğūdira 'inda al-multaqā ṭamma 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 Ğābir al-Salāmān 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-zawwaqtuka ibnātī fa-qāla in qatalūka qataltu minhum mi'a fa-zawwağahu fa-qatalathu Banū Salāmān fa-ṣana'a al-Šanfarā al-nabl wa-ğā'ala aqwāqahā min al-qurūn li-tu'rafa fa-qatala minhum tis'a wa-tis'in tumma raṣadūhu 'alā mā' wa-qatalūhu wa-ṣalabūhu wa-baqiya 'āman maṣlūban wa-'alayhi min naḍrihi rağul fa-marra bibi rağul wa-qad saqāta fa-rakaḍa ra'sahū bi-riğlihi fa-dahala fihā 'azm fa-bağat '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-Farağ al-İṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, XXI, p. 182; al-Marzūqī, *Şarḥ Dīwān 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'ūlūn*) of the first line of the poem conforms to the phenomenon known as *ḥarm* in the science of 'arūḍ: 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-Farağ al-İṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, XXI, pp. 179-182; al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, I, pp. 194-199; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Asmā' al-muğtālin*, 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-ṭariq* (brigandary).⁵⁵ Furthermore, as with Ta'abbata 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-aqānī*, 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-'uqirat riqluhu*—"his leg was wounded".⁵⁷ Al-Maqrīzī however substitutes this verb with a rarer, more salient form: *fa-baġat 'alayhi*—"it became swollen and infected". This substitution does not seem accidental: the phrase *baġā '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 *baġā* is not usually complemented by a prepositional phrase.⁵⁹ The infinitive, *baġy*, 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, *baġy* is a recurrent trope in *Ayyām al-'Arab* 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 gulgolet 'ahat sāpā 'al pənē ha-māyim wə-āmar lāh: 'al da-'ātiēpt 'ātiġūk wə-sōp mətiġayik yətūpūn*). According to the exegete Rashi (Salomon Isaacides, d. 1105, France), the skull was that of a brigand (*məlaštēm 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-Faraġ al-İsfahānī, *Kitāb al-aqānī*, XXI, p. 186. The same appears in Ibn Ḥabīb, *Asmā' al-muġtālīn*, p. 243.

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

59. See Lane, *Lexicon*, vol. 1, pp. 231c-232a. s.v. *baġā*: "baġā al-ġurḥu [...] 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 *bâgi* 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-Hārit ibn Ka'b, and that he was nicknamed Sulayk al-Maqānib (“Sulayk of the rapacious wolves”). Like Ta'abbaṭa 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' imiḥifa-yuğāwizu bilād ḥaṭ'am wa-yuğīru fa-marra qāfilan bi-bayt min ḥaṭ'am fihī imra'a šābbā fa-tasannamahā fa-ahbarat bi-dālika fa-ttaba'ahū Anas ibn Mudrik fa-qatalahū fa-qāla Ibn Muwaylik la-aqtulanna qātilahū aw la-yadiyannahū fa-qāla Anas wa-Llāhi lā adīhi wa-qāla: innī wa-qatli Sulaykan tumma a'qiluhū [...] wa-fi ši'rihi annahū kāna sabā imra'a min ḥaṭ'am wa-waladat labū waladan wa-azārahā qawmahā fa-lammā rağā'a ittaba'ahū Anas fa-qatalahū wa-qāla Ibn Qutayba waṭi'a Sulayk imra'a min ḥaṭ'am ahluhā hulūf fa-qatalahū Anas wa-tūliba bi-qatlihi fa-qāla qataluhū bi-stiḥqāq fa-kayfa a'qiluhū.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-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, XX, pp. 386-387; Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-ṣi'r wa-l-ṣu'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 *diya* or *'aql* was paid only in cases of unjustified killing. Since al-Sulayk appears to have betrayed the code of *giwār* 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 *ruğaylā'* and the *agrība*. It is said that he used to raid the Yemenite tribe of Banū al-Hārit 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-agāra al-Muntašir fa-qatala nā'iha 'Amr wa-asara Ṣalā'a ibn 'Amr al-Hāritī wa-kāna sayyidan fa-qāla lahu iftakka (!) nafsak fa-abā fa-qāla la-uqatṭi 'annaka animalatan animalatan wa-'uḍwan 'uḍwan mā lam taftakka (!) nafsak ḥattā qatalahu ṭumma raṣadat Banū al-Hārit al-Muntašir ḥattā ḥaġġa Dā al-Halaşa fa-dallat 'alayhi Banū Nufayl al-Hāritiyyin fa-abadūhu fa-qāta'ūhu 'uḍwan 'uḍwan [...] wa-kānat Banū al-Hārit tusammī al-Muntašir muġaddi'an.

Al-Muntašir then raided [the Banū al-Hārit]. He killed 'Amr's mourner and captured Ṣalā'a ibn 'Amr al-Hāritī, 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-Hārit then watched for al-Muntašir till he went on a pilgrimage to [the shrine of] Dū al-Halaşa. The Banū Nufayl [ibn 'Amr ibn Kilāb] led the Banū al-Hārit to him, and they captured him and tore him apart limb from limb. [...] The Banū al-Hārit used to call al-Muntašir *muġaddi'* (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-Halaşa (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-muġtālin*, p. 237; Abū al-Faraġ al-İsfahānī, *Kitāb al-agānī*, 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, fol. 10b-11a. Cf. Abū 'Ubayda, *Kitab al-dībāġ*, pp. 35-38; al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*, II, pp. 750-751; Abū 'Ubayd al-Bakrī, *Siġġ 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-Uhaymir and Yazid – Repentance and Redemption

We now come to al-Uhaymir al-Sa'dī and Yazid ibn al-Saqil/Siqqil 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-Uhaymir, 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:

ṭumma tāba wa-qāla:

aškū ilā Allāhi šabri 'an zawa'milihim / wa-mā ulāqī⁷⁰ idā marrū min al-hazanī
 qul li-luṣūši Banī al-Lahnā'i yahtasibū / bazza al-'Irāqi wa-yansaw ṭurfata al-Yamanī
 wa-yatrūkū al-hazza wa-l-dibāga yalbasuhū / biḍū al-mawāli dawī al-surrāti wa-l-'ukani
 fa-rubba ṭawbin karīmin kuntu ḥbuḍuhū / min al-qīṭāri bi-lā naqdin wa-lā tamāni.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-Uhaymir's death is given. As a repentant, he may have died a peaceful death; in the verse that follows immediately after the verse of *Muhāraba* 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, Yazid, is even shorter. Before quoting some of his verse, al-Maqrīzī says:

*Yazid ibn al-Šaqīl [...] al-Qaysī al-'Uqaylī kāna yasriqu al-ibil ṭumma tāba wa-qutila fī sabīl Allāh.*⁷³

Yazid ibn al-Šaqīl... 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 *šahīd*.

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 Manzūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, s.v. *b'r*.

‘Urwa ibn al-Ward and the *ġāhili* 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 *Agānī* 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 *Agānī* 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 Hātim (al-Tā’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 *ġāhili* ideal of virility and generosity known as *murū'a*.⁸⁰

74. Abū al-Faraġ al-İsfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, III, p. 73.

75. See Abū al-Faraġ al-İsfahānī, *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). Arazi, 1997, notes that during the Umayyad period the term *ṣu‘lūk* was gradually replaced with the term *lisṣ*.

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-Faraġ al-İsfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, III, p. 73.

79. Abū al-Faraġ al-İsfahānī, *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 *gāhili* 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 *Habar* 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 *gāhili* 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 *gāhiliyya* and Islam.

Neither the materials embedded in the chapter nor the contrast between *gāhiliyya* 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 *gāhiliyya* and Islam (he was not a *mubdi’*).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 *gāhiliyya* 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-i‘rāb ‘ammā bi-ard Miṣr min al-A‘rāb*, on the genealogy and history of the Bedouin tribes in Egypt, he mentions the great corruption (*fasād*) of the Ġudām, the loathsomeness of the ‘Uḍar (*qawmun lā halāqa lahūm wa-lā dimāmun*), and the destruction wrought by

81. As noted earlier, during the early Abbasid period the *gāhiliyya* 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-ma'rifat 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 (*qutṭā' al-ṭariq*) in all of Egypt, north and south, became severe, because the Bedouins rebelled (*li-ḥurūq al-'urbān 'an al-ṭā'a*) 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 Taġrībīdī (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-i'rāb*, 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-Qa'da 809/April 1407), 316 (a rebellion of the Aḥāmida in the Ṣā'īd in Rabi' II 816/July 1413), 320 (Ġumādā II 818/August 1415: *wa-l-nās min kaṭrat fasād al-'urbān bi-nawāḥī Miṣr fi ḡahd*), 330 (year 818/1415-1416: *wa-ṣamīlat maḍarrat al-'urbān 'āmmat al-nās*), 386 (Ṣafar 820/March-April 1417: *wa-fi hādā al-ṣahr kaṭura fasād al-'urbān bi-bilād al-Ġiza wa-kūrat al-Bahnasā*), 387 (Rabi' II 820/May-June 1417: *sāra al-amīr... li-yatba'a al-'urbān fi al-barriyya fa-innahu katura 'abaṭuhum wa-fasāduhūm*), 394 (year 820/1417: *fa-fi arḍ Miṣr min 'abaṭ al-'urbān wa-nahbīhim wa-taġrībīhim wa-qaf'īhim al-turuqāt 'alā al-musāfirīn min al-tuġġār wa-ġayrīhim šay' 'azīm qubḥuhu šāni' wasfūhu*), 601 (year 825/1422: *wa-bilād al-Ṣā'īd qad 'āṭa bihā al-'urbān wa-katura fasāduhūm*), 678 (year 828/1424-1425: *wa-l-turuqāt bi-Miṣr wa-l-Ṣā'īm mahūfa min kaṭrat 'abat al-'urbān*), 908 (Year 837/1433-1434—a rebellion of the Buhayra 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 *gāhiliyya*. His *gāhili* 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-‘Arab* (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 *jāhiliyya* paradigm that saw pre-Muhammadan 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 "*gāhiliyya* 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 ‘Antar* and the *Sīrat Dalhama*.⁹⁰ It is noteworthy that the pre-Islamic poet ‘Antara Ibn Šaddād, on whom the figure of the folk-epic ‘Antar is based, was one of the *Agribat al-‘Arab*, like some of the brigands mentioned in al-Maqrīzī's chapter, and that ‘Amr Dū al-Kalb and al-Sulayk ibn al-Sulaka, who feature in al-Maqrīzī's chapter, also make an appearance in *Sīrat ‘Antar*.⁹¹ Their portrayal in the popular epic, it should be noted, is quite different than that given in the old *ahbār* material utilized by al-Maqrīzī in composing his text; aside from their names, there is little that connects their figures in the *Sīrat ‘Antar* to the reports about them in early Arabic literature.⁹²

By going back to these early *ahbār*, 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 *gāhiliyya* 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 ‘Abd 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; ‘Amr Dū al-Kalb appears as a warrior who had forced the Arabs to pay tribute to his dog. He becomes ‘Antar's close companion, and ‘Antar marries his sister, Hayfā', who bears him a daughter named ‘Unaytira. See Lyons, 1995, vol. 3, pp. 72-76; Heath, 1996, pp. 225-228, 253, 272. Both al-Sulayk and ‘Antar/‘Antara were, of course, among the most famous of the *Agribat al-‘Arab*, and it is worthwhile mentioning in this context that their names appear in conjunction several times in *Kitāb al-ağānī*, among other sources. See Abū al-Farağ al-İsfahānī, *Kitāb al-ağānī*, VIII, pp. 240, 246; XV, pp. 214-215; and cf. the sources quoted regarding the *Agribā* in the section on Ta'abbata 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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